

*Through fire,
After fire*



THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

PROLOGUE

Two former high school best friends walk from work to home reminiscing about their naughty high school days and their 'supposed' possible wealthy future. At the age of 29, the two occupant as petrol attendants at pick'n pay shopping complex in Sakhile Township. Night shifts are the worst, especially in this cold winter but because they have mouths to feed, they succumb to minimal wage and unfair treatment from their employer who reminds them every day that they are going nowhere in life

Sipho is the eldest son of the late Thandeka Ndlovu, his mom died two years ago in a horrific car accident leaving him with two of his siblings, Vuyani and Thando. He and Vuyani share the same useless father that left his mom to marry another woman and he never bothered to check on them, while Thando is still a mystery to them because his mother was just like any black woman, as long as you live under her roof and she feeds you, you cannot question her at all. So even today they still don't know who Thando's father is and they will probably never know because the person who knew is six feet under to answer her sins.

He is grateful for his best friend Musa, even though Musa comes from a normal family with both parents still alive, Musa still works as a petrol attendant because his father decided to send his brother to law school with all his pension with the hope that he will come back and help him raise his siblings but till to date Bongani left seven years ago and they have never heard from him. Social media did provide proof that he is still alive and living big while his siblings and parents struggle but that's what it is, sometimes life is not fair. And that is the source of Musa's recent career as a petrol attendant, his dreams and ambitions were put on hold for his brother to go to school with the hope that he will come back and take him to school too.

Unlike his friend he was one of those smart ones in class but when the names of those who received bursaries to further their studies were announced, his was not there. So as the second eldest, the responsibility of looking out for his three sibling Buhle, Lindiwe and Zinhle befell on his shoulders, his father suffers severe heart conditions due to his eldest brother Bongani's ordeals

while in his mother's eyes his a failure of a son, if they didn't bewitch her perfect son Bongani she would be rich, so she tells everyone in the township who cares to listen

'The witches of this township are strong, they saw I was going to be rich so they bewitched my son and left me with a useless one' he is never been enough in his mother's eyes and it pains him that he wakes at three o'clock in the morning from his outside garage room to go burst his ass for 2500 wage and knock off at 22:00 sometimes 23:00 in busy month ends and still walk another hour to work, sometimes they catch lifts but sometime Johnny walker is all they rely on for means of transport.

With that peanuts salary he buys grocery for the whole family and makes sure he also buys his sisters their necessities, and his father's expensive medication on top of everything. With his wage and the 1800 his father receives for grant is all the family depends on but sometimes his mom refuses with his father's card and spend the money on all her stockvels that even today, he is never seen his mom come home with money saying it was her turn to be paid from the stockvel. He wonders to date what kind of stockvels this woman joined.

"Yoh yoooooh! Did you see that?" Siphso brings him back to reality praising a beast machine that just passed by, he loves fast cars with all his being "When I die, make sure my body goes to the graves in a beast, not a hearse tuu" they both laugh hard

"Especially the Sakhile burial society hearse" Musa remarks and they both die in laughter thinking of the local burial stockvel that robs people so much but because people trust what they see and who they know, they still join to be carried with an old Van that is called 'things fall apart' in the township because you can spot a coin from the ground and take it with it moving "Haibo!" two cars just passed by speeding with the sound of screeching tires

"What's going on vele today" Siphso asks with the same frown that matches his as they watch the road being busy all of sudden in the middle of the night, as shocked as they are the sound of gun goes off and that alerts them to run off the road, something is going on "Uright Dalas" (are you okay my friend) Siphso questions as they hide in the culvert across the road

“I’m okay Dalas” Musa replies whispering peeping up the road to check when they both hear the commotion peaking with police cars sirens “Dalas take off that white jacket, we don.....” before he can finish whispering another gun sound goes off twice right behind them, from behind a heavy object falls on top of them, he turns and it’s a man, shot, blood is choking his mouth

“My....my....daugh...plea....find her” with that said the man’s neck falls to the side and he instantly knows it’s the end. His heart is palpating in fear, he wants to scream for help but he can’t because of the commotion going on the road, there is a huge bag next to the dead man that he kept shoving his way as he said his last words

“Dalas” Musa nudges his friend staring at the dead man next to him “DALAS” he whispers a bit louder still gazing at the one who fell before his eyes “Sipho?!” he calls out now turning to find his world broken, his friend is soaked in blood holding his chest “NO NO NO SIPHO” now he wails out loud, he doesn’t care that he might be heard “DALAS, SIPHO?!” he screams with tears freely falling

“My.....my....siblings....take.....care....of...the” his last words are cut short, his body just went immobile and dead on the spot, his gone.

“NOOOOOOOOO” he screams hard buried in his friend’s chest

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 1

PAIN

MUSA

The tremendous pain in his heart is indescribable, he lies there next to the body panting and sweating. How can God do something so cruel to the one person who was just living for his siblings, maybe if he took him instead it would have been better, how is he going to look at his siblings when he breaks the devastating news to them. They have been through so much already maybe if he was the one shot because in his family no one has ever died maybe.....but who was going to take care of his family if he died because his father can never be employed, his a pensioner with heart conditions.

He lied there for a while listening to his pained thoughts with tears just flowing down his cheeks, he is brought back to life when he hears a dog bark closer to him. When he snaps, there stands a young police man with a huge dog in his grip, his eyes immediately pop in terror but the police man puts his index finger on his mouth to indicate that he shouldn't scream. He takes something from his pockets and sniffs it on the barking dog's nose then he releases it and it runs in the opposite direction

"What's your name and what are you doing here?" that's the first thing the police man asks getting in the culvert too

"Musa, Musa Nkosi, we were on our home from work and then we heard gun shots and hid here but unfortunately my friend got shot" he explains in fear but he tries so hard to be in control, he knows how police can sometimes be. The police guy looks at him and his dead friend as if inspecting something for a while

"What about this one?" he asks of the man that fell on them

"I don't know him, he just fell shot, on us" he nods multiplied times in understanding and asks

"Can you drive?" he is in awe where this is coming from, he was prepared to be taken to police station for questioning but he thinks there are cars and drivers

provided for such service. Who in their sane mind drives themselves to be questioned by belly founders in SA “Listen, I see you two were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. I have no time to explain, now I want to give you this” he waves car keys before him “My car is parked below the road, get the hell out of here before your caught in the cross-fire of some shit you know nothing about” he is still awe struck “Musa” he snaps his fingers before his stare “Can you?” he nods in fear and the police guy places the key in his hands and help him up taking his hand “takes this and put it in my car” he gives him a bag pack that was hanging on his shoulder “The red VW polo GTI across the road, go” he nods again but before he leaves he kneels back down and look at his friend one last time, he closes his eyes and cover him nicely with his white jacket he was trying to take off when he got shot

“Till we meet again Dalas, look out for me out there and know Vuyani and Thando will not go to bed with nothing while I still live” he stands with a heavy heart and for some reason the police guy looks sincerely sorry for him

“Go” he says with a nod and Musa climbs up the culvert ready to leave “Hey” the police guy request his attention once again when he is just preparing to run to the car “I’m sorry about your friend” he nods “don’t forget your bag” he says throwing the huge bag that the dead man came with, he wasn’t prepared for how heavy it is, he falls on the ground when he catches it due to the heaviness and the police guy chuckles a bit “Corn flakes guy, I’m going to enjoy you” he remarks and Musa is a bit lost with a huge bag on his chest on the ground

“It is not....” he tries to explain that it is not his but he interrupts him

“TAKE IT AND GO, NOW” he orders much firmer now, he instantly gets on his feet carrying the heavy bags quickly running to the car. He immediately slides inside the car when he sees it and speed off home, it wasn’t a long drive so he is instantly parked outside his home. He breaths heavily before he gathers his thoughts together, now it clicks that they didn’t exchange numbers with the police guy, how is he going to find him? He asks himself and he cannot come up with the answer.

He eventually departs the car after parking it inside the gate, he takes his ‘supposed’ bag with, he will explain to the nice police officer when he comes for his car but just as he closes the car something catch his eye. The bag pack the police gave him to put in his car has a 200 note stuck on the zip, he frowns a bit

inspecting closely as he gently unzip the bag pack. His mouth part in shock, what in Sakhile lockshin is happening here? He has never seen so much money in his life, the bag pack is filled with two hundreds notes. He is immediately tempted to steal a few notes but what if he sees and the way it's nicely packed it's like he read how much it makes. He dismisses the corrupt idea closing the bag and the car, he should leave things that doesn't concern him just the way they are, he thinks.

He places the heavy bag on his bed and throws himself next to it taking in the events of the night, he mind slips to Siphos and immediately he reaches for his cell phone in his pockets to check the time, 01:30 it reports. This time really flew and he has to be up by 03:00 to prepare for work but he has to break the news to Siphos's siblings first before they hear it from the police. Siphos's home is just two houses away from his, without thinking any further he locks his garage room and walk there. His brick head forgot to remind him that it's late they are sleeping, he sighs by the door and opens with his keys, they shared everything, siphos also had his garage keys. He will sleep here so he can break the news to them in the morning, he will call his rude boss also and inform him that siphos passed on so he can understand his late coming, he knows that man will never agree to him taking a day off.

He lets himself in the cleanest small RDP house with the sentiments of what he thinks is a perfect home, his house is bigger than this one because it was extended but this one has a sense of belonging he cannot describe. There is a plate covered on the table with a note next to it, that's his friend's food, his sister takes care of them so much it's unnoticeable there is no mother in this house. He opens the plate and chuckles to find his friend's favourite meal, Pap, morogo and chilli gravy, the food looks appetizing but he doesn't have the energy to eat right now instead he reaches for the note and read

Bhuti Siphos I cooked your favourite today, please leave me 40 bucks before you leave, I'm short, I want to buy flour for my fat cakes. I paid registration fee with all the money I had tear drop on the paper before he fold it and decide to sleep a bit, he throws his body on the bed after kicking off his shoes and drift off looking at a picture of him and his best friend plastered on the wardrobe.

I don't remember when I slept but I am woken up by someone tapping my head, Jesus! She opens the curtains and windows wide allowing the morning breeze and sunlight to penetrate through, I wish to shout on top of my lungs at this moment.

"Thando" I groan looking the other way, this one can be so bossy sometimes

"Wake up Dalas, your late it's six already, where is Bhuti Siphon?" Siphon? That wakes me instantly and I sit up straight after taking out a heavy exhale, she is just in her short pyjama night garment that is exposed through the above knee fluffy gown she is wearing, why is she sleeping in such shorts in this winter 'why are you looking at her thighs?' my subconscious asks and I immediately shoot him a look "Hello earth to Dalas" she waves her tiny beautiful hand in my face "Where is your friend?" she questions again going about the room "I cooked last night and he didn't eat, tell him his going to eat that food no one is going to waste my hard work" she says by the door and closes it out. This is going to be so hard.

Eventually I gather my strength and join the two on the table, Vuyani is 25, he works at the local chisanyama while Thando is 21 and in self business as she says, there is Avon, fat cakes and doing hair so she is just in between nje. Vuyani is already digging in with a mouthful of bread, polony and tea

"Gootmaan" he greets me when I sit on the table and I just nod "He left you?" Vuyani is asking about work but his question to me asks something else, he indeed left me

"Finish up, I need to speak to the both of you before you leave" I order just sipping the tea before me, but the police food in front of me is already giving me the 'your wasting my food and hard work' attitude so I obey and eat mine, every now and then my eyes goes to the warmed up last night's plate on the table

"I saw Sindi" Thando informs with an eye roll, if it was any other day I would have laughed like Vuyani but not today, I just offer her my faint smile "She ordered 300 perfume from me, she said you're going to pay for her" I nod faintly eager to finish up this breakfast so I can break the news. My phone rings and I see my boss's name flashing, I drop it and decide to deal with him a bit later, there is also Zinhle's please call me 'Please call Carrie' from all my sisters I swear she is the most dramatic, please call really? Couldn't she WhatsApp me.

And I give her a weekly pocket money every Saturday from my tips, there is no 'Carrie' she is getting from me

"Let's go to the dining room" I order straight after breakfast, Vuyani is already giving me unsettling stares while Thando is just her normal care free bubbly self. After settling in the living room I release a huge sigh before breaking the news "Guys I have something to tell you" now the telling part is the hardest, how do I put it gently "Something terrible happened last night on our way home from work, Dalas.....Dalas....was" my words fail me, my voice trembles in pain, I feel the ache in my heart grow.

"Dalas where is my brother?" Vuyani questions me with eyes that already know what I'm about to say

"He....he was, shot and he didn't make it" tears fall down his cheeks instantly

"NO NO I REFUSE, HE CAN'T, HE" I pull him to my chest and look at the shocked Thando on the couch, she is just numb "Gootmaan please tell me this is joke" unfortunately I cannot, it's the painful reality we have to survive

"Vuyani look at me" he doesn't, he buries his face in his hands wailing out loud "Harde Vuyi" (Sorry) I try to console patting his shoulder next to me but my eyes are on Thando, there is still no tears on her face

"What happened, how did he get shot?" she asks with a frown on her face but no tears what's so ever

"We were just at the wrong place at the wrong time, we were walking home and guns started going off by the road and he was hit" I try to be as brief as I could, I don't want to traumatise them any further

"Hmk" she says before going back to the kitchen, she comes back with warmed up last night's plate "Let's eat up" she says sitting on the table before us, Vuyani looks at her with red eyes

"OUR BROTHER IS DEAD AND YOU'RE THINKING OF FOOD?" he shouts

"It was his last meal on earth" she explains and Vuyani composes himself first, she shoots him a look and he put his hand first on the plate, I'm the second to take in and then her "eat the gravy" Vuyani and I are not friends with chillies, that was Thando and Siphos thing

“hleeeeeee” Vuyani is the first to groan waving his tongue out for air and we all slightly laugh

“Eat the gravy Dalas, this is your friend’s meal” I attempt to stand and go fetch some water but she stops me “no water sit down” urgghh can the gravy just vanish

“shoooooo” that’s me hissing from the burning sensation, we all laugh once again but harder this time “do we really have to finish this” she rapidly nods laughing

“Was he in pain?” she asks just when we all take the last bite, I think a bit and to be honest I don’t know, I have never been shot, I don’t know the pain of a bullet but for them to find peace I will lie so I shake my head no “I would like to see his body and wash him” that is not happening, this girl is not seeing Dalas like that not when I’m still alive but I will just cooperate for the time being

“Okay, we’ll have to wait for the police to inform us though” she nods

“Gootmaan someone is going to pay” I pray this doesn’t take Vuyani back to the gang we pulled him through

“Vuyani, you’re not going to do anything, leave everything in the hands of the police” I sternly reprimand him before he thinks he is Jesus of Sakhile and go around stabbing people. My phone beeps multiple times and I already know who it is *Please call NOW* in capital letters, I hate call backs “Listen, you’re not going to do anything stupid you hear me Vuyani?” he mumbles looking the other way “VUYANI” I shout and he nods hesitantly and storms to his room, gang members tantrums, the worst if you know, if one throws a tantrum the whole community is going to suffer the whole month with a threat ‘they are going to pay’

“Give him time he will be fine” here is another one, why is she so calm

“What about you, are you going to be okay” she looks at me with sparkling eyes but pushes the tears away blinking. I wanted her to cry but I hate seeing tears in her eyes, I don’t even know what I want anymore but no tears is good

“It’s life, what can we say” she says with a trembling voice

“Come here” I open my arms and welcome her brushing her soft back “You’re going to be just fine” she nods in my arms and I wipe few tears on her face with my thumbs and peck her forehead, she smiles with a bit of a chuckle

“You can’t do that anymore, I’m a grown.....” someone clears their throat and there stands my girlfriend behind thando

“Babe” I leave thando and attend her with a content smile, I haven’t seen her since last week “What are you doing here?” I ask after planting a kiss on her cheek

“I came to buy fat cakes but I see she didn’t make them, instead she is busy cuddled in my man’s arms” she says with an attitude and before I can defend Thando is already let her loose tongue off

“My ancestors told me you were coming to buy today with your smelly behind so naahh, I would rather be penniless than take money from gold digging whores with.....”

“THANDO” I admonish but she rolls her eyes “I will be back, I left your flour money in the room and please make sure Vuyani doesn’t leave” she nods as I push sindi out of the door before world war erupts.

“I hate her” she informs as we walk down the street, I know and she hates her back including everyone around me, even my best friend didn’t like her but I love this girl

“Don’t mind her, she is going through something at the moment” she rolls her eyes looking behind me, someone pokes me from behind and I turn to find the dramatic one

“Ola gold digger, scratch that platinum digger, you make my brother miss work now? How is he going to maintain your slay queen ass” I wish everyone could just chill I love this girl

“ZINHLE” she smiles my admonishment

“Babe, I will see you later I can’t deal with your dramatic family” she says excitedly looking at her phone and she doesn’t even wait for my response

After Zinhle scammed me another pocket money I went home with the aim to bath and sleep a bit before I deal with everything but when I opened my room door, something caught my eye. I forgot to check what was so heavy in this bag, so I open it and feel dizzy at the moment, I blink the dizziness away but madness roams my mind, I have to be mad to see such, this things don't happen in reality. The bag is filled with so much money I think I'm mad just looking at it, my body is also in disbelief because im standing rooted before a bag filled with only 200 notes. Did I just become rich within a blink of an eye?

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 2

TEMPTATIONS

MUSA

Some of life's temptation can drag you to hell, straight to the core you end up being Satan's right hand man for frying people, this universe is trying tempt a nobody like me whose got so much baggage already to fall astray. Staring at this money I see my future, I see the possibility of me being a somebody, finally making ends meet but there is always that but. What exactly was going on last night, did the police guy possibly have something to do with this because he also had a bag full of cash and asked me put it in his car? Sometimes I wonder if maybe I was born an alien I would be this troubled and walk such a crooked path. My life surely qualifies to be called temptations of a poor black man because this right here is drawing me to the darkness of theft. I'm saved from troubled thoughts when I hear tyma's voice approaching and I quickly seal the bag and try to mask my awed tempted emotions

"Tyma" (Dad) I greet before he can say anything, he chuckles walking in the room

"What's wrong with you trying to look cool do you have that slay queen of yours in here" his first search tells him to peep behind the door and run his eyes around the room looking for my so called 'slay queen' and I can't help the laughter that escapes my mouth

"Stop the search tyma no one is in here" I reprimand still chuckling, this man is my first love, I know some people say their mothers come first but if I had to choose between the two, my father would come top in all ways possible. As for my mother I don't even think she would make it to the top 10 of the people who occupies a special place in my heart

"Why aren't you at work" now that causes my emotions to sink down in pull of wonders, I point him a chair to rest before I break devastating news to him. He cannot believe what I just told him and now I also regret telling him as he starts hyperventilating balancing by my bed

“Pops come on don’t do this” I reprimand handing him a cup of water and helping him to drink as I fan him with my other hand, he holds the side of his heart and takes deep breaths

“Mfana’mi what are the kids going to do” he asks sincerely broken “Couldn’t Thandeka do something to protect Dalas, you see why I don’t believe in ancestors” a brief laughter escapes my lips “Ngempela mfana’mi those people are useless”

“Hai! pops everything will be okay, I will take care of them where I can” he nods in agreement because we both know if tables were turned, Siphos would do the same for me “Let me get ready for work tyma before my boss send the whole SA police department to come get me” he laughs standing off the room

“Please be careful out there mfana’mi and don’t worry a lot about Thando and Vuyi, I will be with them the whole day”

“Thank you tyma” I appreciate as he closes the door, but he pops his head back in

“Oh I almost forgot, I came here to ask about the car, whose car is this” now that’s a loop hole in my story, I told him everything but the money and the police guy

“It’s a friend of mine's he will collect it later” he nods my falsified info and bits me good day as I prepare myself to start a day without my day one nigger. It still stings like a bee to my heart when I think about him, but I make sure to push the pain back deep in my medulla oblongata for later on. Now I have to go bust myself for two families. I thank God that my father didn’t ask about the huge bag on the bed so I safely hide it on top of the ceiling before I depart to work

Work is always work and now without Dalas it’s too much, I’m going to convince this heartless boss of mine to take Vuyani in Dalas’ place. He gave me his usual verbal warning for being late but seeing my baby at lunchtime is always priceless and it makes all the pain disappear in the darkness of sorrows. She walks towards me straightening her black skirt that looks so good on her, that pick'n pay uniform was made for her.

“Mami” she smiles pecking my cheek and I pull her waist closer to mine balancing by the wall

“Where is gorilla today” she is asking about my Dalas, she didn’t like him and he didn’t like her either. I will forgive her because she doesn’t know and I’m not saying anything to her for now.

“Don’t call him that, you look beautiful” she smiles

“And hungry” she add with a naughty grin, I mask confusion for her to incriminate herself some more “Hungry both up and down” we both explode in laughter, I have never met a woman who loves sex this much

“Let me take care of the upper hunger” I say placing 20 bucks in her shirt pocket and she smiles “the one under lacy wear I will take of it during the weekend” the immediate displeasure on her face tell me she is not happy with my response and I immediately laugh

“Don’t do me like that please, im thirsty” I laugh her madness but im honestly not in a good space “Or you want me to give lockshin boys your food” I shake my head no with creased forehead and she laughs hard but immediately compose her laughter when a white polo drives passed us, she somehow seem to be hiding by my posture or am I seeing things

“What’s wrong” I ask looking at the driver that just stopped and definitely approaching us with an expression that is ready for kills “Sindi” I call out hoping she might enlighten me before this beast meet our reach, this man looks way older now that he is here

“SINDISIWE” the man shouts “Who the fuck is this?” I would also like to know the same, Sindi is trembling in my hands “SINDI!” He roars

“My my cousin” the fu*k! I look at her as she steps away from me but she doesn’t look at me instead she looks at the beast fuming

“YOUR COUSIN THAT STICKS YOU LIKE JAM ON BREAD” instead of fuming back I just chuckle, some fights are obvious and for the mere fact that im address as a cousin I will back off without even a word even though I’m tempted to fist his gold tooth set that looks like the old black version of A.K.A. I pace off from the scene, I guess I had to loose everyone I love this week.

THANDO

Well apparently I was named Thando by my late beautiful mother who passed on two years ago. Im 21 and a business person, I don't like referring to myself as a business woman because it sounds too sophisticated. Well currently I specialize in hair dressing and catering; in catering I specialize in fat cakes, chip fries and chillies garlic archer. I'm also a sale agent for Avon but that one I save to boost to my friends who went to GS college in another province and come back acting like accounts, when they ask what I do, I just say im a sales agent, I don't dare mention Avon. These office administration and business management enrollers at GS tend to think they are doing doctorate, I swear everyone I know is doing those two courses.

The police just left to inform us about my eldest brother's passing and it just correspond to what Dalas already said, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time so like my mom taught me, I have to woman up for my only brother who is broken beyond repair. Bab Nkosi is trying to calm him down but his not having it. Peeping from this curtains making him sugar water as bab Nkosi suggested I see my noisy neighbours lingering around. I swear township life is the most boring, people find solace in others pain. Im sure they saw the police car and they are just waiting for drama but little do they know we lost our brother.

"Mi stop acting like a baby" I reprimand giving him a cup of sugar water and he shoots me a red look while bab Nkosi shakes his head reprimanding me with an intense look, I swear my brother would qualify for a job as a mattress sitter, in every family where there is no one to sit on the mattress they should call him for the job

"We lost our brother and you're so happy going about life like nothing happened" I roll my eyes and walk out before my tongue barks, truly speaking im an easy person, we are all going to die whether we like it or not, I long made peace with death. My brother was like a father to me and im very hurt about his passing but I don't throw tantrums like Vuyani, now he even has hiccups the way he cried like he didn't know. He is too dramatic and im wondering what he is going to do at the funeral. When we buried my mom, he cried so much when the coffin went down. Bhuti and I were fed-up with his wails, he was asking people to hold him, he wants to throw himself in the grave and die with his

mom, I did him the honours, I pushed him inside the grave and guess what? He cried so much asking to be lifted up the grave he doesn't want to die and that's when I made peace that he is dramatic.

Tomorrow I should go to the police and mortuary to collect the papers so I can visit home affairs for death certificate in order to claim with Sakhile burial society. I want my brother buried this weekend and I know it's all my work because vuyani will be like that for a while and there are no long lost relatives, only the drunk uncle that comes whenever his broke from there it will be the whole Sakhile I know, just to score free meal and gossip. As I pass by the store I see a black Audi RS Q8 packed just by the corner, we don't see those often here and the driver is to die for. I love me some man with neat kept dreadlocks.

"Ola Mapakisha" (Hello curvylicious) the driver remarks as I pass and I'm immediately turned off, yes I know im packed but I don't appreciate being called mapakisha "Come on mabhebheza" he continues to spit all the wrong things, now I'm not turned off, I'm so off there is no longer a return to the Eskimo state I'm in, I'm a cold walking mortuary "I just want to ask mamas" yoh! lockshin guys I wish they could roll with Kumkani, that man knows how to call a woman, that sweetheart is like it's meant to come from his lips only "Do you know Musa Nkosi" that one halts my movement, who the hell is this one, he is right under his home moos

"Who are you?" I ask still a bit afar, phela you never know with this expensive car drivers

"A friend of his, can you call him for me" I give him my most intimidating look and he laughs hard puffing a cigarrete "Is that supposed to scare me baby girl?" why is he so beautiful but stupid, baby girl really?

"Well if his your friend you can get him yourself" I know Dalas is at work, there is no way in hell he is going to find him. I turn on my steps and continue to the store, I feel his eyes on me but I don't dare look back, I know and I can feel his staring at my behind so I sway it more and push it further backwards just to give him something to really look at.

Lord it's Happy selling today, the local Indian guy who owns the supermarket, I owe him.....i'm not sure how much but I owe him, whenever I smile and say

'my friend I will see you month end please give me a loaf of bread' shame he gives me but I have never paid and he makes sure to remind me every chance he gets but still loan me more. I don't mind him reminding me that I owe him but today the store is filled with GS office administrators and business managers, it's too late to turn he is already seen me and grinned his yellow maize meal teeth

"AAAhh Tando you pay today" (Thando, you're paying today) every time I hear a white person struggle with English I smile in jubilation, we are not the only ones, this thing of theirs also murder them and yes Indians are white to me, as long as you have fluffy hair then your white, that's my definition of a white person

"Happy can I have a 10 kg cake flour and stop mispronouncing my name, it's THANDO" I correct pushing the money in his hand

"What of the mkoloto, I want stock" (What about your debt, I want to stock) can he die already, my ex classmates chuckle behind me

"How much does she owe you? I can pay for her" the one who used to be the lowest in class asks and I hear giggles behind me, I don't want to turn because I know I'm going to strangle someone to death. Happy being happy he takes out his book and hits his calculator like Madea.

"R375.52" 52 cents really? Was that one even necessary and are cents still considered as money in this day and age

"There you go" A deep voice say behind me with a cologne that hits and ticks all the right boxes, I feel his body right at my back as he places two 200 notes on the counter "You can keep the change" okay! Now I have to turn, no one is keeping the change here. My face is right below his chin when I turn and he cages me with both his hands balancing by the counter "I will carry that flour of yours" I don't know why I keep cowering my head back and why he keeps moving his closer to my face. Where the hell is my voice now?

"Say tankie" Happy's Engrish snaps me out of my cone and I push him off

"My change?" I place my hand expecting what is mine

"But..."

“HAPPY” he knows not to argue with me, he gives me the change mumbling in his language “You too” just in case his cursing me, him too “My love” I say to the guy when I turn, he frowns a bit and I don’t care, I wrap my hand around his waist and I think his a bit uncomfortable “Thank you daddy, please take that to our car” the only wheel machine I own is a wheel barrow but right now I have a point to prove so I will own a car just to fry hell graduates here “Please babe” I motivate with a peck on the lips and he chuckles before shaking his head and turning

“Ladies” he acknowledges with a nod and carry my flour out, every one’s mouth is hanging open as he holds my waist closer to his walking out of the store. I feel like a queen and I sway my hips proudly once again just to make a statement. Now that we just arrived at the car only then my senses come back, I can’t get inside the car with someone I don’t know

“Can we walk” he looks at me for a minute and slightly laugh before nodding “Don’t let my waist go and squeeze my ass too, like Kumkani, gentle squeeze, I want them to see” he laughs hard and do as told but I still think kumkani would have done it way better.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 3

LINES TO BE CROSSED

VUYANI

In all his existence, he never had a father in his life from being a toddler to being the man he is today his father figure was his brother and now looking at his brother's empty bed it hits him more than he will ever see him again. He wishes to have made him proud before he departed this world, he always drove for him to make something of his life unlike him but he never listened, he just thought his brother was being his strict guarded person as he had always been. He wishes for nothing more than to have just a few minutes with him and tell him how much he appreciates all he has done for him, to thank him for always fighting for him, for pulling him back when he went astray.

A subtle knock and opening of the door brings his thoughtful brain back to reality but the way he is so strained he doesn't even have the energy to let his feet carry him to inspect, instead he plays dead, he covers himself with his brother's jacket, whoever it is will go away.

"Vuyi" she requests permission already opened the door, he already knows who it is. Her presence in this room cannot go unnoticed "Hey" she says now softly peeling the jacket he covered himself with, for a moment when he raises his head the pain in his eyes reflects in her heart "I'm so sorry" she engulfs him in a tight hug full of emotions, it's hard to clarify what she feels for this guy but she knows that she doesn't want to see him hurt, what she feels for him she knows she cannot cross that line but when her father told her the state he is in, she came here to comfort him because as much as he is her best friend's brother to her he is her everyday crush, the last thing she thinks of to put her mind to sleep at night.

"I guess I will be fine with time" I say in a low voice and pull away from the hug, there is a glimmer of tears in her eyes, I chuckle wiping them with my thumb "I'm going to be fine" I assure sounding much livelier so I can convince her and she nods slightly smiling.

“My brother said he is taking days off from tomorrow so that he can help you prepare for the funeral” I nod “I’m really sorry Vuyi”

“It’s okay MaLindi there is nothing to be done except to accept” a subtle sigh leaves my mouth “Thando is not here” she laughs a bit

“Who said I’m here for her? I’m here for you” now it’s my turn to laugh because we both know that is not true

“What’s that?” she points a picture of my brother and I that I was holding tight to my chest drowning in my sorrows

“This?” I take the frame from the pedestal and bring it before us as we both sit floating our feet from the edge of the bed. We both laugh by just looking at the picture, it’s one of those you place underneath others because it’s meant for your eyes only, even close family is not allowed to see this kind of picture

“Gosh you were so dirty” she remarks still buried in laughter “but cute though” she adds

“I know right” she rolls her eyes and look the other way in disagreement, she can be so crazy when she likes “how have you been?” she just shrug to my question

“Today it’s not about me, it’s about you, have you eaten?” truly speaking I would like to hear about her rather than my sorrows “I guess not, I will be back” she closes the door behind her before I can even think of my way out of eating and in few minutes she is back with a plate of warm meal on top of a tray and a glass of water “looks like my friend left your meal in the oven” she added her spoon “let’s eat” she commands and now I feel like rolling my eyes too but I just eat to please her, we both eat in silence until the plate is clean.

“Good boy” I laugh hard because I’m two years older than her but here she is calling me boy “It wasn’t so hard now, was it?” I shake my head no smiling at her but the smile back on her face turn into a stare, for minute she stares at my face without saying anything. I gulp down my saliva because this stare she is giving is very awkward and uncomfortable, just when my mind is running loose trying to catch her stare, her face meets mine, for a moment we both breathe each other’s breath before she closes her eyes and touch her soft lips with mine. She asks for permission with a peck first, my reasoning is slowly descending in darkness as I allow permission by smooching her sweet lips

This is wrong, this is gootmaan's sister, my little sister's best friend, Theo's girlfriend but the way her hands run on my skin all that comes as a slide, for now she feels right and I feel human once again, I will deal with whatever comes after this moment.

"Vuyiiii" she groans right beneath me, she feels so warm and so delicate. She wraps her legs around my waist just as I'm about to pull out and I can't help it and empty in her. We both pant skin to skin for a while, I look at her and she smiles and that subsides my fears a bit

"Thank you" I peck her nose, she smiles and moves beneath me, only then I remember I'm still on top of her and inside her warm garden "I'm sorry" she moans as I pull out and lie next to her

"Where can I get the toilet paper" eish so much for being a gentle man

"Sorry" I quickly reach for my left drawer and hand her a towel, she wipes herself off and give it to me to do the same. Now awkwardness fills the room, we both lie facing the ceiling as if it asked us to shag "I'm sorry" I apologise once again, this time I'm not even sure what I'm apologising for

"Stop apologising you will ruin this moment" this moment is very....awkward so I don't think ruining it would be such a bad idea "I have a boyfriend" I know thank you for reminding me, I inwardly tell myself "he cannot know about this" I know that too, I wouldn't want the richest man in Sakhile's son on my back, his father is presumed to mutilate people for wealth. I'm sure I would be on their list if he found out I slept with his girlfriend

"Your wish is my command" that's me easing her, this was just comfort for me but to her it was a mistake, I know I crossed a line but I feel comforted and I hope we never cross it again

"Don't get me wrong, I....." she stops when we both hear thando's voice

"VUYANIIIII?!" shit "VUYI VUYI MY BUBU!" her voice is loudly approaching the room, I quickly push her to the floor on the side that is not facing the door and pull the fleece decorating the edges of the end of the bed to cover my lower body "Still crying?" she says opening the door, I knew she wasn't going to knock, she doesn't know anything about manners

“What do you want?” I ask already annoyed, I want her out before she even thinks of blubbing in here

“Rude!” she exclaims “Thank God your back to the land of the living” she comes in and my uneasiness spikes “Thank God you ate too” she is looking at the empty plate “With two spoons”

“Huh?!” I question confused, she points the two spoons on the plate with her head “Oh! The other one fell on the floor so I went to take another one” ask me again why I’m explaining myself to a 21 year old, she likes playing mother of the house.

“Hmmm! What can we say, spoons just fall nje with blue panties” the sarcasm cannot be missed

“FUCK OFF” I bark, she raise her hands in surrender laughing

“At least she is got style and strategy, only a woman who wants to leave a mark wears a lace to a man’s house” she says kicking MaLindi’s panty and I throw the brush at her, she runs out of the door but open it once again before I can even breath “I will be in the dining room the whole day, tell her to at least come out decent” she closes the door

“Fuck” I bury my face in the pillow thinking

“Vuyi what are we going to do?” MaLindi whispers standing

“Dress-up I will go get rid of her” she nods as we both get dressed silently

MUSA

My rude boss is not as heartless after all, after telling him about Dalas he cut my day short and gave me a week off and R5000.00 cash to help out with the funeral arrangements. I’m heading straight home to start off everything, I’m also running from dealing with Sindi’s annoying behind, she is been trying to explain but I totally ignore her. The girl is been two timing me for ages and I was so blinded by love I didn’t see anything. She can go shag her older man I don’t care.

I know Thando already did the most regarding the death certificate and claiming, what is left is for me to buy food so that tomorrow afternoon our

neighbours can start peeling. For now when I arrive I will go book the tent, chairs and transport, it's funny that just before he was shot he asked me to make sure that he goes to his resting place in a car of his standard and that is exactly what I intend to do, no matter what

"KNOCK, KNOCK" I push the slightly open door and let myself in, thando is watching tv with feet on the table "Thando!" I call out for her attention but she puts her index finger on her cute mouth, my subconscious side eye me for that 'cute' and I ignore him

"SHHHHH!" I'm so lost

"Huh!" I question still confused

"Vuyani is got a girl in his room" she snitches in a whisper

"Thank Lord he is actually acting human, I was starting to worry about him, did you get the death certificate?" she nods "and the sakhile burial?"

"I claimed, everything will be sorted out the only thing missing is food" I nod

"My boss gave us R5000.00, tomorrow Vuyani and I will go buy everything in the morning make the list for us" she nods

"I also need 500" thando and money, yoh!

"For what?" she rolls her eyes

"I want to bake some cookies" I count the money and give her what she requires, she pecks my cheek and quickly speed off the door but she peeps through once again "Oh! Bhuti's clothes that you asked for to dress him are in my room I was ironing them and Law was looking for you yesterday" she says with the biggest grin on earth

"Who is Law manje" I question with a frown

"Your friend"

"What friend?"

"Eish! Dalas im in hurry, I have money I have to compare the prices from all the stores so I can save some for myself I don't have time to remind you your friends list" she closes the door and flies off before I can say anything. I make my way to her room to find my friend's clothes, her room is.....bright, it captivates me,

it makes me feel some sort of..... I hear a lowered giggle and quickly make my way out forgetting my sissy moment of admiring thando's room

"Vuyani" he jumps like he was doing something he shouldn't be doing and the way his eyes are popped something is up "What have you done?" I question with a frown, my hope now is that he didn't go back to the gang and do something stupid, when he shifts a bit I notice there is someone behind him "Lindiwe!"

"Haaa! Hey bhuti wami your back early today" why is she whispering "I was looking for thando" she explains "Vuyani was just telling me she is not here" she swallows a bit "right vuyani?"

"Yeah! Yeah, she was just looking for thando" why are they so jumpy

"Why are you both whispering?" my question goes unanswered, instead their eyes run all over the place but me "Thando went to the shops wena, let's talk vuyani" Lindiwe flies out of the door like unexpected fart, I wonder what this is all about. We both settle on the couch with him still avoiding eye contact with me "My boss gave me R5000 to help with the funeral arrangement" he nods still off "and he also agreed for you to come work with me to fill Dalas' position" he scratches his head and I can already tell he is not budging

"Dalas thank you for considering me but I'm not doing that"

"Vuyani you can't be a waiter forever, you need to do something tangible with your life" I convince

"Hence why I have decided to start hustling for real after the funeral" this feels like back and forth really

"What are you going to do ke hustler?" he chuckles

"I don't know yet but I promise you it will be nothing dodgy, I failed to make my brother proud while he was still alive the least I could do is make him rest in peace by taking care of thando and making something of myself"

"Let's bump on it, now you're talking like a real man" we both bump on it and seal it with a nod "let me leave you ntwana, I have a lot to do, I will see you tonight" he nods as I close the door behind me. Not even out of the gate I see the police guy packed right behind my home, how did this one find me? I wonder as I pass my house and make my way to him. His standing outside like a model for his expensive car if it's his

“Ola” (hello) he chuckles and points me to hop in the other side as he also gets in “How did you find me” that’s the first thing I ask when we both settle on our seat

“The car’s got a tracker” he points his car in my yard, I nod “Why do you still work at the filling station?” he questions but I don’t understand

“Huh!” he laughs

“Musa you have a bag full of money, why do you still work as a petrol attendant?” I didn’t know my body could go into shock up until now “Listen man, I don’t know what you want or how you think, nna I’m here for my money and my car and in the main time while you think what you’re going to do with your money, please get me my bag pack of money and follow me with my car, I will get someone to drive you back when we get to my house” Lord please don’t let me fall in to temptations

“Aren’t you a police” he laughs

“I can be that too, do you want me to be one?” he still amused “Let’s just say, sometimes I’m a police man, sometimes a lawyer, sometime real estate agent, sometimes a car dealer, sometimes a business man and right now I’m an angel from heaven giving you a free start in life, do what you want with the money no one is going to come after you” I think my heart rate is not normal at this moment

“Where did the money come from and how did you know.....” he cuts me

“Don’t ask me questions you don’t need answers to, take what I give you, now be humble and get my money humble”

“Humble?” I question

“I’m sotho in my language Musa is humble” mxm! Criminal

“Speaking of language, I forgot to ask, what’s your name?” he laughs hard

“Lawrence Pula but my people call me law” I nod with a sigh and depart his car to honour his request. The two minutes’ walk inside the yard feels like a long walk to hell, I’m literally walking to hell because as much as my conscious is telling me to give the money all of it to him and cut all loose ties with him, there is that temptation that’s drawing me to possibilities, I can finally be a somebody

with that money but what exactly is the price to pay because I can see that this guy is dodgy as hell and clearly he will be back for the price. What line am I crossing here?

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 4

START OF TROUBLES

MUSA

Sometimes as human beings I wish we were like animals, no feelings and no emotions that comes with various kinds of hurdles. I promised my friend a decent funeral and that is what I gave him, the first can of worms I opened when I hired a car from Avis to carry my friend to his final destination, he asked for a decent car and I gave him that. I used the portion of money from the bag I didn't give back to Law and so far I haven't heard anything from him and I pray that by the time he remember me I would have covered the money I used.

I guess grieve doesn't hit us the same, only when the casket descended down the moist soil thando broke, it was painful to watch someone as strong willed as her break down like that, since Saturday she has been nothing but a walking corpse, I guess it's only sinking in now. I intend on opening my second can of worms for her just to cheer her up.

"Baby girl!" I call out opening her bedroom door, she is under the covers and it's 12 midday, this is what I'm talking about "Neno" I hear a bit of a chuckle, she hates it now but growing up she used to demand to be called Neno

"I miss him" she says with a trembling voice still covered up as I settle on her feet caressing them through the covers

"I know, I miss him too" we fall into a moment of silence, I guess we both really do miss him "let's go out" her head pop from the covers with red eyes

"Where? You have money, I'm not cheap" I laugh nodding to all her nonsense

"You choose any place you like" I suggest

"Hmm! I have never been to cinema before" she says a bit, thinking

"Let's go then" she flies out of the covers and I cannot help but look at the torture of her bending on her wardrobe looking for something to wear, her perfect behind is just there and this is my cue to exit the room before 'Nkosi'

starts his nonsense of reacting to a kid “you will find me in the kitchen” the way she is so excited I don’t think she heard me at all

A text from Sindi comes just as I sit down, this bitch is tripping if she thinks I’m going to give her another chance after what she did

‘Musa please we need to talk’ I read it and ignore it like the rest that I just read and delete, Vuyani asked why I don’t block her, truly speaking I’m a unique rare kind. I still have all my ex’s numbers in my phone, just because things didn’t work out between us doesn’t make us enemies so I don’t delete, if I delete your number know you really scratched my ego the wrong way. Vuyani walks in with a pile of dishes in his hands, people are still here cleaning up the event of yesterday.

“Why are you looking so sharp so early in the morning?” he questions with a frown I can’t explain what it’s doing on his face

“I’m taking Thando out she hasn’t been well since yesterday” he nods

“You will come back late neah” I don’t know if that is a question or what

“YES” the madam replies lively already dressed

“Thando you didn’t bath” Vuyani remarks and I can’t help but laugh, she didn’t I can attest to that, she just washed her face and changed because that was the shortest shower any woman has ever taken if it was one

“YES, it’s not every day Dalas offers to take a girl out for movies so I wasn’t going to waste his time with baths and all that” she turns to me with a content grin “let’s go Dalas” she is already dragging me out of the door like I’m going to change my mind

I regret coming here with everything in me, first the choice ticked me the wrong way, a romantic movies for bloody three hours is torture, then there are scenes I would like not to watch with thando next to me. She so happy she is discussing the movie with me like I wasn’t even in there, even the sex scenes which only send the wrong message to someone.

It’s a bit late outside I’m worried about transport but at least she is not as expensive as she thinks, I didn’t spend much on her so I can uber if we don’t

find taxi. Just as we walk out of the mall, I notice Law standing with a crew of guys next to a C class Mercedes Benz, my eyes fall on his same as his fall on us, he smiles coming my way and I shrink so much holding thando's hand tight

"Humble" he acknowledges and looks at thando "Beautiful" the smile on thando's face is out of this world, I have never seen her smile like this and how do they know each other "You still don't want to give me your numbers" he questions with a grin

"Behave law, I'm with my brother" thando reprimands still amused, jealous hit me a bit that she referred to me as a brother to him, I don't mind being a brother to her but to him I would have liked to be referred as 'as what? my subconscious questions side eyeing me before I can even say it

"He won't mind, please?" he takes out his phone and give it to her but she shakes her head laughing

"How do you two know each other?" only then I ask but they both laugh like I said anything funny, this is starting to get on my nerve "let's go" I tightly hold thando's hand and pull her off

"Humble?!" Law calls out when we are a bit distant "I will give you a call, now I know the price" my heart shatters all over. God I hope what I'm thinking is not it, I hope this is me being jealous and crushing on my best friend's little sister

LINDIWE

Love is something else, I wish who ever stemmed love could have left the manual of how to love right. Here I am, in a relationship with someone whom we have been together for two years now but God knows my heart doesn't beat for him anymore, his touch doesn't tickle my goose bumps but with Vuyani I felt complete, I felt appreciated, everything about him felt right with me. Here I am polishing myself for a day with Vuyani, I know perfectly well that Thando went out with my brother but I intend on going just to check on her even though I really know who I'm checking on

"You look beautiful baby, you going to see Theo?" my mom compliments as I walk passed the dining room

"Yebo Maa" (Yes mom) I see Buhle rolling her eyes next to mom

“Tell him to stop hiding behind the trees, he should come get you properly” I quickly nod and exit the room before I hear of how much of a good boy he is and how perfectly well he was raised. Problem with having a known boyfriend at home is that even when you fall out of love with the guy it will always be a hard to let him go because family is just there somewhere in the equation.

He is humming around the house with headsets on tidying up, that’s one thing I also admire about him, he is clean as they come. He notices me by the door and smiles perfectly

“Staring is rude” he remarks and I just laugh “Come in, why you standing by the door like I eat people” he takes my hand in pulling me in the house and I don’t fight him

“You do eat me” he laughs hard for a moment

“That I do and I wish I can eat you for as long as I live” I’m a blushing mess by now “You look beautiful by the way my stock” he remarks unexpectedly and because I didn’t expect it I don’t know how to respond, I just continue blushing “beautiful dress too, it looks perfect on you, is it new?” hmmm! I don’t know if I should be embarrassed or not but yes it’s new, I wore it for him but I didn’t want him to see that it’s new

“Than....thanks, yeah it’s new” my tongue just decided to blush down my throat and present me to stuttering, he smirks pleased “you notice a lot about me” he laughs

“I know everything about you MaLindi” he sounds so sure

“Oh really?” he nods “What’s my favourite colour?” I test but that smirk on his face tells me I asked him a.b.c

“I’m not good with colours but I would say beige or you call it creamy brown I don’t know” I just stare, he is on point “Am I right?” he questions searching for a reaction in my stare because I just went numb, how can one be so..... “MaLindi” he waves his hand before my eyes, only then I snap out of it

“Yeah, yah it is, how did you know?” he smiles once again pulling a chair for me to sit. He takes oros that is already diluted in the jug from the fridge and put before me with a rinsed glass, I know this is all thando’s doings, she hates it

when he mixes oros himself because apparently he waste it so she is the one who dilute it but if it's wild island she doesn't care. He puts a saucer of four biscuits before me too with the same smile I cannot explain

"You always wear nude lipstick and your favourite watch is light brown so" he shrug sitting before me, I'm lost of words, this is the universe testing me once again but so far I have come to a conclusion that I'm beyond redemption when it comes to how I feel about him.

His cell phone rings somewhere in the living room and only after he asks permission to be excused he goes and attends it. A knock comes from the door just as he leaves the kitchen and I give allowance to whoever it is and in comes my boyfriend, I choke on my oros

"Babe" he acknowledges but my response is stuck somewhere in my throat "Lindiwe" he calls out once again

"Hmmm" a subtle groan leaves my mouth

"It was Dalas, he was telling me that they are going to be la....." Vuyani comes back in the kitchen blubbering without looking up, only when his face leaves the phone he realises there is an extra being in the kitchen "Theo, howzit?" (How are you?) he acknowledges fist bumping him, how can he be so cool when im sweating rivers here

"Sure vuyi, nice farewell to Dalas man" Vuyani nods

"Thanks man, I guess you're here for the plates" Theo nods "Let me get them" before he turns out the door he looks back at me "Oh! MaLindi looks like thando stood you up, she said to tell you she won't make it" I'm so lost now because I don't remember him and I talking about thando "Your date MaLindi, angisho you too were going to town"

"Oh! yah! Mxm! I hate her" he chuckles and disappear from the kitchen, only then it registers what he is doing, he is saving me from my boyfriend. The universe is against my cheating today, the one I wasn't preparing myself for decided to take me with him because 'thando stood me up'

"Theo man thank your mom for me once again for the plates" he says placing a box of plates at the back seat of the car, I know they are not close but they are both just guys from the same hood so they respect each other. Theo came to

collect his mom's plates from the funeral, his family runs the local burial society called Sakhile Burial society.

"Come with your man mamazi, you heard your friend is not home" I wish I can leave my heart behind, my whole body is going with him but my heart and mind is back with Vuyani "You look beautiful" I grin my forced smile as we settle inside the car. The drive back to his house is bubbly with him talking but God knows I'm not even listening "Babe" he spans my thigh "We are here, where are you kanti" Jesus! I need to stop thinking about someone who doesn't even know how I feel about him, I'm sure I'm just a booty to him.

"Oh! Sorry love, I was just thinking" he nods and gives me his hand, we walk hand in hand inside the house. His mom is happy to see me like everyday.

"Ncooo! Makoti wami" (my daughter in law) I just laugh, she is always a happy person, I have never seen her sad not even once. The only person that gives me chills is his father, he is not a friendly person at all and sometimes I wonder how he scored himself such a muffin

"Sawubona Maa" I greet settling on the chair in the kitchen, she is going around preparing her scrumptious Sunday meal. Theo left me with his mom and disappeared inside the house "Can I help you with anything" she nods with a smile

"Theo's sister is coming with her husband today, I want us to have lunch outside at the veranda my baby you can help me set the table there" I nod already on my feet, with Theo's sister it's another thing, I'm not hundred percent sure I tickle her fancy I think she just tolerates me.

Lunch was great and all but I still think Theo's sister doesn't like me much, she avoids conversations with me as much as she could and that for me is a sign of something. Now Theo and I are just chilling in his room, he stepped out a bit to bit his sister goodbye. He comes in all smiles like he ate candy

"Babe" he jumps on top of my back, I'm lying flat on the bed playing a game with his phone

"Huh" he is weighing me down but he is so skinny I don't feel nothing

“Marry me” that grabs all my attention, I turn with a frown to face him but he forces me down, I can’t look at him properly

“What?” I question still not able to look at him because his holding both my shoulders down

“Let’s get married” he says in my ear from behind putting an opened box with a ring before me, there is a mist forming in my throat, there is also warm sweat emitting from my skin pores and this is.... “Try it on” he cuts my thoughts already taking the ring from the box and putting it on my finger

“It’s beautiful” that’s all that come out of my mouth

“I know right, it belongs to my mother, she gave it to me to pass it to my son too” I swallow the lump on my throat and sigh heavily caressing my finger with a ring, it doesn’t look like it belongs on my finger

“Theo what’s my favourite colour?” I don’t even know where that comes from but it just slipped my lips straight from my cerebrum, he chuckles first and steps off my back lying next to me and only then I’m able to see his face

“Pink, every girl loves pink” I give him a look “No wait” my disappointment is quickly replaced with hope when he thinks a bit “Yellow” I give up, he is not even close, yazi if he choose something dark maybe I would understand because most of my wardrobe is filled with darks colours but yellow? I don’t think I even own a yellow item

“I.....i, I don’t know....” He interjects

“What don’t you know Lindiwe, you love me don’t you” the displeasure on his face is venomous

“I...I...” he cuts me once again

“Please tell me this has nothing to do with Vuyani”

“WHAT?” only then stuttering leaves me.

“I saw how you look at him, I’m not stupid Lindiwe” I swallow before I gather my defence

“What? No, I just feel sorry for him because he just lost his brother” he nods

“You better, you don’t want to lose out on me, lot of girls in this town would kill for me to marry them” I can’t believe he just said that.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 5

WOMEN'S WORTH

LINDIWE

As women we should know our worth, as much as you may amount to nothing in your partner's eyes know when to walk away when you feel respect is no longer served on the table. As women we have got so much strength to conquer mountains alone but because we have given men the audacity to think we need to shoulder on them for survival our worth is kept at base because somehow men believe our position is beneath theirs and if you meet a men with that kind of mentality it's time to question your worth in the relationship.

To say I'm shocked is an understatement, I truly cannot believe this bastard just said that to me, this is my way out and I'm grabbing it with both hands

"Come again?" I enquire with a displeasure that matches his, for some stupid reason he looks pissed as if I'm the one who just spit venom out of my mouth

"I'm a full package Lindiwe, I come from a decent family and I have a decent job, marrying me would be your greatest achievement" I'm honestly being tested today. I nicely take off his old cold ring that I don't feel fortunate wearing it and put it back in the box

"Theo Medupe, I may come from nothing but I know my worth and my worth is way out of your league. I deserve a man who would be honoured to have me as a partner not a man who thinks he would be doing me a favour by marrying me so please take your fossil ring and shove it where the sun doesn't shine" I throw him his box and put on my sandals preparing to leave, when im done I look at him one last time and say "Lose my number, nxa!" I leave him shocked with his mouth open agape. His mom is in the kitchen being busy as always

"Makoti, you're leaving already?" I swallow and fake my smile, I cannot be rude to her just because she birthed an ass hole, I'm sorry to involve her womanhood in her son's dense but I'm so annoyed right now to reason well

“Yebo Maa, keep safe” I’m already at the door because I don’t want further interrogations but she stops me

“Wait” I halt with a sigh “Why isn’t Theo accompanying you? It’s getting a bit late” lie fast Lindiwe

“My brother is coming to fetch me so.....” she laughs

“He still doesn’t like him” I nod smiling back

“It’s a good thing we are marrying you soon, he will see that my son has nothing but good intentions with you” I just smile once again, this bastard even told his mom his marrying me

“Yebo Maa, let me not keep him waiting, goodnight” I hear her goodnight back already out of the door. I have never been this disrespected ever in my life, who the hell does Theo think he is? Just because he wears a suit every day to a complex room to collect money from Sakhile residents for burial fees of their beloved ones he thinks he is Patrice Motsepe? Talk about me being lucky to have him, nigger your lucky to have me not the on other way round. I’m fuming more as I think of the clever shit I should have said during the altercation, nxa! What a dog.

Matters of the heart neah! Only now that I’m at the door I realise where my feet carried me, I guess this is where my heart thought it’s safe to find comfort. I raise my hand to knock but I feel him behind me, I don’t need to turn to know it’s him because I can tell, my body and soul can tell that he is breathing behind me

“MaLindi” the fear in his voice cannot be missed, I hope this is not all in my head “What are you doing here so late MaLindi?” he stands next to me and bend his head a bit to look for my face

“I think I’m ready to come in” I say still looking at the door, I don’t want to look at him because I don’t know how he is going to take this. We both fall into a moment of silence still burrowing the poor door with our stare until he breaks the silence

“MaLindi are you sure” I nod “I need you to say it”

“I’m sure with all my heart vuyani” I assure

“Because once I open this door, there is no turning back, it’s you and me not matter what even Dalas we’ll deal with him together” I’m a bit hesitant about that one but Lord knows I love this guy

“Yes I am” I assure once again

“I love hard MaLindi but I break so easily” he informs with us still staring at the door

“I want you to love me hard Vuyani” only then he smiles and opens the door, he stands before me with a content smile holding out the door for me

“If you step through this door, know that you’re the second MaNdlovu no more MaNkosi” I frown

“Who is the first MaNdlovu?” he laughs

“My mother” oh yah! He steps aside and waits for me to come in happily, I step in without thinking of anything “Siya’kwamukela..... (We welcome you)

Gatsheni,

Ndlovu,

Boya benyathi, obusonga busombuluka

Mpongo kaZingelwayo.....” (Clan names) I don’t know why I’m so happy but I honestly feel home, at this moment nothing matters except him and I.

“Ngena endlini nkosikazi waboGatsheni” (Come inside Gatsheni’s wife) I swear my cheeks hurt like crazy from all the smiling, I even forgot my worth was just questioned minutes ago. He pushes the door close with his leg and wrap his hands around my waist from behind pushing me to the living room. An unexpected peck land on my cheek when he settles us on the couch with him still holding me tight from behind “Are you okay?” it comes as a whisper in my ear, I just nod to assure him but he needs more “I need you to say it” this is one of the things I love so much about him, he always demand to make sure that I’m perfectly okay

“Yes I’m okay, can we lie down a bit” I feel his nod against my cheek as his brushes mine in contact. He pushes me to his room once again, I truly don’t

know why he is clued to my behind. He seats me on the bed and kneels down freeing my feet from the sandals, I'm watching everything his doing with so much appreciation, it's the little things like this that make me fall deeper for this man. When he is done he plant a light feather like kiss on both my feet and nicely place them on the bed positioning my upper body by the headboard. Another peck land on my lips with him still on his feet

"Ngicela uku'landa iorder yami yekota at shakes, I won't be long" (Can I please go fetch my kota order at shakes) I nod with a smile "do you want anything?" I shake my head no

"I want you back very soon" he smirks and kiss my lips once again

"Your wish is my command my baby, I will be back now now" I laugh as he closes the door happily but he abruptly open it once again and peep his head in "Please don't leave me MaLindi"

"I won't" I quickly reply without thinking, only when he is closed the door once again it feels like he wasn't talking about me leaving now, he meant I should never leave him. Sigh! I don't want to leave him either he makes me feel home

THANDO

I finally feel whole again, my afternoon with Dalas was perfect just what I needed to lift my mood back to normal, I feel rejuvenated and ready to take on the world once again with no armour or shield for protection. I have to do this life thing once again without my brother who was a father to me but it is what it is, I still have my other brother and Dalas and for that I'm grateful because there are children out there with no one

Dalas saw me in the house and quickly left because his father was blowing his phone of some emergency in the house. Vuyani didn't cook, the dull dead smell in this house tells me but thank God Dalas fed me after our confrontation with Law, I will just make a simple sandwich and sleep after my bath, to be honest I'm not even hungry but I'm that girl, I must have three meals or more a day so because I ate outside I still need something at home before going to bed.

I settle on the couch trying to devour my sandwich but my phone rings making me down my saliva which was prepared to help me chew my food, I huff first when I realise I don't recognise the number

"Unknown hello" that's me answering the smartest way as I can be considering it's nine o'clock at night, only boyfriends are supposed to call at this hour and considering I'm so single it hurts I'm very annoyed who is calling me at this hour. I dumped my boyfriend when he went to university, I'm not one with long distance relationships

"Mamas" my annoyance is buried with a smile, I know I hate the mamas thing but I'm happy he called, but wait where did.....

"Where did you get my number" usually when I ask someone that question my tits are so hard with anger I cannot explain but with him and his voice my tits are actually aroused

"I'm a man of many talents mamas, you looked beautiful tonight" I didn't even bath imagen if he saw me on point, I was with Dalas so there was no need to doll up but had I known I would run into him I would have made sure I looked proper. Tonight was the second time he saw me indecent but he still thinks I'm beautiful so excuse my blushing mess "Hello, mamas you still there?" oh! I have been blushing way too long

"Yeah Law, what can I do for you" playing hard to get is nice yazi, such a lovely game

"What are you doing this week? Can you spare me an hour of your time please" I believe I'm very much free but he doesn't know that so

"I'm very busy this week law i....." he interferes

"Just 30 minutes please moratuwa" (my love) that moratuwa is like it's meant for him only to call me

"I don't know law..." he is at it once again

"Keya o kopa love" (I'm begging you love) my blushing is knocking heaven's door the way it's so high "I won't be long, I just need a moment to talk to you" ladies free advice, play so hard even if you know you have nothing to do like me

“Why can’t you talk now” I’m just exaggerating our flirtatious conversation longer because I enjoy his voice

“What I have to say needs me to look in your beautiful eyes, please moratuwa” oh! Jesus!

“It’s going to be a long wait ke because I’m very busy this week” I see my subconscious rolling her big useless eyes at me

“I cannot wait please make a plan or I’m driving to you now” impatient bastard

“Now?” I question

“Yes, what is it? Are you still with your brother?”

“My brother?” I question once again

“Musa, the guy you were with earlier on” oh! konje I did say his my brother

“No, I’m at home he left”

“Okay I’m coming hee lerato” (love) this guy

“Okay okay I will make time for you this week don’t come” he chuckles

“Better yet, tomorrow” now I roll my eyes

“Bye Law, you will hear from me”

“Goodnight Mrs. Pula to be” I don’t have a comeback for that one so I just drop the call happily, if this isn’t love then I don’t know

When I pass from the bathroom to my bedroom I swear I just heard moans in my brother’s room, oh is it just me still thinking about law but just as I dismiss the dirty thought my brother groans hard

“HMMMM MaNdlovu fuck! Your killing me baby” okay this needs my eyes, I nicely tiptoe back to his door and slightly open without making a sound, I know he is never one to lock doors, I just need to see this MaNdlovu that’s killing my brother so much he screams like a girl. My fragile innocent heart was not prepared for the sight my eyes land on “Fuck bougie baby!” he spansks her ass hard and she responds with a moan twerking on my brother’s member as he doggies her

“LEE!” I meant to exclaim in my head and continue to watch but my cerebrum failed me once again, I’m just shocked to see the twerking lessons she teaches me comes this handy. They both turn to me with expressions I cannot explain

“THE HELL THANDO, FUCK OFF FROM HERE” Vuyani barks but I can’t I’m taking a mental picture and saving it somewhere in archives in my brains to retrieve it when I need to blackmail him for something “THANDO!” He shouts once again

“Huh!”

“DON’T NYAA, FUCK OFF FROM HERE” he doesn’t understand, I’m traumatised but I’m also taking lessons

“Lee twerk again I want to see something” my eyes are exactly on her ass and my brother’s waist, I need to see that rhythm once again. I don’t know who threw a book on my face and where it came from but only when it hits me I sigh and close the door but I quickly remember I didn’t check the upper body position so I open the door once again just to have a clear image

“THANDOO” my brother shouts

“Sorry I just needed to make sure of the position, chest down ass up chommie, you need to teach me that one t.....” my brother pulls out and oh!! Now it’s really exit time, I fly out and lock myself in my room before he comes and rearrange me.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 6

SHATTERED

THANDO

The trauma I suffered the previous night is indescribable, I can't believe I saw such a traumatizing moment between my brother and friend. That bitch need to teach me a thing or two, no wonder I'm boyfriend-less I always fought Sbu when he wanted dog style, my response was always 'I'm not a bitch' no wonder the poor guy didn't even fight when I dumped him, he was tired of missionary shame, gogo no mkhulu all the way, that's me.

Okay I'm awake from my trauma but im still digesting the storm of yesterday so I don't appreciate my brother banging my door so early in the morning. I know he is going to kill me but can he do it later, his tlof tlofing skills were too much for me and it looked like it went to private school so he should give me a minute to teach my community school tlof tlofing skills a thing a two from his game

"Neno please open up I'm not mad baby" okay why is he so nice, this one used to belt me so bad so I'm not buying his politeness, he might be waiting on me with a belt "I just need your help mtase, I'm not going to do anything to you" he assures

"If you hit me I'm going to tell Dalas you're shagging Lee" I start my blackmail

"Yes baby, you can do that" I kick the blanket and roll my own belt on my hand just in case he tries me. He is standing by my door with puppy eyes that I now know they are not as puppy as they come, last night he was Asian with Lee twerking on his member "I'm sorry about what you saw last night, I shouldn't have done that" why is he so nice

"What do you want" he chuckles

"I need you to accompany MaLindi home and say she slept here with you" the devil is overworking my friend shame, the mthondolo (dick) was so nice she over slept, yoh!

“Heeeeeee!” that’s my bitchy laugh forgive me, I leave him by my door and go to his room, Lee cannot even look at me “Chommie!” she is still burrowing the poor floor “It was so nice you slept over”

“Thando” My brother reprimands behind me

“You even woke up shy, perks of having a nice di....hmmm”

“Of having a nice what thando” this one mustn’t try me, he needs my help

“Let’s go chommie but your telling me everything” I see my brother shaking his head to her not to spill, he doesn’t know me I want all the details or else they will see themselves out of their mess. As soon as I close my room door I burn her with my stare and she chuckles looking away from me

“What?” she questions still amused

“Haibo! Chommie, my brother” she laughs

“Leave me alone, he is hot and I love him” I roll my eyes and look for my gown to wrap myself after washing my face to accompany her

“When did all this start and where is Theo”

“I left him”

“Lee, you have been with the guy for years” I remind her

“And I don’t love him anymore” yoh!

“Okay, let’s talk about that style you were on last ni.....”

“THANDO” my brother interferes walking in, I can’t believe he was eavesdropping “Go wash your face and accompany MaLindi” mxm! I leave them both in my room to do as told, but this one is still going to spill on our way “I’m coming with you” my brother informs when I come back from freshening up, they are now seated in the living room sipping on some coffee and biscuits, lovers things “I’m going to see Dalas” such gossip blocker, doesn’t he know gossip is nice when it’s still served hot, I know he just wants to refrain us from discussing his game

When we enter the gate he goes straight to Dalas' outside room while we both go to the main house, MaBongani is preparing breakfast in the kitchen

"Girls" she greets us with a happy smile before we can even say anything "Don't look so nervous I covered for you, I said you asked to sleep with Thando to your brother and father, how is Theo, when is he sending his uncles" I frown and look at my friend next to me, she sighs looking down, well I guess there will be no need for me to explain anything

"Maa, I will be in the living room, I'm waiting for breakfast"

"Okay baby" I leave them both there and disappear to the living room where I find Buhle skipping through channels. This woman is so lonely bantu, I think she is still a virgin, she depresses the bitch in me because truly speaking every time I look at her I feel guilty for sleeping around

"Buhleza" she laughs

"Thandoza, I was looking for you yazi, I need to do my hair"

"You're going on a date?" she laughs hard shaking her head. Vuyani, Dalas and Lee all walk in with Dalas questioning Lee

"Where the fuck were you wena last night, you don't sleep home now Lindiwe" my brother looks at me and I know it's time to jump in

"She slept with me" I inform but Dalas looks at me, him I cannot lie to, he always get me and I don't know why I agreed knowing that he can see right through me

"Where were you wena?" he ignores me and question Lee once again, he knows I'm lying

"I was with love I promise bhuti wami" (my brother)

"Stop lying I know she is lying and you're lying too" he shouts

"I swear I was....." he interjects

"Hai wena! I was with Thando last night up until 9, you were not with her" eish konje!

"What were you doing with Thando that late Musa?" Buhle asks but Dalas ignores her and continue to interrogate Lee

“Khuluma wena” (speak up) he interrogates further

“Musa leave my daughter alone, Lindiwe go call your father to come have breakfast” Lee quickly disappears from Dalas’ glare “Your slay queen is showing you flames ubusy ngomtanami” we all erupt in laughter, he huffs as we all go back to the kitchen laughing at him

“Yazi Maa Lindiwe is going to fall pregnant, don’t say I didn’t warn you when she comes home with another mouth to feed”

“Musa stop being grumpy hau! Don’t try to ruin my sunny morning please....” Bab Nkosi interjects

“MaBongani, Musa what is it so early in the morning, I swear you two are worse than Zinhle” he reprimands taking his chair together with Lee. No one answer him, we all dig in without even saying orison. Breakfast is as scrumptious as it smelled, my eyes keep going from my brother to Lee but they are both not even looking at each other. A polite knock interrupts our happy breakfast, in walks two unknown men and the one and only Bab Medupe of Sakhile burial society a.k.a Theo’s father

“Sanibonani endline” (Good morning in the house) my eyes are on Lee, she is nervous but seems confused as everyone on this table except MaBongani who somehow made a lot of breakfast like she knew she was going to receive visitors. BabNkosi stands and shake their hands with a polite smile

“Gentlemen, welcome how can I help you” he asks them still standing

“Myeni wami please show our visitors inside” (my husband) MaBongani suggests lively

“No mama we have to report ourselves before entering the premises” one of the unknown oldies say, he takes out what looks like an expensive whisky in his coat and hand it to BabNkosi “We are the Medupes in your house and we are asking permission to fix the mess our son caused in your home” babNkosi frowns

“What mess?” he asks

“Our son has stolen one of your flowers” old people and riddles, can he just go straight to the point

“Get to the point ndoda” babNkosi remarks impatient as me

“Our son Theo Medupe asked us to come inform you that he impregnated one of your daughters” my breath suddenly hitches while my eyes travel to my poor brother, he looks shattered. MaBongani breezes in jubilation trying hard to control her thrilled demeanour, only her on this table is welcoming of the news. Poor Lee, her chest is expanding and contracting like she ran from those who are foreign to this planet. BabNkosi sighs heavily before leading them to the dining area but he shortly comes back

“Musa, Vuyani?!” he calls out for them but my brother remains clued to the chair “Vuyani?!” he calls out once again “You two have to help me handle this talks, let’s go” they both follow him to the dining room and I feel for my brother, I hope what they have with Lee was just shagging no emotions involved because I wouldn’t want to imagen the pain and hurt he would feel having to sit in the talks of someone you love possibly marrying another man

Naturally I would like to think I’m one to always distant myself from awkward situations because as rock solid tight I may appear on the facials, I’m a cry baby inside. I quickly left the breakfast table with an excuse to tidy the house but honestly being, the tension on that table was thicker than a knife cut. Even if a maniac psychiatric patient was to walk in that house in that present moment, they would tell that Lee looked like her world came to an end. She was shattered beyond mending.

I hear the sound of my phone requesting attention somewhere in my bedroom and I make my way there to attend it, maybe my mind might wear off from the events of the morning breakfast. It’s a text, and I’m suddenly worn with annoyance because I’m sure it’s mtn being it’s marketing whatever as always, no one still text in this day and age but nonetheless I still open the text just to scan and delete, but my annoyance is swept under the carpet with amusement. It’s a text from Law, so far I have come up with three words to describe him, impatient, ancient and dirty.

Do I need to send a helicopter for you to administer time for our date TODAY that today is in capital letters and somehow it comes a bit exasperated to me

and this only just confirms my prior discovery, impatient is one of his characteristics

I don't remember agreeing to see you today I fly back the text, I patiently cross my leg on my bed waiting for his reply because his impatience tells me his not one to just leave things with no full-stop

I don't remember giving you an ultimatum hmk! Even reading his text sounds dirty although it's very neat but impolite ,I'm still not turned off in fact I'm more amused *When should I pick you* another one comes just as I'm still trying to gather my tools to deny him a date. Now I'm at pause, the debate between my subconscious and my heart is at its highest peak and by the look of things it won't come to conclusion today, my subconscious is saying just go on the bloody date while as my heart is a bit reluctant and she doesn't even have a solid reason for her reluctance *I WILL BE THERE IN AN HOUR MRS. PULA TO BE* this one actually sounds like a command. This guy clearly doesn't know me, who the hell is he to command me through a text

'He will be here in an hour' my subconscious rings that bell and there is a mild panic in my emotions, he has never seen me decent and if I would like to twerk on his member someday I better neat up. An hour is very short for a lady but because I'm hooked by this guy's messy attitude, I will make it work. A quick dash in water, lotion and fragrance myself and now 20 minutes left I'm standing before my wardrobe because I don't know what to put on. Another 10 minutes later I settle for jeggings, boots and coat and I'm good to go. Winter is still at its meanest form. He shoot me a text straight at 11:00 am which is exactly an hour later.

I'm waiting where I first saw you swaying your sexy behind for me it's dirty but I love it, I collect my phone, keys and make sure I have at least 50 bucks in my wallet before I go out with him. Always make sure you have return fee in case things turn sour wherever you're going.

He is looking jaw droopingly handsome as always, hmk! What a snack bathong! I would like to run my finger through those dreadlocks someday 'hopefully soon, it's been ages' my horny subconscious, I ignore her salty behind and smile to my acquaintance

“MaPula” he engulfs me in a tight hug and I immediately melt to his cologne that hits all the right places and the warmth of his embrace just escalate my desires. I’m still a bit lost with how I was addressed but I’m so captivated to question

“Hey” mine comes shyly in a whisper, new girlfriend things, give me a month the shyness will be flushed down the drain

“And she blushes” he chuckles wrapping his hand around my waist and walking me to the other side of the car, he opens the door for me and safely close it before turning to his side, okay I have just realised he is also a gentleman, impatient, ancient, dirty and a gentleman not a bad combination at all “O montle” (Your beautiful) he compliments starting the car and driving with one hand, his other hand land on my thigh caressing it, I don’t know if that’s forward or brave but I’m too focused on being a perfect potential girlfriend to scold “Where would you like us to go?” he asks

“Hmmm” my voice is somewhere draped in my oesophagus

“Would you like us to dine in a public place or private, I don’t know about you but I’m a very private person” well I’m a very public person but here I am in the most expensive car with a jaw dropping guy so I would like to score myself some points too

“Private” he nods side eyeing me and I’m pleased with the smirk on this face

“Do you love music MaPula” the question comes awfully unexpected, it catches me off guard

“Yeah” my voice comes out husky, he chuckles once more

“Which genre?” his hand is still caress my thigh as he rides us with one hand and I find this hell sexy

“Anything but hip hop” he laughs hard

“I guess it’s true when they say opposite attract” he does the exact opposite, he plays drake and ‘hold on we going home’ comes live through his speakers. He jams to the song bouncing his head mildly forward and backwards all the way to our destination. I find him haze like, there is a fog hovering his existence but nonetheless I’m still drawn to this arrogant man that looks like he weighs more than what meets the eye.

Not once in my life have I thought I would land in Hillside, it's one of those places I just saved for my never-to-come true dreams but what do you know, I Thando Ndlovu made it to Hillside and I cannot lie it looks more extravagant than when you see it afar, this estate is so heavily guarded I swear one would think only high powers reside in here. I knew we were coming to a beautiful house but this one is heavenly, I'm taken back by its beauty.

"Would you like something to drink?" he asks peeling off my coat and hanging it behind the door

"Yeah, anything" he nods and leads me further in, he makes sure that I'm settled down and disappears to what I think is the kitchen

"There you go" he puts a glass of wine in front of me while he sips what I think is whisky "You have a way of making an old man long for you MaPula" I still have questions about that name but for now to earn myself some points I will let it slide "What would you like to eat before we talk?" talk? I almost forgot we are here to talk "Lerato?!" he snaps my attention and I slightly laugh, that one I know Lerato is love which is my name

"Anything would be just fine" he agrees with a nod once again smiling and he takes his phone from the table and buttons it for less than 5 minutes, quite, then he comes for my attention once again

"So MaPula" I roll my eyes but he laughs hard, he contains his moment and sits before me on the table. He takes my hands and starts rubbing his thumbs in my sweaty palms, his demeanour is a bit hazy once again, there is just something that hovers his clarity and I can't quite make sense of it "Lerato, I'm not one to go around beating about the bush, when I want something I go for it and I take it with both hands and I want you to know I always get what I want one way or the other" my subconscious gives an okay tapping her foot waiting for the big ask of the night so I can start making him wait while I think about it, you know all that dramatic process we put our boyfriends through even though we all know from day one if you want them or not "I want you to be my side chick" the fuck!

"Huh!" I think my ears are deceiving me

“I want us to fuck lerato and we are going fuck” oh my God! What have I gotten myself into?

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 7

“SOME OF THE HURDLES OF LIFE WE GO THROUGH THEM BECAUSE WE INITIALLY IGNORED ALL THE INDICATORS”

THANDO

Sometimes some of the things we go through from the hurdles of life is because we purposely ignored the initial indicators with the mentality that ‘we only live once’ or ‘we’ll cross that bridge when we get there’. I know for a fact that even a stare from my reflection in the mirror would be more than disappointed in me to even consider being belittled like this. I am in awe, not the great amazement awe from excitement but an awe of fear and incredulity, not once in my beautiful existence have I ever been this affronted like this. This bollocks clearly doesn’t know the kind of paint I am

“Pardon the vomit you just puked” there is a developing smug over his face as I yank my hand off his grip

“I said I want you to be my side chick” he is not even afraid to repeat that junk out of his mouth

“Listen and listen attentively rasta” I lean closer between his legs and my face is inches from his “I don’t know who do you think you are or where you think your mash-mellow testicles reside, I’m no one’s side chick and I will never be anyone’s side chick even for a rasta farian like you” the smile on his face is accelerating my fury “Is your dick perhaps anointed? Hmm! Is it going to cleanse my soul perhaps” his demeanour is diverse from mine, tears are flowing from his cheeks as he tries hard to contain his laugh which I find more disgusting because I’m mad as hell now

“Are you done?” he asks through his now audible laugh

“No not yet, go fuck yourself and be a side nigger to your ICU dick, nxa!” I add and attempt stand but he grabs my waist and position me back on the couch between his legs

“You look mighty mad and feisty MaPula, just the way I prefer my woman” he pulls my waist closer to him and his soft wet lips land on my forehead “Gotcha” I tilt my face backwards and glare at him, there is that smirk on his face I can’t really explain

“What do you mean?”

“I wanted to press your buttons a bit, you were too appropriate maan, I love you feisty with a loose mouth, the thando that asked....no the thando that swayed her ass for me to have the real show for my ogling eyes and told me to squeeze her behind for the world to see” I can’t help the growing smile on my face

“So you don’t want me to be your side-chick?” I still need affirmation, he shakes his head no and pulls me closer once again

“I want you to be my feisty loose mouth woman and mine only” now we getting somewhere, side chick my foot! His lips touches mine for a wet smooth peck

“I haven’t said yes” I remind him when he intertwines his forehead with mine

“I’m very much aware love but like I said, I’m the kind of man who always get what he wants one way or the other so you better buckle up and watch me make you mine from which ever frog you’ve been kissing” his hands grab both my behind and picks me over to his thighs, I sit proudly astride on his thighs “Your mine lerato you hear that” I nod with a smile and he responds by cupping my face and pecking my lips first, he goes again for the kill and murder my poor lips with a sweet gentle kiss that wakes my affections instantly “now that was me sealing the deal” I can’t help but bury my face on his shoulder, I know I always have something to say but I do have my shy moments. A swift doorbell interrupts out smooching session and he stands with me wrapped around his waist

“Law put me down, I will fall” I panic trying to get down but he holds me tight

“I won’t let you fall love, just hold on to me” he assures and I relax wrapping also my hands around his neck “that’s my girl” I roll my eyes and he laughs opening the door, the delivery guy is taken aback by the image portrayed before him. Law give him his card for him to swipe through his speed points machine for payments and he takes our food when his done closing the door with his leg, he walks us to the kitchen and place me on top of the counter searching for

cutleries in the cupboards, he is a bit bougie, we could have ate straight from the takeaway containers “it’s rude to stare” he snaps me from my mind

“I like how you walk around the kitchen”

“Oh really? How so MaPula” he asks not even looking at me but going about with his business

“There is something dirty but elegant about your graceful walk law” he turns to me with a smug and a bit of frown on his face

“Let me make you my first trip back to the lounge before you take me by force, I see this loose mouth is at it once again” he grabs me back to the lounge as we both laugh and he turns back after seating me back on the couch. He comes back with food now nicely placed on plates like home cooked meal “let’s dig in sweetness and while at it please block and delete all the boys you have been fooling around with, I don’t do well with sharing” claiming as much, he sits next to me and put my plate on my thighs

“So you’re not married” I ask ignoring his prior request, he waves his hand before me “what? Not all married man wear rings and considering you just asked me to be your side chick minutes ago so” I shrug but he laughs

“Stop running away from what I asked you lerato, block and delete those morons” he commands taking my eyes with to my cell phone on the table

“But I don’t remember saying yes to being your girlfriend”

“And I never asked you to be one, I told you that you’re my woman not my girlfriend there is still a vacant post for that one” I narrow my eyes at him and he laughs hard “Nka” (take) he grabs my phone and give it to me “I mean it thando block and delete” he orders

“There is nothing to delete or block” he frowns

“Why?”

“Because I don’t have any boyfriends at the moment” there is still a displeased look on his face

“Thando I don’t do well with sharing, I repeat, I’m giving you this platform to clear up whatever relations you have with boys.....” I cut him

“I was single law, there was no one” his faces relaxes a bit satisfied

“Why?” I roll my eyes once again and he laughs

“Because I’m a virgin and waiting for my future husband” we both bust laughing

“I’m going to bust that virgin behind” more laughter fills the room

“After 90 days”

“Steve Harvey my Sotho ass, you will live that in his snitching American ass not in Africa baby” the exasperation on his face propels me to laugh harder “that nigger is a sell-out to male species” he continues his exasperation murdering the poor steak like it’s the one that invented the 90 day rule “Nxa! You know what, let’s stop talking about that moustache bored man, tell me how are you related to Musa?”

“Dalas” he nods as I contain my laughter “he is my brother, well not biologically, he is my late brother’s best friend” he nods repeatedly

“Sorry about your brother babe, if you don’t mind me asking, what happened to your brother? Your emotions just changed when you talk about him” he asks genuinely concerned

“We just buried him last week so the wounds are still fresh” he frowns and stops eating staring at me giving me the continue look “he was shot from work walking back home with Dalas du.....” he chokes from whatever was in his mouth and I immediately hand him a glass of water “You okay?” he nods looking anywhere but me

“I will be back, I have to make a quick call” he says not looking at me and he is out of the lounge before I can even say anything, I wonder what that is all about.

LINDIWE

They say life is a battle field and sometimes we just have to dive with the waves blowing our way as we go on but I honestly refuse to weather this storm with Theo, I don’t know if this is the universe defining my odyssey for me but I’m honestly numb, I don’t see myself going anywhere with Theo, the only person who puts my mind to sleep is Vuyani and I would like very much to spend the rest of my life with him not anyone else. My mother on the other hand is so

thrilled gosh! You would swear prince harry is asking for my hand. My phone vibrates in my dress pockets snapping my numbness back to reality

It's a text from Theo that reads as follows *I'm outside in the car, come* I huff first before making an excuse for the store, my mother tells me to hurry before I'm called in the dining room, I roll my eyes and walk out because I honestly don't care about that nonsense going on in there, the only person I'm shattered about is the love of my life sitting in in such talks

"Theo" that's my greeting after banging the poor car door that knows nothing about my exasperation

"Babe" he tries to touch my thigh but I spank his black hand

"Define that chaos you just created in my home"

"It's not chaos babe, it's me righting my wrongs" I exhale first to calm down

"Theo Medupe, it's over as in O.V.E.R I don't know what tricks you're playing at but I'm not getting back with you, so you better stop that nonsense happening before I embarrass you in front of your family and deny you"

"Lindiwe I'm doing the right thing here for our son, he is going to have to grow in a home with both pare....." I interject annoyed

"WHAT SON?" I truly tried to be calm but this fool had to be a fool today

"The one in you womb" he says so calm, mxm! I tried to give him the benefit of the doubt but nah....I open the door with an aim to go and stop the talks going on but what he says next shatters me, it breaks me to pieces that cannot be mend even with magnets that attracts all pieces together "Lindiwe I have been stabbing all the condoms we were using this month with a needle" I close the door back in and look at him in shock with my mouth open agape, he takes a pharmacy paper from the dash board and put it on my lap "go take the test and come back so we can have the real talk"

I swear the walk to the bathroom feels like the longest journey to hell, I feel like I'm walking straight in hell gates suddenly everything is so dark, so blurry and some multiplied by two. My knees fails me and just when I give in to weakness

he holds me before I fall the ground, I wasn't even aware that he is right behind me

"I got you Lindiwe, just take the test, everything will be okay" I roughly untangle myself from his hold and bang the outside toilet door on his face. Tears are freely falling my cheeks as I pee on the bloody stick, when I'm done I don't wait for the instructed two minutes I bust out and throw him the stick and tap my foot on the ground waiting for my sentence

The smile on his face confirms his suspicions while to me it break me further and I can't help but meet the ground crying, he holds me to dust wiping my cheeks

"Don't cry Lindiwe, we going to be perfect parents" I don't know if it's me thinking of the man I love but I think I saw Vuyani walking past by through my crying session. I hate my life, I hate Theo and I hate his child in my womb.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 8

SOMETIMES A SOLE CALM MOMENT IS ALL WE NEED TO PROCESS AND HEAL

MUSA

His day started depressingly down in the dumps, he is pained that his sister is pregnant for Theo, he is not a bad guy but he still wanted his sister to be more than just a wife of some rich man's son. Like any brother he had hopes that his sisters would amount to more than he can never be, that someday he would be proud that at least one of his siblings flourished unlike him but it is what it is and like his mom told him to butt off his sisters business and focus on his, he will not fight if his sister is genuinely happy with the guy.

Through the events of today he is made a decision, life is too short and he wants to make something of his life so he has decided to quit his job and start planning his future with the cash but first he need to visit his rude boss and see if the offer he once made him and Dalas still stands and if it does, he is going into business but first thing is first, this is his restart, his beginning and definitely his tomorrow so he is preparing his speech to Thando to confess his feelings because as much as he tried very well to bury his feelings for her that girl is his tomorrow, so his intended on stepping into the new era with her by his side

He deeply breathes one last time before exiting the door to claim his girl, his never been one to be weak but for some reason his knees are shivering in fear, he chuckles thinking of what a sissy his best friend would have told him he is as he walks to confess his affections to Thando.

Just as he turns corner to her home, his knees completely loose balance to what he sees before him. The love of his life is held warm in another man's embrace, for a moment he stands watching and breathing deeply and consecutively to still his palpitating heart. Love hurts. When his audience notice him, thando jumps a bit from Law's hold but he pulls her closer and holds her tight, probably to make it crystal clear for him that she is his

For they have seen him, so he has no choice but to acknowledge. The walk closer to them hitches his breath more and for some reason he feels like his drowning

in the pit of melancholy. His chest expands and contracts one last time when he feels his inches from the two good looking love birds, she looks perfect in his hold, he just wish she could look him so his heart can see her happy, perhaps seeing her happy with someone will supress his feelings

“Lawrence” his voice slip out weak and he hates it but he can’t help the torment in his heart

“Musa” Law acknowledges back, still holding thando closely tight to him but for some reason thando’s buried her face away from Musa, she cannot look at him and he just wants her to look at him “I hope you don’t have a problem with this” law breaks the awkwardness and Musa breathes one more time

“Nah! As long as you treat her right” even as he says it he knows its pure lie, he has every problem there is to have with what is before him

“Sure man, I will keep in touch” law excuse him and he nods before turning on his steps, he is not sure anymore where he is going but he needs a moment to collect his emotions and piece everything together, so his steps carry him to his best friend fresh grave, perhaps a moment alone with his quiet brother from another mother will soothe his ached heart, sometimes a sole calm moment is all we need to process and heal.

VUYANI

The feeling of tormented suffering in his ached heart cuts deeper than a knife, he was better alone when he loved her from a distance but she came and pulled him through the cocoon he build around his affections to protect him from reciprocating his desires for her because he knew he couldn’t afford a girl like that, she is not the expensive type but she is someone’s girl and he respected that, moreover she was Dalas’ sister so he was supposed to look at her as a sister as well which he did exceptionally well until she pulled him to love her openly.

He was ready to fight for this girl, claim her like his sole purpose in life was just to love her but seeing her in the arms of her man confirmed that she was just feeling sorry for him. The thought did cross his mind a coupled times that maybe what she feels for him is just pity but when he held her in his arms it felt right, like she belonged in his touch so he thought for a moment that his home

is with her and just maybe they were meant to be after all, but the events of today proved otherwise. He will never amount to anything than pain in his life, he is not meant for happiness.

Only when wet droplets hit his chest he realise his crying, he is a sensitive being, some call him a cry baby but that never toughened him, he still cry whenever pain is inflicted on him. He came straight home and threw his weight on the couch for the tv to watch him, images are being portrayed before him from the screen but at this moment the man in him is being watched by the television, he envies Theo, for he has the greatest woman in the world.

“Vuyaniiii” his sister snaps him from his sorrowed heavy heart “I have been calling you, what’s wrong?” she sits before him worry hovering her face “Vuyani we going to be okay, bhuti is watching down on us” she thinks this is still the aftermath of their brother’s gruesome depart from this earth

“I’m fine neno, where have you been?” he wipes the corners of his teary eyes, she gives him a stare, he knows how much she hates the name but he is trying to distract her from seeing his pain

“Is it Lee?” she goes back exactly where he was trying so hard for her not to go, she sits next to him and throw her coat and bag on the other couch. This is her sister as dramatic as she is, she is all he has so he thinks what he is got to lose from opening up to her

“Do you think she really loved me or she felt sorry for me?” her tiny hand is already rubbing on his back and this only means that the deliverance of his voice was pained and trembling

“She loves you and still loves you, just give her time to sort this one out” she assures still rubbing on his back “Come to think of it, I had never seen her that happy since the beginning of her relationship with Theo, I think along the way she fell out of love but she stayed hoping the spark would come back”

“Is she really pregnant?” he questions not really sure he truly wants to know but this is her best friend she might know and it’s better he breaks down now in front of his sister than MaLindi

“I don’t know Vuyani but from how stunned she was, I would say she isn’t” he nods hesitantly with a sigh “Just talk to her, I’m sure there is some explanation

for all this mess” he nods once again “Will you be okay? I need to fix us something to eat”

“I will be fine neno, make my favourite” she laughs disappearing to her room first with her coat and bag

THANDO

She throws herself on the bed and allow tears to wet her pillow, she is not sure why her heart is filled with so much sadness, she should be happy she is got herself the perfect boyfriend but after Dalas saw her in Law’s embrace which she tried so hard to get off but he held her tight and told her ‘your mine and the sooner he knows the better’. She felt glum from that incident and she cannot exactly pin point what caused her blueness.

After collecting her emotions and cleaning up her face, she walks back to prepare dinner for her and Vuyani who is heartbroken beyond repair but she feels his presence in the house and she knows he is in, indeed he is watching soccer with Vuyani, there is no need to greet coz he had already seen her in a not so pleasant way so she disappears to the kitchen without a word which is so unlike her

She feels his piercing stare on her back as she goes about the kitchen, she wants to turn and confirm but something in her heart refuses to look his eyes, somehow she feels it’s not a good look and she is not prepared for it

“Thando” he murmurs

“Hmmm” she responds still not looking at him, she feels his steps growing closer to her and before she could run elsewhere, her face land on his chest when she turns and somehow she flushes from the contact of her skin to his, he caves her with his strong hands holding on to the stove edges behind her

“Please look at me” he begs in a low voice looking down at her, she still cannot look at him, her eyes land exactly on his chest. He raises her face up to his with a hold of his two fingers beneath her chin “Look at me please baby girl” he begs once again looking down at her “Does he make you happy?” it’s still new so she is not sure, instead she swallows looking away “Are you happy?” he changes his

approaching hoping to receive a reply this time but she just shrug still looking anywhere but him, he sighs deep before breaking the news "I'm leaving"

"Huh" only then a pained voice leaves her lips

"I'm going somewhere but I will be back....." she cuts him

"Where, why?" there is glumness in her voice

"I can't tell you where I'm going but I want you to know I will be back and whenever you need me I'll be just a phone call away" there is a forming sparkle in her eyes

"Why?" she fails completely to contain her tears so she buries her face with her hands and put her head on his chest, he pulls her closer to his embrace and brushes her back holding her tight, it aches his heart to see tears in her eyes

"Don't cry please baby girl, I will be back" he assures gently pushing her face off his chest by holding her shoulders away, he cups her face cleaning her tears with his thumbs. A slow feather like peck land on her lips and only then she opens her teary eyes, words fail to come out of her mouth instead she grabs his shirt and pull him back down to her face once again, his one hand grabs her waits closer while the other one cages her necks to a soft, gentle tender kiss that leaves her earning for more "Remember I'm just a phone call away baby girl" with that he flies out of the door before she can gather her scattered emotions

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 9

SOMETIME LEAVING EVERYTHING BEHIND AND STARTING AFRESH IS ALL THE BEGINNING WE NEED

MUSA

Like a gust of wind I just flown out of Sakhile with the speed of more than 16 knots which is considered the peak wind speed. My heart couldn't take the heart break, so I up and left all behind, sometimes leaving everything behind and starting afresh is all the beginning we need. I know some might say im a weakling but I couldn't pretend like all is well when I knew I'm slowly dying to hold her to sleep every night and knowing someone was doing that job for me tore me to crush

After handing in my resignation to Ndaba my rude boss we discussed real business and he was more than happy to lead me in the right path if it's one, I told him nothing but the truth and he was more than happy to lead me so he called his contact who wanted me in Johannesburg as soon as possible. So here I am in the city of gold, hoping to make something of myself and probably find love while at it so I can forget Thando's soft lips

Kepu truck trading is where Ndaba send me. Dalas and I long wanted to go into truck business but we didn't have the right cash to start so we postponed our dream for when we had saved enough, one truck is all we needed to start and from there we would see a way forward. Working at a garage as a petrol attendant for years may had been a disgrace but we had dreams to flourish from that downfall and we were at the right place considering our dream.

Dalas and I did our code 14 years ago so I'm not totally clueless when it comes to trucks. Ndaba's contact is an old successful man who owns a truck business, he used to be the garage supplier for diesel and oil but when his son died he just stopped trading. His children were all he had so when his heir passed on, he was only left with a daughter, he approached Ndaba with the offer to buy his company and trade for other garages because he just wanted to go start somewhere with his daughter but no one could afford to buy the whole

business so he sold everything bit by bit, even now he is still in South Africa because he is still trying to sell all his assets.

So here I am at Mohapi residence, the man welcomed me well yesterday, he even offered me a place to stay while I sort myself out. His house is a mansion, he said he will barely notice my presence in this gigantic house which is true and he is also selling the house so he said I can stay for until it's sold. We didn't get much into business when he fetched me from the taxi rank but he knows why I'm here.

A sound of a ringing telephone snaps me from my morning reverie, I wasn't even aware there is a telephone on the wall by the door. My first instinct is to ignore it but it keeps ringing so I drag my feet to it

"Hello" that's a normality for every phone call

"Hello Mr. Nkosi, my name is Sophia the house manager, Mr. Mohapi said to inform you that breakfast will be ready by nine o'clock and he would like you to join him in his study while you both discuss business" is it joburg things or am I backwards, what the hell is a house manager?

"Sure" that's all that leaves my lips because wow! I'm astonished there are so many careers in this world, where I come from if you work in someone's house you're a maid, simple as that

"Oh! One more thing sir" I keep my silence for her to continue "The in house chef would like to know if you're allergic to anything for when he prepares your breakfast" in house chef, couldn't he or she be just a chef? From house managers to in house chef I'm totally turning bougie here

"Sesi wee, I'm a zulu man, I eat just about anything well except for raw fish, my fish should be fried not live straight from the water" I hear a giggle before she thanks me and wishes me a fruitful day

Ntate Mohapi as his employees call him, he and I exchanged pleasantries when we met in the morning for a cup of..... not a cup that thing was so small it felt like a taste of whatever tea that it was as we waited for our breakfast to be set in his study, there are so many people in this house I swear this is a work place, there is a maid, there is a chef, there is that house manager, there is a laundry

lady probably called clothes manager and then I saw two guys in overalls weighing the outside benches, I wonder what they are called, garden managers.

“Your breakfast is ready sir” one of the familiar faces I have seen walking about in this giant house informs clicking her heels to the tile that rhyme well with the tips of the heel

“Thanks Sophia” oh! This is the house manager, she nods and disappear “This way Nkosi” I follow him to his study as he leads the way. His study is at the far end of the upper floor, from the opened sliding doors we can see movement around the yard from the top, air breezes nicely through the laces dancing in lazy motion from wind, the breakfast is not set on his desk but on the couch just next to the sliding doors “Musa Nkosi” he takes a sit on the one sitter couch before me while I take mine opposite to his

“Mr. Mohapi” I acknowledge back and he chuckles with a nod

“Let’s get straight to it while we eat” he opens his covered plate “What can I do for you Musa?” hewww! I deeply sigh

“I need you to sell me two oil tankers” he raises an eyebrow at me

“And what are you going to do with oil tankers” he probes devouring his plate, I take mine and put on my lap and inspect if there are not live fish here.

“Let me be specific, I need two crude tankers”

“Crude?” he probes further and I assure with a nod “Why crude” eish! I don’t like revealing my plans but I guess I have to but I have to be careful so he doesn’t take my business plan and make it his

“Let’s just say there is a certain organisation in need for fuel oil and I’m looking into supplying them” he nods

“And who is going to supply you with oil?” careful Musa, my inner voice warns me

“For now I just want to make sure I get the oils tankers and trucks, the supply side I will see a way out after solving this one, one step at the time” he smiles nodding

“I love your tenacity, this dream of yours is going to come true because you’re not afraid of obstacles, you tackle them as you go” I nod “I have four oil tankers

and two truck heads with trailers” he challenges me with a look “I can write you a figure and if you can afford it, they can all be delivered to you first thing tomorrow morning” I give him a nod as I continue eating my plate, he wipes his hand and write on the serviette, then he pushes it to me. Hmmk! This is peanuts compared to what I have but I don’t want him to know that

“Fair price Mr. Mohapi” he nods “Let me talk to my banker and lawyer and see what I can do” he smiles

“Now you’re talking Nkosi, talking like a man” it’s my turn to laugh, rich man and money, it’s never enough for them

“How long do you think your lawyer and banker can come into a conclusion?” my banker is the bag safeguarding the money and my lawyer is my instinct so.....

“Just give me a day or two” he nods once again

“Hai! When you have finalised everything on your side, you will let me know so I can also get my lawyer going with the paper work” I nod “It was a pleasure doing business with you Nkosi and like I said yesterday, you can stay here until you sort your things out, Ndaba asked me to take care of you” my rude boss does have humanity underneath that range in him “What are your plans for the day?” that’s random of him

“Nothing much, probably just getting to know the place better” he nods

“I’ll call my daughter to come take your measurements so she can design few things for you, she is a fashion designer” he chuckles

“No thank you but.....” he cuts me off

“Nkosi the business you’re going in is going to need you to dress the part for your opponents to take you seriously and if I were you, I would start looking for an assistant and drivers because if you think you’re going to drive those trucks then you’re setting yourself up for failure, rather you focus on the supplier side because that’s where all the cash comes from” so much details, can he just let me take it one step at the time

“Papaaaa” a loud voice disturbs us and he laughs hard before he yells back

“In here sweetheart, the study” in less than a minute the door flies open and in walks what I think is a model, the likes of this one used to be plastered in my

room in their bikini wear growing up “I was just talking about you sweetheart” I don’t like the look she is giving me and why hasn’t she greet me yet. She goes straight to her father and peck his cheek still looking at me

“Papa, who is this one” haibo! She asks still looking at me, Mr. Mohapi chuckle

“This is Musa Nkosi my business associate, Musa this is my daughter Dimpho, the fashion designer I was telling you about” I nod and extend my hand for a shake, just for formalities. She takes my hand and hold it longer still standing, I try to pull it back but she holds it tight

“Papa I think I found you the son in law you have been pestering me about” her father laughs hard and spanks her hand that’s holding mine tight

“I actually wanted you to take his measurements so you can design him few things, he is going into logistic power business” her father explains and she smiles

“Oh! I would be more than happy to dress you Mr. Nkosi but I don’t come cheap” I just shake my head and Mr. Mohapi laughs hard once again standing

“Nkosi, you’ll find me downstairs when she is done with you so I can show you around” I nod “No funny business with my daughter Musa” he warns and it delivers exactly a warning

Dimpho sways her tiny ass in front of me to her studio as she calls it, her forwardness remind me of Thando in fact everything about her is thando except the body of course. This one is taller, no hips no ass but bloody beautiful, in fact she is gorgeous and she looks like the type that knows how to dress her sexy physique. If she were mine, I wouldn’t allow her to dress in those short shorts with those kind of legs. She leads me in her space and I must say it looks like a real studio even though I have never been to one

I’m told to stand on some pedestal and spread my arms in the air like a manmade farmers’ fields guard toy. I don’t know if this is the zulu in me or im impatient but I don’t think taking measurements is supposed to be this sensual

“Strong hands Nkosi” she remarks slowly pulling the tape to my biceps “Hmmm!” seriously, this chick, why does it sound like that ‘hmmm’ was a moan “I wonder what they can do” she is now at my waist and staring in my

eyes with nothing but lust, I don't know why I flush because I hate girls coming on to me but I find her sexy as hell. She kneels down with the tape and start it from my ankle and slowly pull it up brushing my leg all the way up, when she reaches my crotch I hear her breath hitching and somehow my member is starting to react "OHH! Lord" she remarks looking up at me with nothing but sex in her eyes and the way she is biting that lip....a.a I can't

"I think that will do Miss Mohapi" I quickly excuse myself from her and leave panting on her pedestal, did she just cum by just touching me? Horny joburg girls!

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 10

MOTHER'S HATE

BUHLE

It's been almost a month. Three weeks to be precise of severe heartache since her brother just up and left, his departure felt like a run from life, no one understand his selfishness, already they lost another brother whose living big through their father's hard efforts but he is a mere corpse to them because they regard him as non-existence, Musa was all they had so they don't understand why he left but Buhle suspects someone and she intend on giving her a piece of her mind. From all her family her father and little zinhle are the most shattered while her mother somehow doesn't care much. She is just worried that the only income coming in will be from BabNkosi's pension so she called the girls to her bedroom to remind them that it's time they bring in some money

Buhle is the first to walk in, she weighs the ottoman without saying anything, she is the eldest daughter but not the closest to their mother unlike her fellow siblings. In few minutes Lindiwe joins with Zinhle right behind her in her school uniform, she is just doing her matric.

"Girls I won't be long, I need us to get few things straight" the atmosphere in the room is already unpleasant so Buhle has sharpened her weapons for whatever venom her mother is going to spit "Firstly" she pauses adjusting herself with the continental pillow by the headboard "Lindiwe your marrying Theo" she says it like an order and a mocking chuckle part Buhle's lips

"That's not happening, Lindi will marry Theo if she wants not because you want her to" Buhle defends

"Oh really? Tell me who is going to feed another mouth since your brother up and left" she remarks with raised eyebrow with her hands folded

"I will make a plan"

"And what plan is that since your 25 with no job no nothing, your just useless sitting at home doing nothing but eating my food"

“It’s my brother who buys everything in this house” Buhle reminds her pissed

“Well he is not here and it’s going to be my husband’s money that support this family young lady so you better shush and take my orders.....” she huffs “As I was saying Lindiwe you’re getting married to Theo, Buhle I’m giving you only this week to start putting money on the table and wena little miss my brother sends me to private schools, you need to think of something to do to get in some money in the house, no one is going to feed anyone in this house, my husband’s money is enough for me and him only” Buhle is the first to stand, she spits on the floor next to her mother’s feet and fold her arms with attitude that stinks through the room like beans fart

“What a wasted disgusting speech mother” she chuckles again with a mock “None of that shit you just puked is going to happen hell mother, I actually feel sorry for you but don’t worry your gold digging self about money, my brother promised to send money every month to take care of us so relax he will do your job for you even from afar, he will take care of your own children” She looks at Zinhle “Zizi go to school, your pocket money is in my room on the dressing table Musa left enough to last us a month don’t worry about anything okay baby” she nods “Just focus on getting that matric, go” Zihle flies out of the door running her mother’s glare

“Did I birth this children Buhle or you did” her mother asks annoyed as hell

“I might as well mother them because you totally suck at it, Lindi let’s go” she grabs her sister’s arm and force her out of the devil’s bedroom

“I want the money my son left” MaBongani screams as they walk down the corridor

“You will see it in hell where you belong” Buhle screams back and just then BabNkosi walks in the house, he had went to fetch his medication from the clinic in the morning

“Buhlebami what’s with the screams so early in the morning” he asks quickly grabbing the chair to sit, it was a long walk to the clinic, Musa usually collects his medication for him and before he left he told him not to worry Buhle will buy his medication but he didn’t want to burden his girl so he walked to the clinic

“Baba where have you been” Lindiwe asks rushing with a glass of water to her father, Buhle is fanning him

“Medication babies, I went to the clinic”

“Baba bhuti left money for me to buy you medication, you shouldn’t have walked that....” MaBongani interrupts walking in

“Then bring that money since your father already fetched his medication”

“MaBongani can you not please start with my children, not today please” she gives her daughters a diabolic look before she rubs her husband’s back

“I’m sorry baba, please go lie down while I fix you something to eat so you can take your medication” BabNkosi nods and slowly limps to his room due to the pain in his leg from the walking. Buhle grabs lindi once again out of the house before she says somethings she might not be able to take back to her mother, that woman has a way of pulling her to hell. She opens her brother’s room with a key he left her and pushes lindi in, she closes the door and stands behind staring at her troubled sister.

“Did you really have to be that rude?” Lindi dodges the main glare, she knows what her sister wants to talk about

“Starts talking Lindi, don’t tell me about that woman” she commands

“She is our mother”

“Maybe yours, not mine. Khuluma Lindiwe” (Talk) she exhales heavily first

“I don’t want to marry him” she says weighing the bed down

“Then why are you still entertaining him” buhle questions

“I’m pregnant with his child buhle what am I going to do with a whole mouth to feed with a mother like mine” the sadness in her voice is very hard to miss

“We are both going to do what we should have done a long time ago, we are both getting a job. Bhuti had been taking care of us for so long that we settled, so from today we moving cv’s around so we can be able to feed that extra mouth”

“But I thought you said bhuti left money for....” She cuts her

“Yes he did and he promised to send more every month but we still finding jobs Lindi, we are not Musa’s responsibilities to take care off” Lindiwe nods hesitantly “Good now let’s talk about the pregnancy, how far are you” she shrugs “Haibo lindiwe!” she exclaims

“I really don’t know sis, that bastard impregnated me on purpose” the is sparkle in her eyes

“What do you mean?” she probes

“He stabbed the condoms” Buhle opens her mouth in shock

“The fuck!” Lindi nods with tears flowing her cheeks “Don’t cry sis we going to burn his manipulative behind” they both chuckle in each other’s embrace

THANDO

Since Musa’s departure couple of weeks ago she is been in her cocoon, cell phone off and locking herself at home all day long, she only wake up in the morning to make fat cakes to sell to workers who pass by her home to buy, then she cleans after 09:00 when she is sure no one would come to buy and she give in to sleep after her bath, this has been her weekly routine. Somehow she feels incomplete without Dala’s presence and that kiss she doesn’t know where it came from but she wishes he was here to talk and probably drop more kisses like that.

She is woken from her day sleep by a persistent knock from the door that alarms her anger, she is really not in a good mood so she drags her feet to the door with an intend to bark whoever it is but her lips part when she opens the door, what’s he doing here, she asks herself inwardly before she steps aside to let him in

“Law” he looks dead gorgeous but she is not blown away that much anymore, she is been ignoring him for an entire three week duration and even herself she doesn’t know the main reason why

“What have I done” he questions walking in, she is much shorter bare foot so he grabs her waist and put her on top of his shoes “Love?” he questions once again with her inches from his face

“I’m sorry, I was just going through something” she sighs

“Mind sharing?”

“No Lawrence, you can’t come in my home like this” she untangle herself from his grip and steps back “Me telling you that I live with my brother only wasn’t permission for you to come and do as you please, this is still my mother’s house and you should respe....” He cuts her

“HOO! Love!” he comes closer to her once again and cup her face to look at him “What’s wrong, what have I done? I only came because your phone was off for the past weeks and I was worried about you, I didn’t mean to disrespect your home” she sighs more like calming herself down

“I’m sorry” he nods and plant a peck on her forehead

“Let’s spend the day together and just talk” he suggest

“Go wait for me in your car, but I must warn you I’m not in a good space” he chuckles and peck her lips

“Oh! MaPula you will never have a dull day with me, make it quick okay” she nods as he closes the door out. She sighs once again as she prepares herself for her unplanned date with Law.

Just as she finishes up, she is met by a not so pleasant expression from Buhle in the kitchen, her conscious already suspects what this is about, she has a habit of trying to protect them as much as she can, so she thinks she is here about Law, maybe she saw his car.

“Buhleza” she greets not maintaining eye contact but she feels her stare penetrate through her skin

“I’m not your mate Thando, you can’t keep calling me that” she rolls her eyes, this song is getting quite old and she has a handsome dread being waiting impatiently for her around the corner

“I’m going somewhere Buhle, you will lock after yourself” she is half way through the door when she calls back

“THANDO?!” her tone is firm and a layer of annoyance projected from its deliverance “SIT” she commands

“Buhle I really don’t have time yazi, I have a hunk waiting for me.....” she is cut off

“I don’t give a damn about your boyfriend Thando, sit” she sighs before pulling the chair and weighing it down as told “How do you sleep at night?”

“Huh!” she is a bit confused

“Don’t tell me you don’t know” thando frowns further “Dalas left because of you thando” there is groaning chuckle audible from thando, she is definitely not pleased to hear that

“A whole 330ml short staff me chased a grown ass puffed man like Dalas out of Sakhile” she chuckles dramatically “Be real buhle, come on man”

“Thando my brother is in love with you and he couldn’t stand seeing you happy with someone else” she is a bit taken back by this revelation, yes they kissed and every time she thinks of that kiss her legs end up tightly pressed together with her toes curling in waves of masturbation that always makes her reach her peak no matter what. She hasn’t gotten herself the courage to pick the phone and call him since his departure and he hasn’t either, so this only means that was just a moment of weakness although to her it woke things she has never felt before.

“Buhle, Dalas and I kissed it wasn’t.....” she is interjected

“You what?” oh shit! He is standing by the door ready to kill

“Law, I told you to stop coming in.....” he steps further in breathing fire

“YOU KISSED WHO AND WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN” he shouts with a trembling voice

“Haibo! Bhuti wee, we just met two minutes noodles ago, you have no right to.....” she didn’t see it coming but she felt a wave struck her out of nowhere, only when her cheek sting and she feels it with her palm it registers that he slapped her. Shock is hovering her, she is confused, mad, in disbelief.....

“Haibo! Njaa” (dog) Buhle is right next to them within a second, everything happened so fast and her mind is taking forever to process it “THANDO” Buhle

snaps her out for her moment and only then she huffs and let her chest contract and expand to take in the happenings

“Love, listen I told you I don’t do well with sharing, your mine thando you’re not supposed to go around ki.....”

“FUCK OFF” she point him the door with a firm tone

“Thando I.....”

“I SAID GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY MOTHER’S HOUSE AND DON’T COME BACK” he is still standing, in disbelief himself “I see I’m not making myself clear” she turns back on her steps, back to the bedrooms, he is left with Buhle who looks disgusted by his presence

“You’re a disgrace to men, it’s animals like you that tarnish the....” he cuts her the speech, it was a mistake he didn’t mean to slap her, he just lost it when he walked in and heard she kissed someone while he is been waiting and being ignored for damn three weeks kanti his person is busy smooching the so called ‘Dalas’, he has heard the name before but his too disoriented with what he did to connect the dots

“Who the fuck is Da.....” he is interrupted by Thando walking back in the kitchen with her hands both positioned at her back, he wants to ask but he has to apologise first “MaPula, I’m sorry my love I just.....” he doesn’t finish, she swings the belt fast and it lands at his back, he tries to shield but a pan from Buhle which he doesn’t know when she reached it land on his cheek, there is a couple of swings of belt that stings all over his body while there is also a pan hit that bangs where ever it can. He can fight them but he doesn’t want to make things worse so he runs to the exit “Lerato laka I’m sorry” he says before a pan is sent flying towards him, he dodges “I’m coming back tomorrow when you have calmed down my love, I’m really sorry” he closes the door and sigh heavily, kasi girls are worse! Who in their right mind whip their boyfriends with a belt?

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 11

MATTERS OF THE HEART

THANDO

“Are you okay?” Buhle asks when we both settle on the couch after our mini wrestling

“I’m perfect” I release a heavy mist from my chest by exhaling deep, what a day!
“He didn’t bruise me neah?” I ask turning my cheek to her and she shakes her head no laughing

“You’re not a yellow bone thando”

“Haibo! Bruising doesn’t apply to peach people only, even my skin colour also bruise, hau! White people and their nagging skin, we also bruise okay” she rolls her eyes

“I’m sorry baby girl but I want us to go back to our prior conversation, you mentioned kissing, when did that happen and...” I cut her, I’m really tired of this conversation and I would like to abandon it but I know she won’t let me be

“Well we ki....no he kissed me a day before he left and I have never heard from him since then, I wasn’t aware of how he felt about me until that day and even I myself only looked at him as a brother but ever since the kiss my feelings are conflicted, I don’t know any more if I want him to be just a brother or more”

“Thando I’m not saying be with my brother and leave your jerk boyfriend” I roll my eyes because I know she won’t let this go anytime soon “Musa loves you and he has always loved you from a distance, everyone around you two know all this, Vuyani, my father, me even Bhuti Siphon knew” I frown encouraging her to continue “Yes, Bhuti Siphon knew and we both used to laugh about it, Musa cannot keep his eyes when you’re in the room, even a fool could see that”

“You say my brothers know about this” she nods

“It was just a matter of time before he confessed his love to you, they fought a lot about it with Bhuti Siphon until he finally gave him his blessings but he asked

him to back off a bit so you can grow and experience life first” this is some messed up shit, I can’t say im totally shocked because I always knew somehow but it was one of those things I ignored and buried “What are you going to do?”

“Haibo! Nothing, what’s there to do?” and she says she is not rooting for her brother “And I wouldn’t want to compete nabo Naomi Campbell with my fat self” she frowns confused

“What do you mean?”

“You haven’t seen Dala’s timeline?” she disagrees shaking her head no, I throw her my cell phone and explain anyway even though she is going to see for herself in a minute

“There is a beautiful model always tagging him in pictures of them eating in expensive places, they look good and perfect together” I mumble the last part because it doesn’t deliver nicely through my lips, I don’t want him to look good with someone else but me, he does look good with her

“Haibo! This is my brother?” I know what she is asking, within a minute that guy transformed in to something else, sexy doesn’t even begin to cover it, he looks hot, sophisticated and well put together “Thatha my brother, and a sexy girl next to him” I give her a look and she laughs more “And you say you don’t feel anything for him”

“Don’t bore me Buhle please” she giggles

“I’m just raising your high high on purpose and its working” mxm! “Anyway, this doesn’t mean anything, you can see she keeps tagging him but he doesn’t respond to any of this, there is not even a comment from him, further more you and I both know my brother is not much into social media he probably haven’t seen any of this” it’s true, he is not a fan of social media but he is always tagged and mentioned mostly without him knowing, he is one of those that trend for no reason at all. I suspect his well-built physique scores him some points because all the pics he is always tagged on reach more than 1k like within a day, while thina abanye (some of us) who are Facebook loyal customers, we post our pictures and hardly reach 50 likes in a week. Mark needs to do something about that, it is not fair.

“Buhle you don’t get it, this is more about them together, they are always together and he looks happier with her” she laughs standing and throwing my phone on me

“I have to go but listen Thando, that girl may be a super model but his heart is here with your fat behind and 330 ml height” we both laugh “Just call him, tell him you miss him and ask him when he is coming back” I nod “Just take it from there and allow pieces to fall in to place” so much for not rooting for her brother but I’m not complaining

“Thanks sis, I will do so” she nods and wave me goodbye exiting the room but she peeps back in

“Please dump that ass hole” I smile and nod just to assure her, I haven’t thought about that one yet but I know I want to pursue the one with Dalas more because as strange as it is, my heart doesn’t dance much to Law’s kisses compared to Dalas’ one kiss that always leave me damp when I think about it. One phone call it is, so I finally pick my cell and dial him, it rings for a while and just as im about to lose faith, he answers

‘Hello’ it’s a she not him, the voice sounds angelic and educated, that ‘hello’ sound like private school ‘hello’ the one that escapes through the nostrils

‘Hi....hi’ there is something forming in my throat, and I don’t like it because my voice is slowly fading and I’m stuttering ‘Hi...hmm! Can I speak to Musa’

‘Hi, thando, your one of Musa’s sisters right’

‘Yeah’ my faint heart is already beating abnormal

‘His getting dressed’

‘Oh’ I meant to say it in my head but it came from my lips and so broken, he is getting dressed, what were they doing?

‘I can take the message for you, I’m your soon to be sister in law by the way, Dimpho’ there is a smooth laugh from her, she sounds beautiful even through a phone call. He has someone perfect ‘Or I can tell him to call you back when he is done’

'Nah, thanks' I quickly drop the call and when I blink tears fall on my thighs, what exactly am I crying for 'he has a perfect girl by his side' my subconscious reminds me and I can't help the pool of tears falling my cheeks

"And then?" Vuyani questions walking in the room staring at me, I don't know either so I burst to my room and leave him there confused, I need a moment alone okay! There is super model that took my man.

VUYANI

My sister hardly cries, she is what I call a conqueror of life so im worried about the picture I walked in on. I'm putting all my cooking skills in this pot, she deserves a break and I hope my meal will comfort her for whatever she is going through. I make a mental note to buy her pizza tomorrow when I come back from work, Dalas did ask me to spoil her and I haven't done that. He left me R5000 when he left and he promised to send me more month end, I didn't use all the money, I only bought all the house necessities and all is still comfortably eaten by my bank, I don't know why they call it savings account if they keep chowing few rands per day which results in huge unnecessary monthly charges.

"Hey" I'm startled to turn from my pot and find MaLindi standing by the door, I swallow a lump that formed out of nowhere first, she looks milky, like a smooth silky surface with no humps. Her pregnancy is already doing her wonders even though it's not visible as yet, how I wish to be Theo right now is.... "Can I come in?"

"Sorry, sure come in" I sigh and turn back to my pot "She is in her room" I tell her but I don't hear her steps fading away, instead she is piercing me with her stare from the back

"Vuyani can we please talk" talk? I have been avoiding her for a month now because I'm afraid of the talk. Deep down I know pregnancy changes everything, she is not leaving that guy anymore. I turn off the stove and turn to her still standing, she pulls a chair and weigh it down "Vuyi, first I would like to say I'm sorry, I didn't know I was pregnant when I pursued our relationship" I nod "I didn't mean to hurt you" I nod once again

"It's okay MaLindi" she sighs

“But we cannot be together anymore” a painful chuckle escapes my lips, somehow I knew she was going to leave me, I mean what can I give her while I myself have nothing, although I knew and cried about it, it still cut deep to hear her say it but I will not cry anymore. I’m never falling in love again

“It’s okay MaLindi” the same word deliver from my lips

“Vuyi please understand, my baby deserves a home with both parents and Theo may be bad but I know he will take care of his child, he has a stable job, home and.....” I interject her because she is stabbing me more, I know Theo is everything I can never be and indeed he as stable job unlike me just a chisanyama waiter with no stable home, so I understand he can give her all, she doesn’t need to twist the knife further in my already broken soul

“MaLindi, I understand” she nods blinking away her tears “Is that all?” she nods again forcing a smile “By the way congratulations on the engagement and pregnancy” I turn back my stove on and mind my pot once again, I don’t want her to see the mess she made of me, I’m five minutes to cry-land

“Thank you, I will be in thando’s room” I hear her pushing the chair standing

“Sure” when I hear my sister’s room close, only then I sigh to calm my tormented heart, the two minutes relationship I had with her will forever be my greatest

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 12

MONEY SHINES EVEN COAL

MUSA

Change, change doesn't always bear fruitful comebacks, sometimes change often brings headache and misery while at seldom times brings nothing but pure joy of heart. Sometimes I pinch myself just to remind myself that this is really me flourishing and maturing like fine wine, it's true when they say 'we are not ugly, we just not rich' I'm a living testimony that money shines even coal.

At this point in my life the only thing that still hurt is my heart, for I don't have the heart of the one I earn to love more than anything. Since I left she hasn't called and I haven't called too because I'm afraid of what I did, the forbidden kiss. I may had caught her off guard but I would give all this money just to have her.

It's been a month of nothing but pure blessings, Mr. Mohapi totally took me under his wing, I swear he is so amazing it's unbelievable. My four trucks are ready for business, all the paperwork is done and dusted curtesy of Mr. Mohapi. Now im readying myself for drivers and an assistant job interviews which will be held in Mr. Mohapi's study by him and I. My first option for truck driver's position was Vuyani but I remembered he doesn't have code 14 and it would take him a while to get one so I had to scratch him but he is definitely getting a comfortable position when the business picks up, plus he is smart so I think he can do well with an office job.

Thinking of Vuyani reminds me that I have to send money to both my homes today, both R5000 each, it's the best I can do for now. I don't want to spend this money carelessly and have Lawrence on my worry list when he comes for it before my business picks up. After making the transfer to both Buhle and Vuyani I dial my father, I still have 10 minutes to spare before the interviews and I know he is an early bird like me, he is probably awake. And indeed it rings twice before I hear his humble voice on the line

'Nkosi' I laugh at how my father respects me, it warms my heart

'Baba, how are you?' he feels happy over the phone call

'I'm fine my boy, wena unjani?' (How about you?) I hate the 'my boy' thing and he knows it so he chuckles

'I'm good tyma, how is every one?' he sighs

'Everyone is good except your mother and Buhle's constant fights for every day, I swear they are worse than tom and jerry' we both chuckle before he proceeds 'they both exhaust me' my father doesn't need stress in his life, I have to speak to the two to tone it down although I know whatever they fight about will never end, Buhle and MaBongani have always been like a cat and mouse, they repel like same charges and I think my departure probably escalated things because I have always been the middle man. It was hard to notice the drift between the two with my presence as the referee.

'I will call both of them' I know my mother is on the top list of bad mothers but I know she loves my father more than anything in this world and when she hears she is stressing her husband she is going to stop no matter what

'Tankie my boy but there is more' I keep silent for him to continue 'Lindiwe finally agreed to marry Theo, there are lobala negotiations you have to lead, when do you think you can come home? They need an answer as soon as possible' argh! This really throws my day to the dungeons. I was really happy when she hesitated about that guy, I was hoping she would say no, I don't like my sister with that snob

'What changed her mind, she didn't want to get married the last time I checked'

'I really don't know my boy but she also told me herself that she wants to get married to him' now it's my turn to heavily sigh

'Okay tyma, let me check my calendar and I will give you an answer before this day end' he laughs

'Calendar?' I laugh his surprised tone 'Musa don't be stealing for people there, make me proud'

'Not at all tyma, let me get going, I will call later'

'Sure boy' I drop the call and sigh heavily at Lindiwe's news, I really don't want her to marry that guy, he hasn't done anything bad but my blood just doesn't still at the mention of his name with my sister. I scroll down my dialler with an aim to call her for the remaining two minutes but something catches my eye. Thando called yesterday and it's not missed call it's received but how is that possible, I haven't spoken to my angel because I didn't have the guts to dial her. I try to think pacing back the time of the call yesterday and it matches the time I was with Dimpho fitting some of the suits she designed for me. It was only her and I meaning she has to be the one that probably picked my phone but why didn't she tell me. I dial Thando now walking to the interviews destination but it sends me straight to voicemail. Argh! I send an urgent message to my cerebrum to remind me to question Dimpho.

Well I think the interviews went well, I have two guys to start the job as soon as yesterday and one girl to be my assistant. Mr. Mohapi and I had to rush to go get my new wheels, I wanted a golf but Mr. Mohapi my so called mentor was against it, so I at least settled for BMW 3 series "Nkosi you have to look, dress, live and drive the part" those are his words for making me spend uselessly, I'm just glad he hasn't picked up that nothing about my money is legit, he is just happy to have someone to pass all his wisdom and experience to and I'm not complaining at all. My brain is wide hungry for whatever he feeds it. Coming back he asked his driver to drop me and said something about going for escort services, he did asked me to join him first but I refused because I have three important things to do, talk to Thando, Lindiwe and Dimpho to explain herself

DIMPHO

She is a successful educated girl, she long moved from home even before her brother passed on because she couldn't stand her father's strict nature but ever since she saw her father's new companion, she is totally moved back. She sits in the lounge specifically waiting for Musa to walk in through the doors, it's Monday night and she knows her father won't sleep home. He will probably be busy entertaining one of his 'escort services' at the sacred men's club in Sandton, she knows this because she also sometimes offer 'her services' when

she needs 'servicing' herself but her father doesn't know that she is also member

It's hard being a rich feared man's daughter, guys flock at the pictures of her sexy body in magazines but they flee at the mention of her father's name so landing a boyfriend has always been a hustle which resulted in her joining the prestige sacred men's club escort services, she enjoys their discretion more because the minute she enters that club, she is no more Dimpho, Lady Dee is the name and she gets to leave with her dignity intact as Dimpho the following day so she avoids being booked for Monday nights as much as she can so she doesn't bump in to her father.

From the sophisticated men she service almost every Friday night she swears she has never seen a creature like Musa, he is a true definition of gorgeous man, in and out. He is a humble, sexy and beautiful soul and what exaggerate him more also is his perfect well build body structure, thinking of his body damps her underwear. From the bit she saw and touched that man is gifted well and could service her just the way she likes it. He walks in looking like he just came from a photoshoot right in the middle of her reverie about him, she drools, she is proud at her work, Musa turned in to something else after allowing her to dress him

"Dimpho" he acknowledges settling by the edge of the flower pot table by the entrance

"Hey babe" he frowns, she knows how much he hates her throwing herself at him but she can't help it

"Did you perhaps pick my phone yesterday when I was fitting clothes?" she thinks a bit and remember she did

"Oh! yeah! I forgot to tell you, your sister Thando called" she kicks the fleece that was covering her beautiful legs off so he can see but his focus remain on her face and she doesn't exactly know what expression is that on his face, he looks cold

"Come here" he emphasise by waving her inches to him with his index finger, she finds all this sexy as hell as she catwalks to him still balancing by the edge of the table, she wraps her tiny hands around his waist but he holds them back

to the front “Thando is not my sister. She is my woman” he says in her ear and she flushes, a bit confused

“Huh?” she enquires

“You answered my woman’s call” he clarifies with a straight face “And it better be the last time you pick my calls, are we clear?” she nods quickly out of words, she didn’t think he is taken because he is never mentioned anyone special “That will be all, excuse me” he pushes her off his way and walks off leaving her stunned. Woman? What woman manje? All her hard work for another woman? She takes her phone and look at Thando’s number in her phone saved, she had saved the number with the aim to call thando to ask about her brother so she can learn more about her soon to be husband as she dreams but now learning she is someone standing in her way of being with the man she loves makes her think otherwise of the phone number.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 13

SOMETIMES WE NEED TO READ BETWEEN THE LINES

THANDO

I'm not one to fall apart even with death of a family member I hardly shatter but hearing that Dalas has someone tore me, she sounds perfect even the way she speaks. There is absolutely nothing I can do except to take the situation for what it is but it hurts because a part of me was starting to warm at the image of Dalas and I. And I know deep down that I feel the same way about him but I will settle for what life gives me, if we are meant to be then we are not. Although I'm still disappointed life has to go on.

Law has been blowing my phone the entire night from yesterday so I have switched it off so he takes a hint, his one of those perverts that calls with different numbers when you block them, I had already blocked three different numbers from him before I decided to switch off my phone, even to this morning it's still off and I don't intend on switching it on anytime soon. Today im too lazy, one 20l bucket of fat cakes will do, I just need to sleep the pain of my man being taken the whole day. A knock come live from the door just as I finish my task.

"Come in" I yell for my first customer to come in, she looks new, I have never seen her, even those shoes she is wearing and that bag I can tell they don't belong in Kasi, she is from the burbs but how

"Hello" she greets a bit nervously if I may say interrupting my busy mind

"Hi, you want some fat cakes" she nods "How many?" I ask already reaching for small plastics

"How much is it"

"R2.00" she frowns

"Why?" Why? Haibo! This cheese girl better not mock my hustle, this is my business and my prices are mine alone

“Because my fat cakes went to private school” I mock back and she sighs first before her lips curve in what I think is a smile

“I’m sorry, I will take 201” Now it’s my turn to frown

“Why?” She laughs

“Because I feed children from private schools” Mxm! she is throwing shade back, I don’t care as long as I get my money

“That would be 200 cash madam private school, no credit” She laughs fishing for her wallet in her bag that looks expensive “And extra 50 for the bucket” She narrows her eyes at me, she better not look at me like that, this is kasi we make money no matter what. She takes one from the bucket and devour it pulling a chair.

“Wow they are amazing” I roll my eyes “Let’s talk business Thando”

“How do you know my name?”

“The person who brought me here told me, anyway im going to need one bucket from Monday to Friday, do you think you can do that for me” My smile can warm all the lonely hearts in SA now

“As long as you pay cash sis I have no problem” we both shake on it happily

“Thank you, if I may ask who referred you to me? I need to thank them” She laughs

“Lawrence” That slaps like unexpected period pain, nxa! This bastard, if he thinks this is going to soften me he doesn’t know me as yet but I won’t say no to money never, I will take the business even if it’s a creature like him that organized it for me

I had angry customers the entire morning all mad because I couldn’t deliver their breakfast, tomorrow I will make two buckets just to be safe. Another knock interrupts me just as I throw my weight on the couch. I tread going to open because I honestly cannot deal with another angry magwinya breakfast eaters, to my surprise there is a delivery guy with a bouquet of roses and beautiful pink paper bag. For a minute I thought he is lost but after he confirms my name he is indeed in the right place

This is the first time I receive roses, I don't even know where to put them. I wish I could put them outside so all the haters could see but I settle for the living room, they smell divine. There is also a box of expensive chocolate, Ferrero Rocher as I see it on tv. The second warm smile all courtesy of my certain rude guy, maybe he's softening up a bit as I melt one chocolate smoothly in my mouth.

The last nail to the coffin is a wrapped gift of a perfect dress and heels that matches, there is a card accompanying the last gift that asks to have supper with me so he can show how sorry he is. I'm smitten I won't lie, I sit the whole day in contemplation whether I should honour the request or not. I open my phone with an aim to unblock and WhatsApp him so we can talk but there is a text that catches my eye

Hi thando, it's dimpho your brother's woman I was wondering if we could talk
I check the profile picture first and see it's the super model

Hello, is he okay the first thing I question myself is if he is well

Yes he's fine dear Fuck this bitch, dear, I hate people who call me dear with passion

How can I help you?

I have two things here, I'm indecisive about which one to wear for him. Let me send you pics Two lingerie pics pop on my screen and I cringe

Thing is we still getting to know each other, I don't know which one he will like the best, please help My reasoning has deserted me, I'm mad, confused, hell I'm five minutes to shit-land

I need to make it special for him there is red and black lingerie, hell that thing is going to show her sexy body perfectly

Don't you have a petticoat instead I affront, who in their right mind asks their boyfriends sisters an opinion on lingerie except if they are too forward, Nxa!

Make it a red petticoat with a green bra and yellow pumps, he is a classic guy who likes colours Nxa! Bloody bitch. Law calls just as I'm still stunned waiting for this girl's response, I huff and breathe heavily before picking the call

“MaPula” I keep quiet, right now im not mad at him, im mad at Dala’s woman
“Lerato laka I know I did you wrong please please give me a chance to apologize,
I swear I....”

“Okay”

“Okay?” He questions sounding a bit in disbelief

“Yes”

“Oh! Thank you my love, I will pick you up at 4 will you be ready then”

“Yes”

“Thank you baby, I love you okay” I don’t reply that, instead I drop the call and
sigh before sending Dalas a text * I hate your Skeleton*

I know if I wear to count one of the stupidest decisions I have made this one
would definitely make a bold appearance on the list. A bouquet of roses with
chocolate, dress and shoes and romantic note had me smiling and I picked the
call, agreed for a chance for him to explain and apologise. I was bored in the
house alone so I tricked myself with one of those lines that can drag you to hell
‘You only live once thando’ the guy made a mistake and he is sincerely sorry,
it’s not like you have anything to do and the one your heart earns for is taken
by a supermodel so go with what you have, my subconscious vividly added to
my bad decision. So I blame boredom, Dala’s woman and my subconscious for
this stupid decision. We are back to that giant house.

“You look beautiful” he admires pulling me to a couch, he is been admiring me
the whole way here, he sits before me and takes both my hands “Thando please
forgive me, I’m sorry my love, I didn’t mean to lose my cool like that please”
there is sparkle in his eyes and I’m slowly melting into it “It will never happen
again, it was the first and the last time no matter what my baby, I’m not a violent
guy I swear I just lost it when I heard you kissed someone” he brings both my
hands to his lips for a peck “Please say something, tell me what to do to fix what
I broke” he sincerely begs

“What if I sleep with someone, will you hit me again” he pecks both my hands
once again and shake his head

“Never, this was the first and the last time MaPula waka, tell me what to do to make this right baby”

“You can start by feeding me, im hungry” I see relief in his eyes before he bends his head to plant a peck on my lips

“Kea leboha lerato laka, I promise it will never happen again” (Thank you my love) I nod “Make yourself at home my baby, I will go see if our supper is ready” I nod once again as he kisses my lips before exiting the room

It’s just after five in the afternoon but because it’s still wintery the sky matches the set up well. A table for two is set just outside in the garden, I swear I feel so special right now, I have never had someone do this for me, I swear movie characters have nothing on me in this moment. He leads us to the intimate set up with him holding my waist closer to his

“Thank you once again for coming my baby” he says in my ear as he pulls a chair for me, I feel his jacket hang on my shoulders before he rounds to his chair opposite to me. It is a bit chilled outside hence his jacket on my shoulders

“You will never put your hand on me Lawrence”

“I swear on my parents’ graves, it will never happen again MaPula waka” he reaches for my hand on the table and caress it

“Your parents died?” he nods “I’m sorry”

“It was a long time ago and I’m fine, now I want to talk to my woman, let those who passed sleep” I nod with a smile, a guy dressed in black and white comes and put two plates before us. To be honest I don’t know what this is but it smells so nice Jesus “You said you eat everything right?” I nod again “Let’s enjoy my baby, oh! Before I forget, did my sister come to see you today?” I frown

“That’s your sister?” he nods with a smile

“Now that you say it, you kinda look alike” he laughs hard “thank you for referring her to me”

“Anything to soften my woman up” I roll my eyes and he laughs his captivating laugh “Thando”

“Hmm” I’m not even looking at him, this plate is so nice and it’s almost over I’m not even full

“Please spend the night with me” I choke on whatever was down my throat and raise my eyes to find him glaring at me, he looks dead serious

“Huh?”

“I just want to be with you, I swear we won’t do anything” Haibo! This guy! All my 21 years, well almost 22 next month I have never been one not to sleep at home

“Law I ca....” he cuts me

“Baby please, I just want to hold you to sleep, I will set the alarm to wake me up so I can take you home early in the morning for your business”

“And my brother?” he thinks a bit

“Don’t you have a friend that you can say you’re visiting” Lindiwe, my brother would never question me with lindi

“Let me see what I can do” I say reaching for my phone and texting my brother

“Please motho waka” (my person)

Vuyani, I’m not coming home tonight I’m sleeping with lindi she is not feeling well like lightning he instantly types

What’s wrong, is it the baby I roll my eyes, I forget he still has hots for her

Something like that

Please make sure she is okay babygirl I smile at the culprit before me as I also text lindi to tell her not to make an appearance outside until tomorrow morning, Law happily kicks his chair away and comes my way. He scoops me like I weigh nothing

“You just made me the happiest man motho waka” (my person) he says planting kisses all over my face

“I swear law if you drop me, I’m going to uber myself home and you will never see me again” he laughs hard walking us back to the house

“Then I will hold you tight and make sure you never fall” ncoo! I’m loving his rude romantic behind “James, you can go, we’ll have our dessert in bed” he screams and another voice replies by thanking him, I guess it’s the waiter guy

“Where are we going?” I ask as he climbs the stairs with me still in his arms

“To peel you off this dress, I want to see this behind that I have been made to squeeze like Kumkani” we both explode “I forgot to ask, did I meet the requirements?”

“Never” he explodes once more “No man can touch me like him”

“I will chop any man who dares touches what’s mine” he throws me on top of a fluffy soft bed “I love you thando” he says caging me with both his hands as looks down on me, I don’t know how to respond to that as yet instead I pull him closer to my face for a kiss. I start leading the kiss by pecking him but he overtakes the lead by cupping my face taking the pleasure in sweeping all my kissing skills off me, he breaks the kiss when we both almost out of breath “I better stop before something denies me to keep my promises” we both giggle as he points his bulge “Let me go fix us our dessert, choose something we can watch” he switches on the huge tv on the wall and throws me the remotes as he exit the room, I’m not even a movie person I don’t know what to choose. His phone ring next to me on the bed and when my eyes catch the name on the screen, my heart stops beating for a moment ‘WIFEY’ calling. This guy better not start with me, I don’t do married man, never ever and never will.

He walks back in few minutes humming a song with two bowls placed on a tray, he looks delighted if only he could raise his head to the storm before him

“I hope you didn’t choose anything roma.....” He stops when his face meets mine to find me in shit-land “What’s wrong?” he puts the tray on the pedestal and walk to me with his phone in my hand

“Are you married?” he clears his throat with a frown and gulp something as his Adam’s apple moves

“WHAT? NO”

“NO, NO LAWRENCE, WIFEY WAS CALLING FIVE MINUTES AGO” I shout but he laughs hard touching his knees

“Wifey is my sister MaPula jeez! Let me call her and I will put her on speaker” he says after containing his disgusting laugh, I didn’t find that one charming because I’m mad. I hand him the phone and he dials, it rings twice before a voice comes through

'Ngwaneso' (My sibling) I'm not very good with sotho but I can hear it here and there

'Thando a re o no letsitse metsotsong e mehlano e fetileng, ko beile ho moropa hee ngwaneso o seka nsenyetsa' (Thando say you called five minutes ago, you're on speaker my sister please cover for me) why don't they speak English, sotho sometimes murder me. From what he just said I only heard that he confirms that she called five minutes ago, the rest is foreign to me

'Thando I'm the only wife you share with him, relax I will always leave a piece for you' she laughs and I join her 'I hope I will get my fat cakes in the morning'

'You'll get them'

'Be safe babies, don't do anything I wouldn't do, law neke batla ho hopotsa our appointment tomorrow' (I wanted to remind you of our appointment tomorrow)

'Sure I won't forget, bye' he drops the call and look at me

"You need to trust me" I nod with an embarrassed smile

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 14

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

THANDO

Sweet gentle lips paces across my face leaving wet trace after effects all over my facial skin, I'm a deep sleeper by nature, I feel him gently trying to wake my sleep but I burrow my face into the pillow, I groan in annoyance because I'm not a morning person

"MaPula wake up" his voice is soft, ready to kick start the day while mine is still dead in deep sleep

"Nooo" I groan not wanting to wake up

"Come on babe, I have to drive you" he plants wet kisses all over my cheeks once again, I reluctantly open my sleepy eyes to find him amused "Damn my baby, you can sleep" he gazes down at me once more and plant another peck on my cheek, he smell fine, fresh from his morning shower, there is a towel only wrapped around his waist evident that he just came out of the shower "Okay out, you have fifteen minutes to get ready" he takes off the covers and I immediately curl, he bust in to fits of laughter "I'm going to get a bucket full of cold water if you don't wake up" he threatens and that works

I slowly climb down the bed yawning and stretching my arms, the shirt he borrowed me rise up beneath my behind and he watches with lust biting his lower lip, I immediately drop my arms when my eyes lands on his full of lust

"Morning" my horrible morning voice finally escape my throat, he chuckles sitting on the bed and reaching for his phone

"Morning MaPula waka, you're a terrible sleeper" I roll my eyes and he smirks "Please take your sexy ass off my face before you force me into another morning cold shower" my eyes involuntarily travel to his waits seated, there is a fist forming there and I grin satisfied at the effect I have on him. Last night was very difficult for him, his member didn't want to keep the promise he made but he tried his best shame, I felt it poke my behind the whole night and the movie I

choose didn't help the situation either but nonetheless I enjoyed torturing him like that, it's always satisfying knowing I turn my man on without doing anything.

"Should I use your things, I didn't bring anything" he smirks

"You can even wear my underwear MaPula I don't care" I shake my head and walk to the bathroom but he calls out my name bringing me into a halt "Thando?!" I turn back to him confused of the expression on his face, there is a silly smile I can't describe plastered over his face "When are we going to fuck?" I flush with my eyes popping "I can't be taking cold showers when I have a fully curvylicious woman by my side, I'm too old for that shit" my lips part gape in shock, his grin tells me that he finds what he just said amusing, he is not even trying to be romantic about it, like how normal guys would say 'Baby when are we going to make love' the normal way, not when are we going to fuck like animals. My cerebrum refuses to have a comeback for his indecent ask, instead I further my steps to the bathroom and hear him explode once more as a shut the door, so arrogant!

Twenty minutes later I feel fresh as I walk out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel, his on a call as I walk out but he immediately drops it and turn to me, he is still not dressed also wrapped in a towel. I don't like the twinkle in his eyes, it's hungry and demanding. I sway to the top of the bed to take the lotion he was using, I want to take it and disappear with it back to the bathroom but I feel his eyes on me, he intently stare at me wanting me to lotion in front of him. I have never been one to be shy about my body but this is my first rich boyfriend, he intimidate the cockiness out of me, as if residing in my head he strides towards me

"Let me help you with that" he takes the lotion out of my hands before words can form in my head, his eyes deeply stare into mine as he squashes more than enough lotion in his hand, he throws the lotion container back on the bed and his free hand land on the knot of my towel. In less than a second the towel drop to the floor leaving my nakedness exposed, his adam's apple moves as he swallow whatever rubbing lotion on both his palms as he stares my naked "You have a beautiful body MaPula" his voice comes out soft in a whisper, his slowly inheriting Chinese genes as his eyes loosens shape to smaller size

Both his moist palms full of lotion land on my boobies, he gently squeezes them teasing my nipples and warmth build around my body. His one slippery hand moves to the back of my waist as one teases my nipple and pulls me closer to him, he leaves my nipple and curve my chin up for my face to meet his full of lust, he bites my lower lip first staring into my eyes before he devours my mouth in a demanding kiss with his slippery hands all over my body waking all the freaks in me to show

I allow him to push me further to the bed and when he pushes me to the pillow with my back, my legs wrap around his waist throwing my neck to the side to give him more space to devour my neck, he gets the message and do as demanded and I moan in satisfaction. I don't know when his towel dropped but only now I feel his slimy liquid on my thighs it registers that he is naked.

"Law condom" I cannot even recognise my voice the way I'm so horny

"Okay baby" he assures it with a nod and I close my eyes taking in the pleasure, his dreads nicely sweep my neck as he goes to take my nipple in his mouth, I have only been with one guy in my life and I swear Law takes the cup, his excellent. I feel his hardness wetly slipper around my folds and I open my legs wider, I have never felt this niceness

"Babe condo...aah" I remind but I don't finish due to the delicious round movement in my cookie his making as he plays his head around my clit in a circling motion

"Yes my baby" he whispers in my ear biting it while at it, that sends all my reasoning out of the door, he takes both my butt cheeks in his hands and spread them further before I feel him pushing his way in, it's so nice I want to stop him but gosh!

"Babeeee" I moan

"I'm clean I promise my love, will pass by the chemist" with that I close my eyes and take all the pleasure in, he gently eases into me breathing in my ear, it stings a bit but it's also nice. He slowly but nicely thrusts biting my ear and the itching sensation from the ear and the twinkling one from my core won't make me last. The way he is holding me tight I feel him too that he is not far so I let go and let my orgasm shatter, he grips my butt harder and stroke deeply twice before he jumps and pulls out smearing his cum on my stomach

“Damn it woman!” he buries his head on my shoulder panting “Fuck you Thando, you hear that, fuck you” we both giggle “Nxa! This is what happens when you make your man wait too long, now I have turned to a two minutes guy” we both giggle further as he retires next to me still trying to catch his breath

LINDIWE

My life is like sad movie I didn't audition for, bitter sweet is the exact taste to describe it. Some days are as bitter as lemon juice while some are so sweet honey wouldn't qualify the criteria of their sweetness. One of the sweetness of my life is the hardening of my bump, it's not out there yet but touching it every day and feeling it swell brings joy to my life but knowing my father will be there to hold his first grandchild warms my life and makes all the sacrifices I made worth it and if I had to do it all over again I would sacrifice the love of my life once more

Today is my first day visiting the doctor, a part of me is excited but minor part is a bit troubled and I don't know the reason for the sourness of my mood, at first I thought the fact that I'm going for my first visit with my soon to be mother in law Mrs. Medupe was the reason for my heaviness but no it's not it. I feel heavy, like something is pressing me to the ground.

“Lindiwe, Mme Medupe is here” my mother screams bringing me back to reality, she is so excited one would swear she is the one pregnant and getting married but I don't blame her, she is getting exactly what she wanted, money.

“I'm almost done Maa” Buhle budes in just as I'm getting dressed, I know the look screening her face and I'm not in the mood for her lectures. She weighs the chair and stares at me without saying anything but I know she is sharpening her weapon, her tongue is her strongest weapon

“Lindi you really are doing this” I don't know if that is an ask or what but I know she is not done “Lindi please don't marry that bastard sis, will figure something out please mtase” she pleads, she is been pleading with me since I told her I changed my mind and she doesn't understand I'm not going to change my mind again no matter what

“I have to go Buhle” she jumps to the door and block my way. Sigh! Sisters we keep!

“You’re not going anywhere until you tell me why you’re marrying that moron, you don’t even love him for fuck sakes” she yells

“Buhle please”

“Fotsek Lindiwe, I will not stand and watch you settle for shit, you’re not marrying that fool, not while I’m still.....” my mother interjects pushing the door

“BUHLE, FOTSEK” she pushes the door hard almost causing Buhle to stumble to the floor but I catch her before she hits the floor “GET A LIFE AND LEAVE LINDIWE’S LIFE ALONE” she shouts

“What did you do to her?” Buhle questions Maa right on her face “What did you do Maa?” she shouts

“Nothing, get out of here” My mother pushes her out and locks the door, she sighs first straightening her dress and strides towards me “You better not let her change your mind, we both know what will happen to daddy dearest if you do right?” she whispers in my ear and I nod with tears freely pathing my cheeks “Good, now pull yourself together we still have a long way to go” she turns leaving me wiping the pain away. I hope one day everyone will understand why I did what I did but most importantly I hope Vuyani forgives me one day for breaking his heart like that, I had to do it, I had to stab his heart for him to back off or else my father was going to be collateral damage

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 15

HOME

MUSA

It's been a another month of bliss of blessings in my life, two months in the city of gold im heading my small business straight to the mountains of everlasting wealth, in two months I have four trucks on the road delivering fuel oil, petrol and paraffin to local garages. I haven't made much but I'm working hard on securing the bag so I'm heading home to solve few family matters and hopefully secure the biggest bag that can take my business in the exact direct of the mountain of wealth I want it to head.

HOME, they say there is no place like home and indeed they are correct, I thought I was content but the feeling I felt when my little sister put her books aside on the stoep and ran to me was priceless, no amount of money could amount to the feeling I felt, I felt complete and no one can take that moment from me. I swear she has grown so much in two months I haven't been home. She throws herself on me wrapping her skinny legs around my waist, I don't know if it's me sweating or something but I feel wet on my shoulder where she buried her face

"Zizi what's wrong" I take her face off my shoulder and find her sniffing, she is crying "Zizi" she wails causing my father to walk out of the house, he looks surprised. I didn't tell him I'm coming, after what Dimpho did I needed to see thando face to face and tell her how I feel, I just couldn't come sooner because I was still trying to see the business through but I have made up my mind, I love this girl, she constantly occupies my mind even from afar and the fact that she is been ignoring me for two months for whatever reason confirms that she feels the same way too, I remember a text she sent me a month ago about hating my skeleton, I wish she picked my phone then when I called to acquire about the skeleton she is talking about but she is been ignoring me since then. Coming home is to get my girl, talk with Lindiwe, this thing of her getting married is not sitting well with me and securing the last bag that might make me be.

“Nkosi” my father throws himself on us with a hug too as zizi continues to cry on my shoulder, I should leave more often if people miss me like this “Zinhle stop crying my baby, I told you he will come back” he brushes zizi’s back

“I...I...thought he...won’t come back...like...bhuti....bongani” ahhh! My little sister, she says between the sobs and hiccups and that shatters my heart, I live for this people, I wouldn’t abandon them no matter what

“I would never leave you my baby” I assure wiping her tears “now go take the plastics off the car, I bought you vans and jeans” she lights up and instantly run to the car, she stops meet way and calls me

“Bhuti, whose car is this?”

“Mine” she screams loudly and my mother comes out of the house, my father is looking at me with a frown I can’t explain next to me. We walk to the house where we meet my mother by the door, she looks pleased to see me because there is a curve of what I think is a smile on her face

“MaBongani” I greet but she engulfs me in a hug, my father and I both share looks behind her as she hugs me because we are both taken by her reaction, I’m that child that never bring happiness to my mother no matter what but today looks like tables have turned

“Oh! My boy you should have told me your coming I could’ve cleaned your room” I laugh nervously because I honestly don’t know how to take this reaction in

“Its fine Maa, I’m sure it’s not that bad” she smiles scanning me

“Your glowing, did you finally find another slay queen” my father burst into a fits of laughter, I will never hear the end of Sindi in this house, everyone reminds me about her every chance they get “Or better yet, you finally told thando how you feel” my father dies further more in laughter

“Mama please come help me, this plastics are too heavy” Zinhle screams saving me from my mother, only then she leaves me

I made sure to arrive early in the morning as I have lot of things to do, I’m only sparing couple of days I can’t be away as my business is still in the development

stage. My father and I spent the whole afternoon discussing the way forward with the whole lobola negotiations if they happen because I still have to sit Lindiwe down before I give my father the go ahead to allow our guests to come, speak of the devil walks in just as we discussing her. Her eyes pop like strangled frog when she sees me, she attempts to fly out but I seize her with a stern voice

“LINDIWE” she digs the poor floor with her glare like it did her wrong, this girl has been ignoring my calls and blue ticking me like I’m a boyfriend that wants to get back together with her “In my room” I order her and she immediately walks out

“Don’t be too hard on her, remember she is pregnant” my father is too soft with these girls, I have to be the judge Judy of the family mostly because I know in his eyes his girls will never do wrong before him. I find her twisting her knuckles looking down, she is five minutes to teary land, I sigh to calm myself down and unbutton my jacket sitting next to her on the bed, I have to calm down so I don’t scare her so she tells me what is going on

“My baby” my voice comes out soft, pleading

“Hmm” she says still burying her look on the floor

“Talk to me, what is going on” I pull her head on my shoulder while I wrap my arm around hers

“Nothing is going on Bhuti wami, I love him” (my brother)

“My baby you know you can tell me anything, if you’re worried about the baby then you have nothing to worry about, I will make sure he or she is well taken care of” she sighs heavily against my shoulder

“It’s nothing like that bhuti wami, I love Theo please allow him to marry me”

“Lindiwe” I plead trying to look in her face but she looks away

“Please Bhuti” sigh!

“There is nothing you can do, I already tried” Buhle says standing by the door, when did she get here “Bhuti” she throws herself at me squashing me with a hug, this one comes right after me and we have that sibling thing, we fight a lot but I wouldn’t change her for anything in this world, I’m taken back to hear her respecting me, to her I’m Musa, simple as that

“My baby” I respond brushing her back

“I’m not your baby, I’m a grown ass woman” here we go again, I’m four years older than her by the way but the way she back chats me I swear she thinks I’m older by couple of months “Now I see why models throw themselves at you and tag you all over social media, your fine brother” she remarks scanning me from head to toe, Lindi giggle next to me

“I know right, if I saw him somewhere at the mall I wouldn’t have recognised him” mxm stupid girls

“What tagging and social media your talking about” Buhle smirks

“To think Thando was worked up for nothing, but don’t worry I covered for you, check your Facebook you’ll know what I’m talking about”

“I’ll check it later, Lindi we were talking” I turn back to her next to me

“Please let this go, I love Theo and I’m marrying him Bhuti” Buhle shrugs looking at her and for once I agree with her, this is so not Lindiwe

“Okay I’ll let the negotiations go ahead if it’s what you want” she nods with a smile “And wena, sit down” I say to Buhle who rolls her eyes before pulling a chair to sit “Why are you and MaBongani always fighting, your raising Nkosi’s high blood with all the screaming and yelling”

“That woman knows how to press my wrong buttons” she says like she is not talking about the woman that birthed her

“That woman is your mother”

“Maybe yours, not mine”

“BUHLEBAMI” she rolls her eyes again before she exhales heavily

“Okay I’m sorry Musa I will tone it down”

“Thank you, I know Maa can get under our skin but we don’t scream and yell in front of Baba we all know his condition” they both agree in agreement “Good, I’m going to transfer R3000 in both your accounts to spoil yourselves, I didn’t buy you anything”

“HAAA!” lindi exclaims shocked “but you bought Zinhle two pairs of vans and jeans”

“She is a kid and she asked me”

“She is 18”

“She is my kid lindiwe” she rolls her eyes before she mumbles something walking out, Buhle chuckles

“Her hormones are starting to play don’t worry about her” I nod

“How has everything been” she sighs

“Good but I think mom’s got something on her, she doesn’t love the guy bhuti”

“I know and I wish I can do something about it, if only I knew” she nods depressed as me “Continue looking out for them while I hustle for us okay” she nods once again “And if all goes well, next year your all going to school” she frowns

“I’m 25 Musa” she says with a voice lacking excitement

“So”

“I’m too old for that shit”

“I don’t care Buhle, you’re going whether you like it or not” she roughly pushes the poor chair standing

“I will go if you also go” she says before she bust out of the door and I know she means it, she will not go if I don’t, she tends to think we are mates.

Everyone looks delighted as we eat dinner but my mind is no longer here, I want to see Thando this instant, she is the only hurdle left to soothe. I drive the car inside the yard when it gets a bit late after dinner, I announce that I will be sleeping at Dala’s place tonight and no one minds me, they are all occupied with date my family, I know it’s the only show that brings my family together because we always joke about entering Buhle. I love that she is not the dating type but sometimes she worries me, Dalas once mentioned suspecting she is lesbian or she is the type saving herself for ‘the one’ I don’t know.

Guilt hovers me when I walk through the gates remembering I didn’t buy anything for my friend’s siblings, I console myself with the idea that I will take her shopping myself and give Vuyani some cash. I hate the darkness blanketing

the yard because it tells me no one is home, where in the hell would Thando be this late, Vuyani I know he is probably at chisanyama because he mostly knocks off late.

I dial Thando after switching all the lights on in the house but it rings unanswered, this is so unlike her. I hear the door opening just as I'm still wondering

"The prodigal sister returns" Vuyani's voice echoes the house in a pissed tone "At least you still remember you have....." his mouth part agape when his eyes meet mine settling in the living room "Grootman?!" he calls out in disbelief

"Vuyani" I stand to fist bump him but he stands rooted like he saw a ghost, what's wrong with this boy "VUYI?!" I call out louder and he snaps and bumps me

"My bad, harde grootman, geez! You changed" he exclaims "You look good" I laugh his surprised tone "Damn!" he is in disbelief

"Unjani?" (How are you?) I question sitting back down, he takes a sit opposite mine

"I'm fine grootman, except your girl giving me problems lately" I frown

"Where is she by the way?"

"Thando doesn't live here anymore" he shakes his head

"WHAT?"

"A month ago she lied about spending the night with Lindi and I allowed it thinking she is indeed with her but I later found out she was lying, she is leaving with that boyfriend of hers, she left me, her home, her business, it's like she just decided to leave everything behind" the fuck!

"VUYANI" I'm on my feet shouting at the wrong man "WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME ALL THIS, WE TALK EVERYDAY FOR GODSAKES"

"Dalas I didn't want to worry you, you work hard for two families and I thought it was just a phase she will pass but I only realised its serious when I saw most of her clothes missing from her closet" Haibo!

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 16

LOVE LOVES WHEN IT'S READY TO LOVE

MUSA

As my burdened heavy mind meet the pillow sleep escapes my sleeping cells, if anything they are more awake as daylight, the only notion roaming my mind is Thando's safety, how could she do this? I'm so disappointed I want to slap the sense back in her. I'm not the type to believe in ancestors but because im in my best friend's room and he believed so much in ancestors, I recite a cry of help to him if his one. I always hoped he didn't die but turned out to be a guardian angel or ancestor making all things possible for me. I stare into the darkness because I shut down all the lights in his room and communicate just the way he used to

"Gatsheni, Ndlovu, Boya benyathi, obusonga busombuluka..... (Clan names), I come to you my friend with a heavy hard, I need you to help me through this one my brother. Thando has left home and I want her home, I want her home with me where she belongs please bring my girl back to me, bring my wife back to me Dalas that's all I ask and I will forgive you for leaving me with so much burden....."

~ "You really do love her don't you" Sipho snaps me back to him as we sit under the tree watching little thando do the laundry

"I know you don't want to hear it but I do, I'm sorry Dalas but I can't anymore" he laughs hard

"You broke bro's code" he says with a smile

"I'm sorry" that's all I can afford to say

"When she turns twenty one you can approach her" I turn to look at him in the face and find him smiling "but if she denies you promise not to be a bitch about it" I nod repeatedly "And please allow her to live first and enjoy life because I can see you going to turn my sister in to a Nkosi wife as soon as she agrees you" my smile at this moment reach straight to my heart

“Thank you Ndlovu” he taps my shoulder laughing

“Please help her with that blanket, it looks heavy” I want to hesitate but because this man just gave me blessings to pursue her sister I go to help her. She is not looking at me, instead she is looking forward trying to hang a heavy wet blanket, I hold the other edge and throw it on the line, a huge hole stain of blood display evident right at the centre of the blanket

“Thando you didn’t wash the blanket, whose blood is this” I shout. She turn to look at me and only when my eyes meet her face I find her eyes crying blood “THANDO?!” I scream trying to touch her but she keeps fading, something is engulfing her away from me as I keep reaching for her. I run back to Siphos under the tree but I find that man where Siphos was seated, he repeats what he once said to me in his death bed, the scene replays once again “My....my....daugh...plea....find her” with that the man’s neck falls to the side~

Fuck! I instantly snap out of my terror dream sweating and panting, what kind of dream is that? I reach for my cell and inspect time, it reports to be 04:30 am in the morning, when did I sleep? I only remember bashing to Dalas if he was listening, I don’t remember falling asleep. I sigh sitting up straight and think of the dream once again, that man whose money I’m spending once asked me to look for his daughter and I didn’t but I’m busy making a successful living over his money not knowing if his daughter is taken care of, and Thando? What did that dream mean about her? Why was she crying blood? And hanging a heavy blanket with a huge blood stain.

After my mini moment to the bathroom I made a decision to visit my friend’s grave hoping he would clarify the terrible dream but nothing, I’m still as heavy as I was in the morning. I have a meeting with our ward councillor this morning to discuss business but the way I’m so heavy I don’t think I will make it. Vuyani is already left for work when I return from the graves, I’m leaving with him, he is quitting that crap job I’m just worried about Thando. One way or the other I’m getting her back home but I’m worried who she is going to stay with when I leave with Vuyani

When I get home I’m welcomed with a warm breakfast from my mother, another shocking event in my life. After my wash up we have a brief chat with my father who updates me that we should expect the Medupes from tomorrow and I just nod in hurry, my mind is not here, I have to get my girl. I drive out of

the yard like something is chasing me, part of me is telling me that Thando is not okay hence the disturbing dream. I don't know where I'm going but I know Law resides in Hillside so I text him already on the way

I need your address, we need to speak now it's urgent it doesn't take long for a reply notification to ring

* 442 Crystal Street
Lakeview
Hillside

I'm not home but I will be there in few, you will find my girlfriend, tell the guards at the entrance you visiting me they will not give you a hustle to pass through*

I sigh throwing the cell in the dashboard, I don't have beef with the guy considering his been so cool about the money but now I have a feeling lines are going to be crossed. I reach under my sit and check if the gun Mr. Mohapi made me own is still there, I take the gun and tuck it on my waist just in case things get out of control, I have never used a gun to shoot a person before but with the few lessons I have I'm ready to shoot for Thando if need be

Like he said the guards just smiled and let me in without even searching me or the vehicle mind you the who is who of Standerton lives here, this should be the safest place but nah. His house is as enormous as his cars, I park my car behind the Jeep grand cherokee and step out of the car. One knock at the door and I let myself in

"THANDO?!" I shout loud and stern enough once, I'm not going to repeat myself, what I'm doing next is kicking every room open in search for her

"Yoh! babe what's with the noi...." her eyes leaves sockets when she set them on me, she tightens whatever that thing she is wearing. What's wrong with this girl?

"Get your shit let's go" she remains rooted glaring at me "THANDO" I snap

"I....I....was just, just visiting" she explains shaking

"I DON'T GIVE A FUCK, GET YOUR SHIT LETS GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE"
She nods rapidly and run up the stairs, I don't believe she left everything behind

to sit naked sipping champagnes the whole day waiting for her boyfriend, she was the one person I know didn't want to be kept with everything in her, Thando is the girl to work for her money not this.....she comes back quickly with her bag "COULDN'T YOU FUCKEN PUT ON SOMETHING, HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO THINK WITH YOU NAKED"

"I'm not naked" she defends

"THANDO?!" I warn, she sighs and take a coat from her bag

"It's too hot for a coat by the way but because I know you don't know lingerie, your used to red petticoat I will cover my sexy lingerie so you don't faint" she affronts with a pissed tone fastening the coat around her waist, to be honest I don't even know what petticoat she is talking about and I don't care for now, I just want her home "Let's go" she announces sulking already heading for the door

"No, we are waiting for your boyfriend I need him to get few things straight" she pops her eyes and march back to me

"Dalas please no, I know I was wrong but please Dalas...." She begs brushing my chest and for a minute it's working until Law walks in

"I knew I have heard this name before, so you are Dalas" Law say behind us with suspicion as if thinking "What's with the bag babe, how did I say I want to find you" Law say to Thando holding out his hand for her but she doesn't take it, instead she looks anywhere but him

"Thando" I give her my hand and she takes it "Lawrence, you asked if I had a problem with you dating Thando and I said no because I had no problem with you dating her but taking her and turning her into a wife I have a problem with that one, I don't care how you know me but you DO NOT DISRESPECT ME LIKE THAT" he chuckles in disbelief

"SHE IS MINE AND I CAN DO AS I PLEASE WITH HER" he barks but I smirk

"REALLY? WHY DON'T WE LET HER CHOOSE WHERE SHE BELONGS" I let Thando's hand go but she takes my hand once again "I GUESS YOU HAVE YOUR ANSWER, STAY THE FUCK AWAY FROM HER" I roar pulling my girl out of the house

"MUSA YOU'RE GOING TO REGRET TAKING WHAT'S MINE" he threatens

“Babe we were wrong, we shou.....” Thando tries to intervene but I cut her

“COME FOR ME WITH ALL YOU GOT LAWRENCE, I’LL BE WAITING” I close the door pulling thando with me

She is looking anywhere but me as I drive us back home, I don’t believe she is been cohabiting for a whole month, a whole damn 4 weeks living with a man. If she was still a child I was going to spank this big ass that think it’s grown.

“I’m sorry dalas” she says softly looking at me with sparkling eyes, she better not cry I haven’t done anything to punish her. I keep my silence just to calm myself because I have a feeling I’m going to spit venom “You look nice” she says out of nowhere, I think she is trying to digest the huge awkwardness in the car

“Are you a whore now thando” she frowns blinking her tears and they fall on her cheeks, where does she get this sudden tears because last time I checked she never cries

“I made a mistake and I’m sorry but please don’t insult me while you have your skinny legs whoring with you in joburg” the attitude never dies “NXA!” she says folding her arms and looking out of the window, I inwardly chuckle before bringing the car to a halt at the side of the road

“Out” I order stepping down and she bangs my door doing the same, she stands right by the door with an attitude that stings even from a distance “Explain” I say right before her face, she tries to look away but I bring her right up to my face, she huffs with a pinched nose

“It’s not cohabiting okay, I was just visiting my boyfriend”

“For a whole month thando” she rolls her eyes

“It’s not like that, jeez! Who said I visited the whole month, okay maybe I’m just spending too much time with him but it’s not cohabiting I swear” she defends

“Listen and listen carefully madam, I don’t give a fuck what you call it but you are not doing it again, are we clear?” she nods “I don’t ever want to hear you visiting that guy thando” she pops her eyes

“Haibo! His my boyfriend how am supposed to see him” is she deaf?

“Let me give it to you straight, your breaking up with him” her mouth part agape in shock

“Dalas no not break up, okay I’m sorry we were disrespectful but I love the guy, he makes me happy please don’t don’t make things difficult for us” that stabs right to the core “Give him a chance, he is a nice guy and he makes me happy” I swallow the lump forming on my throat, I’m too late, she is in love

“He can have you, but no sleeping out thando, you date like normal kids not whores, you weren’t raised a whore and you will not start acting like a whore now” she nods and throws herself in my embrace

“Thank you Dalas I’m sorry I disappointed you, it won’t happen again” I hug her tighter and kiss her cheeks

“It’s okay babygirl as long as he makes you happy” she beams with joy and that’s all there is for me, sometimes you have to love people enough to let them be with those that makes them feel content, love is indescribable but love should not be forced, love loves when it’s ready to love.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 17

ANOTHER WOMAN'S MAN

THANDO

I'm a ball of emotions, I'm happy in love, scared of the unknown and disappointed in my peak of delight. Love sometimes can be so good it makes you do things you never thought you would do, love can drug you with desire so bad you end up falling deeper not giving a damn of who stand beside you, at that moment the only thing that matters is what you have with your partner and that is me and Law. We didn't have an epic start but boy am I happy, the guy knows how to love me so bad and I'm happily taking in all the loving his giving, with him it's always the honeymoon phase, he was right to say I will never have a dull moment with him.

Yesterday after Dalas dropped me home, we have been texting and ironing things out and he understand that I had to walk out with Dalas because his my brother before everything else but his sulky of how things rolled out, he wants to see me so I can 'calm him down' but I will respect Dalas until he leaves. I will only see him when Dalas rides back to Joburg. Right now I'm waiting on Vuyani, he left with Dalas earlier in the morning saying they have some meeting to attend, he is been running from me as if we live in a big house kanti we just live in a tin, he betrayed me while I kept his secret with Lee.

I hear the car pulling and I run to the window, just to stare. I have a boyfriend but that doesn't mean my eyes can't see good things out there, Law is hot and flames but damn! Dalas, fuck it's like in blink of an eye he brewed, brewed like fine beer. The way he walks, the way he talks, the way he do just about anything it's so captivating and so hypnotizing to watch. I swear his like a drug, savannah to be precise, that thing is addictive, once you go savannah you never go back

"Thando" he acknowledges going to the fridge while I keep busy with the cupboards doing only god knows what, I just didn't want them to see I was peeping throw the curtains staring at him. My treacherous brother disappears to the room without saying anything, I thought he was hiding from me but now

I realise he is actually mad. I don't know why people fail to see that I'm in love and be happy for me.

"Dalas" I don't want to look at him because seeing the disappointment I instilled in his eyes stabs me back with the same effort, although im not looking at him but I feel his burning stare penetrate my skin

"Uyenzani tomorrow, I want us to go shopping" (What are you doing....) okay that turns me to him like lightning and he laughs

"Nothing, I will be available all day long" he nods with a smile

"Be ready ke ekseni neno" (In the morning neno) he is out of the door before I call out my appropriate insults for that, he laughs closing the door out and I sigh in relief that we are okay. As much as I hate to admit I know I have feeling for Dalas but I'm scared to pursue anything with him, what if we don't work out? He and Vuyani are all I have in this world and if things don't work out between us and I end up not having him at all or.....

"I have never been so disappointed in you in my life, I'm sure my brother is looking at you in his resting placing thinking what a whore he raised" Vuyani interjects my thoughts with words that cut deep in my soul, that hit straight to my heart and I can't help the glitter forming in my eyes "When your precious boyfriend starts showing you flames please don't come running to us, deal with your shit alone as you're doing now" with that he walks out of the door and I blink my tears down my cheeks, damn those words hurt but why am I crying?

Lindi walks in on me sniffing my tears away, she frowns sitting next to me and rub my back without saying anything, she is the only person who understands that I'm in love

"Why are you crying? You never cry" she questions just as I contain my waterfalls

"Everyone is mad at me" she laughs

"They need to take chill pills, they don't understand you're a rich man's girlfriend" we both giggle "They are jealous" she adds

"How are you?" I ask brushing her tummy, perhaps turning the spotlight to her might change my sorrow mood, she sighs

“I’m fine, although I went yet to another doctor’s appointment with my soon to be mother in law without my fiancé” and here I was thinking my life is at the lowest level of hierarchy there ever was

“Why isn’t Theo coming with you?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care, I just want this damn wedding over and done with” she says with so much hate like this is not her life we are talking about. This is my time to be a friend, we ignore things like this and then tomorrow we wake up to news that our friends committed suicide. Because I know she is as stubborn as me, I know how to deal with my kind

“Let’s go to my room babe, I don’t want Vuyani walking in on us, I kinda hate him at the moment” she laughs taking my hand as I drag her to my room. As soon as we both shut the door I lock it and throw the key outside the window, I know Vuyani will only be back later, it’s Friday and shisanyama tend to be so busy until wee hours of the morning

“Thando, uyahlanya? What are you doing?” (Are you crazy) she asks with popped eyes

“Doing what I should have done a long time ago, we are not going anywhere until you tell me why you are marrying that imbecile” she sits the bed and bury her face with her hands, I go and sit down the bed besides her and listen

“Promise you will not tell anyone first” a.a I’m the one holding the negotiations here

“I can’t make pro....” She cuts me

“Well I’m not telling you shit then” mxm! Well because my second name is Nondaba I make a promise

“Okay I won’t tell a soul” she nods with a sigh

“My mother was killing my father for insurance money” I think I didn’t catch that one correctly so I question again for her to clarify

“What?”

“My father doesn’t suffer from any chronic illness, my mother has been putting slow poison in my father’s tea because she wants him to die so she can claim with Sakhile burial society which is due to pay her 75 000 if my father dies, I

walked in on her and Theo's mother talking about raising the dosage so my father can die sooner. Apparently if my mother claims for my father Mrs. Medupe being the burial society owner also gets huge amount of cash, so they were both planning on killing my father" what is happening in this world? "So I heard them and they saw me and decided otherwise, they both want money so they decided to marry me to Theo. Mr. Medupe will pay ridiculous lobola which both my mom and Mrs. Medupe will share equally. I happily agreed to the deal because it was better than not having a father"

"LINDIWE" my voice comes out short in a whisper

"I know I traded my father's life for mine and I would do it all over again if I have to" Jesus! Mabongani, I know she is not the greatest but this

"So let me get this straight, you're only marrying Theo to save your father and for your devil mother to get the lobola money she wants" she nods with teary eyes

"Technically she and Mrs. Medupe just want money, me marrying Theo was the simplest way to get them money so they leave my father alone" I swear I'm never eating Mabongani's food again, she is dangerous moos

"Why MaMedupe doesn't just ask money from her husband, that man is loaded" she nods

"Honestly I don't know but what I learned is that the burial society is all managed by Mrs. Medupe alone, Mr. Medupe has nothing to do with that business and to think I used to not like him thinking his the villain kanti the devil is the sweet wife that always smiled and welcomed me with opened arms" what's wrong with this world mara?

"Lindi you're telling me Mrs. Medupe kills some of her clients so she can claim" she nods

"Hmk! If my brother and mother didn't die by accidents, I swear I was going to burn her house down" she laughs "phela they both were under that society, Lindiwe we have to tell Dalas about this" I suggest

"No Thando, if I do then they will go back to their former plan which was eliminating my father"

"Lindiwe please, we'll be discreet about it, Dalas will not...." she cuts me

“Thando please, I already tried and I know what I have to lose if my brother hears about this, please don’t force me to lose my father. He, my brother and sisters are the only angels in my life and I cannot imagine life without any of them, please keep this for me and let me do it my own way” I thank God I had a loving mother in my life, my time with mine may have been brief but it was priceless, sweet and motherly as it’s supposed to be and I thank all mighty every day for letting such phenomenal angel carry me through life

“I’m so sorry my friend, I don’t know what to say” she chuckles painfully

“Just promise not to tell anyone, this is my burden to carry”

“I’ll carry it with you” she smiles “Whenever it gets too heavy for your shoulders, know I’m just two houses corner away and a phone call away” she laughs lightly

“I will bear that in mind friend, your phone has been popping lights on the dressing table” she alerts and I turn to it, I already know who it is, he is trying to get me to see him, but to my surprise it’s two missed calls from a number I don’t know so I dial it back thinking it might be something crucial

‘Hello’ I say when the caller picks

‘Hi’ a woman’s soft calm voice say and keeps quite forcing me to explain myself while it’s supposed to be the other way round

‘I just found your missed call on my phone’ I explain feeling stupid but I receive silence, the person is on the line because I can hear her breath ‘Heloooooo’ I snap ‘mxm’ just when I’m about to drop the call because this person is finishing my airtime by just breathing, who said breathing over the phone is not eating airtime? She speaks

‘What’s your name?’ she asks causing me to chuckle

‘Who did you call?’ this day keeps getting worse for me

‘The woman sleeping with my husband’ okay this one is funny so I laugh out loud, Yoh! This is not a wrong number but utterly improper number, I wish to call my former maths teacher and tell him I finally know what an improper number is.

'Sorry dear you have the wrong number, I'm not sleeping with any married man' I say after containing my laughter and Lindi pops her eyes at me on the bed, this is a wrong turn number she better not look at me like that

'Are you not sleeping with Lawrence Pula?' the fuck! My soul evaporates my body because I swiftly run out breath holding on to the table for support, the cell phone stumbles through my hands hitting the floor, my world spins a bit before I see double of everything and fall down to deep darkness

LINDIWE

We were talking and okay five minutes ago but after the phone call she just fainted, I'm trying to revive her but I don't know what I'm doing and the fact that we are both locked in this room is not helping the situation either

"Thando, chomie please wake up" I'm slapping her cheeks so hard but she isn't opening her eyes. I know Vuyani will take forever to come so I dial my brother, he is just two houses away and luckily he picks up on the second ring

'Bhuti please help me, thando fainted and we are locked in her room I don't know what to do' I shoot straight to the point when he picks up

'Lindi you going to have to speak a bit slowly' haibo! I wasn't running moss

'Musa. Thando. Fainted..... We. Are. Locked. In. Her. Room. I don't know. What. To. Do' I pause after every word so he gets me because he always complains of me being fast when I'm nervous. The fact that he dropped the call without saying anything tells me he heard all that I said, I continue with my cheek hitting technic hoping it will work. In less than two minutes I hear the kitchen door abruptly opening before he calls out loud

"THANDO, LINDIWE" he screams in panic

"In here" I direct screaming back, he turns the lock but it's locked "It's locked" I scream again

"Move away from the door" he warns but luckily we are far from the entrance, with one kick I think the door flies opens breaking the lock to the ground, he quickly scoops thando off the ground and walk with her to the bathroom where he puts her in a bath tab and opens cold water directly to her face. She starts

shaking and gasping for air when cold water splash directly over her face but my brother holds her tight. This is new to me, I have never seen such.

“THANDO” he cups her face like pure gold, wiping water off her face, he looks like his world just came to an end “What’s wrong baby girl?” he asks worriedly “Talk to me baby girl” he pleads further but Thando buries her head in his chest and wails a hurtful cry that cuts deep. He pulls her closer to his chest and scoop her off the bath back to the bedroom “What happened?” he directs the question to me gently placing her on the bed and thando looks the other way crying

“I don’t know, we were just talking and she received a call and that’s it” I’m lying, I think I know but I will not spill before we talk

“Go home, I will take it from her” he orders going to the wardrobe, he takes out her silky night dress, my mind questions and I’m afraid I can’t keep it in my head

“You going to do it” well his already doing it but I just needed to hear him say it, maybe he will realise what he is doing is inappropriate

“She is wet, you want her to sleep in wet clothes and catch cold on top of whatever is going on?” he snaps

“No but I can do it”

“GET LOST LINDI” he says in a stern voice and I just shrug walking out but I peep through the door and watch as he takes her wet clothes off and put her in her silky night garment covering her with a fleece, then he takes off his shoes and climb the bed cuddling her. This is some weird shit right here.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 18

I REFUSE TO BELIEVE

THANDO

'Take time to know him' I used to read it as a phrase, I never thought I would cry rivers because I didn't take time to know him. Problem with me is that I fall easily and when I love, I love with everything in me. If I could turn back the hands of time I swear I would do things differently, I would think with my head more than my heart because it catches easily but this is a lesson learned, take time to know him.

"Babygirl please, talk to me" he pleads once more, he is been here cuddling me and I don't have the guts to face him, he warned me several times but like a dog thrown a bone I refused to see the other way other than the direction of the bone "Just so you now I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what or who hurt you" I wish he could go, I deserve all the pain coming my way "Thando, I know your used to being strong, your used to handling things your own way and I love that more about you but please let me help you carry some of your hurdles, even strong walls needs solid structure to help them overcome any blows and withstand all eras, let me be your solid structure baby girl, let me hold you down, please lean on me thandolwami" unintended smile curve my lips

"Thandolwami?" I question still looking the other way

"Forever and always, please look at me my baby, talk to me" he pleads once again and this time I turn to him and I can't look his face, instead my eyes lands on his chest "Thank you for turning but I asked you to look at me" he says pulling my chin so my eyes could meet his "Who hurt you?" he asks softly with the pain that matches mine in his eyes

"I.....I hurt.....myself" my voice fails me, it comes tearing at my heart

"What can I do to take all the hurt away" he cups my face and wipes the tears with his fingers "Hmm" he asks again now pecking my nose

“Let me cry the pain away”

“That one I will not do Thandolwami, your pain is my pain, talk my baby” sigh!
He is not letting this go

“Law is married” I expected him to be shocked but he is just staring as if he expected more “That’s it” he frowns

“So you’re crying because he is married?”

“Yes Dalas, hau! I don’t do married men no matter what” he chuckles

“So you really love this guy” he asks as if in disbelief

“Dalas please, I told.....” He interjects

“No Thando, I refuse to believe you love this guy, I refuse to believe that this love I have for you is all in vain, I refuse to believe your heart belongs to someone else other than me, I refuse to believe.....”

“Dalas please” he holds my waist and brings me closer to his body and the rush I feel when he holds my waist makes my sacred places swim in pool of desires

“No, No Thandolwami, I refuse, I love you damn it” he confess soft but sternly

“Please” he begs me in a whisper looking in my eyes

“Dalas I’m scared” I confess back in a whisper too

“Scared of what Thando, I would never hurt you, you know that, why don’t I deserve to be loved by you?” the torment in his voice cut’s through my heart

“I know and you know I feel the same way too but what if we don’t work, what if.....” he interjects putting his lips on mine and just staring in my eyes, he pecks me still looking in my eyes.

“Your mine to have Thando, mine to treat right, mine to grow old with, please allow me to have your heart and I swear I will treat you like the queen you are, there will be no ‘what ifs’ in our love, ours is forever baby” I know this is wrong but he feels so right and everything about him just melts me, so instead of giving him an answer I peck his lips and he smiles that captivating smile of his “Does this mean I have Thandolwami?” he excitedly asks and I nod “Come here” he shifts me and place me on top of his body before I can even contest

“Dalas” I giggle as he caresses my behind

“From today till we die, this is your home you hear that” I nod happily with his hand running my back “This is where you belong, no more Law”

“Law, who is that?” I question with a frown and he laughs

“That’s my girl” he says, smiling his delicious infatuating smile, he pulls me head downward for his lips to meet mine, the kiss, that kiss again, it starts soft with a peck but the pull of desire in my sacred place overpowers me, I allow myself to lean down and kiss him back. Tentatively, he brings his one hand to trap my waist over his while his other hand gently hold the side of my cheek, the kiss is as wet as the dampness forming in me undies, my walls clench with desire as he caresses my behind once again and that’s signal for me to let go as I also feel his member breathing. I gently pull off the sensation and his eyes remains closed for a minute controlling his breathing “You’re going to kill me, you know that” he remarks with a pleased smile still eyes closed

“Never” I softly whisper in his mouth as I peck him once again

“Let’s go to joburg” he abruptly say when he finally opens his eyes looking in mine with nothing but love “Just for a month or two” he adds as he sees the hesitation in my eyes

“I don’t know”

“Please Thandolwami” he pleads further caressing my body like a guitar and I must say it’s working but one thing I will take from Law drama is to take things slow, take time to know him

“Can we take things slow, maybe in two to three months I will join you” he nods happily

“I understand baby girl” we both laugh because he knows I hate being called baby girl but because it’s coming from him I don’t mind at all “Let me go lock up so we can sleep” he gently place me off his chest to the bed and peck my nose before he exit the room and all I can do is grin to the poor ceiling like it brought me father Christmas. I don’t know what will happen but I hope this is not another mistake.

MUSA

Saturday afternoon after the lobola negotiations Freddi Jackson you are my lady soothes smoothly through the speakers in my car, I just needed a moment alone to digest all the happening. My little sister is getting married and there is nothing I can do about it but I'm glad all went well for her, I hope she will be happy with her man but I know deep down that's not the reason for my pure delighted mood, I finally have what is rightfully mine.

I wish she can agree to come with me to joburg because truly speaking I just want to get her far away from that swine Law as soon as possible, I don't trust that nigger will just let her go and me having to go back to joburg makes things more difficult.

Today I woke up in the morning with her giving me hot meal in bed and that was a dream come true for me, I swear that little girl's put her spell on me. We are supposed to be going shopping with her but she cancelled on me and told me she is taking Lindi instead, I want her back already, they have been gone for far too long, I want to spend all the time I have here with her. I swear I'm in too deep for this girl.....

Someone roughly knocks my window and I open my eyes ready to bury whoever it is but I find my father's face with an expression that immediately reminds me of the days when he used to whoop me

"Nkosi" I acknowledge rolling down the window and tuning the volume down, what's with the cold face because everything went well

"Come and answer your shit" haibo! My father and swearing!

"Tyma what shit, what did I do?" I ask stepping out of the car

"To think how you are busy giving my daughter a hard time kanti she learned from the best, her brother, you both don't know condoms" he spansks the back of my head hard "maybe I should give all of you condom lessons" haibo!

"Tyma..." he cuts me before I can even finish

"Fotsek, let's go" he walks before me and I nervously follow him back to the house, I wonder what I did. My mother narrow her eyes at me when we walk through the door and I instantly know I did something wrong because since I have been home I have been the best child to her. She is making oros and putting biscuits on a tray, this means we have visitors but who because the

negotiators long left. My father walks me to the living room and I follow him there, my jaws meet the floor when we get in there

“What the fuck?” I meant to exclaim in head but damn! The words just escaped my mouth, Buhle is standing by the corner giggling for decades

“SIT” my father shouts and I do as told keeping my glare at her, what in the world is Sindi up to.

“You know how to take my daughter’s panty off but you can’t even greet me, her father” the old familiar old man asks pissed, I’m sorry I didn’t greet but im still digesting whatever this is

“Tyma what’s going on” I turn to my father hoping for clarification

“Musa, don’t annoy me, don’t dare annoy me, what is going on? Was I there when you were busy taking Ndaba’s daughter for a ride?” I exhale deeply to calm down and collect all my manners because this is wow! It really is wow, Mr. Ndaba, Sindi’s father now I remember him

“My apologies my elders for my terrible manners, if I may ask what is going on here” another older woman who looks like an aunt claps her hands

“Listen here young man, we brought your wife here, angisho you know how to make babies and you think you’re going to be clever about it and leave my brother to raise your kid. Well not in this life time.....” my mother interrupts roughly placing the tray on top of the table almost spilling

“No whore will be married in my house, if that thing she is carryi.....” my father also interrupts more like stopping the brewing fight

“MaBongani! Sit down, can we all calm down people and talk” They all breath heavily calming down and indeed the anger in the room subsides because there seems to be calmness after few minutes of silence and my father continues “Ndaba as you have mentioned, you brought your daughter here because my son here disrespected your home, here he is I fetched him for you, you can have a talk with him” Ndaba nods still sweating but he turns to Sindi who somehow is looking down the floor so respectful

“Sindisiwe, is this him” Ndaba questions sindi and she nods “I WANT YOU TO SAY IT OUT LOUD LIKE YOU WERE SCREAMING HIS NAME WHEN YOU WERE OPENING YOUR LEGS FOR HIM” he shouts

“Yebo it’s him baba” she says still looking down

“HIM THAT DID WHAT?” he shouts again

“It’s him that impregnated me”

“HAI! HAI! A.A Sindi, such lies” all the attention is turned to me as I shout “When last did I fuck you we.....”

“MUSA?” My father admonishes me and I sigh heavily to calm down

“I’m four months pregnant Musa, I only realised after we broke up” can this day get any worse than this

“Broke up or after you left me for your blesser” my mother claps her hands and chuckles bitterly “Don’t come here taking chances sisi, how do I know that is my child you’re carrying” she looks at me with sparkling eyes, she better not cry I deserve answers

“Did you sleep with my daughter?” Ndaba questions me

“I did but it was a long time ago and.....” he stands dusting himself

“Well that’s all I need to know, I don’t want a cent, she and the child she is carrying will be your problem from now on, there are her bags” he points behind the door and my eyes find clothes filled in plastic bags, what kind of parents are this? “Nkosi” he acknowledges my father before he and his sister walk out of the door leaving Sindi buried on the couch

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 19

THE CONFRONTATION

LINDIWE

Today the stamp to my relationship with Theo is officially marked and my mother couldn't be happier, she is so excited she even organised me to spend the night with Theo but thando being thando I don't how she pulled her impossible because instead of spending the entire night with Theo as my mother wanted I'm shopping the afternoon away with her and she tells me we are spending the night together. Theo just texted me and told me to enjoy my night with my girl, truly speaking he no longer tickle my fancy so whatever he tries will never be enough for me

"Thando I'm hungry and tired, can we leave already" I complain once again, I have been complaining the whole afternoon, I agreed to this thinking she was still down but like a flower she just blossomed, she is even glowing from the heartbreak. I want to be just like her when I grow up, take break ups like stepping stones.

"Yoh! Pregnant your killing my mood yazi" I narrow my eyes at her but she laughs and pulls me towards spur entrance

"Okay I get that my brother gave us money to spoil ourselves but do we really have to eat this fancy, I mean chicken licken could do just fine" she smirks back at me already inside the restaurant, a young lady directs us to our table after confirming our sitting arrangement which is table for two

"Who said I have been spending my money? That one I'm saving to resurrect my business" she says as we settle nicely on the chairs

"Haibo! Then whose money have we been spending" she flies a card over my stare and I gasp "Bitch please tell me that is not Law's card?" she frowns

"Can you please refrain from mention that devil advocate's name in my presence" I laugh her irritation "And just so you know this is Dala's card"

“Dalas as in my brother?” she nods looking through the menu without raising her eyes to me “Thando you’re not sleeping with my brother, right?”

“Not yet”

“Not yet? What do you mean not yet, thando i.....” she cuts me

“Don’t come to me with that crap lee, I love Dalas and I’m no longer going to hide my feelings for him” she exhales “I’m sorry chommie but I wanted us to come here and talk about this, I really do love him and I have been running away from him for as long as I started having eyes for testosterone because I didn’t want to build on what I have for him but now, I’m ready to embrace he and I for eternity, please tell me you will not have a problem with him and I” she sincerely looks in my eyes begging

“Thando I don’t have a say in my brother’s relationships but what about Law, last I checked.....” she cuts me once again

“Lee you heard that call, law is married and that makes him none existent to me”

“But you can’t just switch feelings like that, I mean you were head over heels for the guy a day ago” she nods agreeing with me

“Yes I was but that’s because I didn’t want to pursue what I feel for Dalas, it has always been dalas for me but because I was scared I gave myself to law thinking I will stop feeling for Dalas but I didn’t, with one touch dalas warms my.....”

“Aaaaaah, hold it right there” she laughs “I don’t want to hear about my brother’s game please” she continues laughing as we place our orders “So tell me, when did all this happen?” she smiles

“Last night, we finally confessed our feelings and decided to be in a relationship” she is beaming with content as she tells me and I can see all the happiness in her radiating to me, she is hooking me with her happiness and I can’t help but smile back at her as if the news is mine to share

“I’m happy if your happy chommie but promise to.....” my phone rings disturbing our conversation and it’s none other than the devil himself, I roll my eyes as I pick his call

‘Lindi, nikuphi? Why is thando’s phone off?’ (where are you?)

'Dalas we are eating' thando's face before me is priceless, she gets that this call is all about her

'Give her the phone' I roll my eyes once again

'NO'

'Lindi my baby please' I laugh

'No dalas I mean it' he sighs

'Okay please call me when you're both done so I can pick you'

'Sure' I drop the call immediately before he say anything and the look I receive from thando is not pleased anymore, she looks ready to murder me

"Jealous doesn't look good on you" I roll my eyes at her

"I'm happy that you too are jolling but your both not going to be jolling over my phone, why is your phone off anyway" she sighs digging in her plate that was placed while I was still on the call

"Law has been blowing it so switch it off"

"Did you break up with him though?" she nods

"I sent him a text telling him that it was nice fucking him but his dick ain't doing shit anymore" I gasp because I know she wrote that

"THANDO!" I reprimand

"What was I to say, that fucker played me and for that he deserves hell, I swear if he wasn't married I was going to kill him but for his wife I will let him live....." she cuts me

THANDO

"Chommie, don't look neah" that's a sign for me to put on my google search instinct and investigate "there is a lady at your left that keeps stealing glances at you" I send my eyes to the direction and find the one and only 'law's sister' Lilian with a woman whose face I can't stamp it properly yet as she is facing the other way. I wish I had something stronger to gulp down my aching throat, it's

aching to spit venom to the woman that double crossed me by assuring me her brother is not married

“If things get out of hand, hold me, I will throw the ‘Chommie hold me before I murder this bitch’ notice, just watch out for those words” she gives me the ‘don’t do anything stupid’ stare but I’m afraid I can’t deal with her devil look now, that whore over there owes me answers, just because she is a homewrecker doesn’t make all of us one

“Thando sit” she orders through gritted teeth but I can’t help my sweating armpits as I roughly push the chair standing, my brain is already polishing my swearing tongue to just spit “Who are they and what.....” I cut her because she is wasting my time

“That’s Law’s sister, I need to deal with her flat behind, I will be back but remember to watch and listen for my warning notice

“THANDO....” I don’t wait to hear her plea words as I’m already marching towards the two ladies. Lilian notice me walking in fire in their direction and she pops her eyes

“Thando” she says in a shaky voice when I stand beside the other woman staring at her

“How do you sleep at night vele?” she blinks nervously and try to stand but I roughly push her back to her sit gaining ourselves some audience “Sit, this won’t take long, I just want you to know you deserve a sit at the board of South African bitches table, in fact you would make a perfect extraordinary devil’s side chick” when I hear gasps and some laughter only then I realise my voice is quite loud. Lee is already marching to us and it’s not time yet, I haven’t thrown the warning notice as yet and this one seems to be shaky so I think I have her right where I want

“What did she do?” the beautiful woman asks and only then I glance at her and realize her eyes are teary and red as if she is been crying

“She forced her brother’s match stick dick down my throat” more gasps and laughter is audible around the restaurant “tell him Christmas is over and as for you, I wish when you get out of here you could be hit by a bus and end up in ICU and just when you wake, you find yourself buried alive and rot in your grave until you finally die. And I wish God could also could also reject your useless

soul and sent it back to be satan's side chick as it's where you belong, nxa!" I turn and tuck my friend's arm who is also shocked "Let's go chommy"

"You haven't paid" our waitress reminds marching to our direction

"Oh I forgot, how much is the bill?" she looks through her black cover and say

"R427.52 mam"

"Perfect, this satan's side chick here will pay" I point Lilian who looks like she is ready to ask Caster for some lessons

"Mam, will you pay?" the waitress questions Lilian and she nods quickly already reaching for her wallet

"And oh! Lilian, please tell that imbecile you call a brother to lose my number, I don't fuck around with married men" with that said I walk out with my friend head held up high, although I didn't get the answers I want because I didn't ask but I feel light for slicing her like that. This women fooled me with her brother, I hate women who cover men's shit to deceive others to be trapped by this other gender, it's a dangerous world out there, every gender for itself and I don't care that she is blood related to this moron, her loyalty lies with me first, women for women, not the other way around

LAWRENCE

Somewhere at Hillside estate Lawrence is seated staring at the television portraying picture before him. His mind is racing at the speed of lightning chasing what is now a dream about him and Thando. His not exactly certain what he did so bad to piss her off because she was fine talking to her and even arranging for some quality time once Musa leaves. Maybe the way he handled the situation threatening Musa when he came for her but he did his best to hide the range in him. As much as he wanted to squash Musa's bones he had to control his temper because he promised Thando that he is not a violent person

For once in his notorious life he found a woman who calms him down. With her he felt secure, guarded and complete, she filled the range in him with nothing but pure joy he never knew existed. Most of his family and friends refer to him as a furious person, a beast to be precise because when pressed over the edges his range is hard to control. That is why he choose the notorious life he is living

but because he reside in his own world that too is boring the shit out of him so his everywhere, heists, money laundering and schemes

But for once in his life he felt Thando's presence complete the aching bone in him, the time he spent with her kept him at base, for once his mind, body and soul were in balance. He felt like his at peace, everything in him functioning in accordance even his everyday dreams that haunt him stopped and he finally slept like a normal human being, which is something he never knew all his life.

He doesn't understand what let to him receiving an sms saying *It was nice fucking you, but like all nice things, you have expired so I no longer have use for your jelly ass, lose my number and make sure you stay in hell where you belong or else I will drag you there myself, bloody swine!* He is tempted to drive to her house straightaway but because he knows Musa is still around he will stay put until then.

His sister walks in looking troubled, he wants to ask what she is doing here but because he has his own troubles he is not interested in hers so he just stares at her going to the alcohol cabinet and burning her throat with whisky. It must have been a really shitty day for her, he thinks.

"Law" she says in a whisper trying to earn his attention but he just looks at her absent mindedly like she is not even in the same room as her "I saw thando" that gains her the attentions she was trying to get

"Where, what did she say?" he questions on his feet

She sighs first "I was with precious and she came to confront me for lying about your marital status"

"Shit" he hits the table hard, now it makes sense "You told her" she quickly shakes her head no with an exhausted sigh

"Apparently as Precious say, she saw your car at Hillside mall where as you had claimed to be out of town for the whole month, so she followed you and saw you coming here"

"The fuck!" she affirms with a nod

“Yeah! So because she is not allowed here, she couldn’t come in so she bribed one of the guards who gladly aired all your dirty laundry for just few bucks and he also got Thando’s number for her through the visitors list thando signed when coming here” his face is burning with rage and Lilian knows when he is like this he is five minutes to explosion “Calm down Law, we’ll find a way through this”

“So Precious called Thando?” she nods

“I tried to convince her it’s not true but thando kind of saw me with her and she grilled me with her unknowingly that Precious is the wife and that confrontation took things way south, Precious is threatening to leave you Lawrence, you better go home and fix this mess before you lose your wife”

“Fuck” he curses further “I’ll go sleep home today just to calm her but I’m not losing thando lilian, she is my peace, get her back for me” Lilian quickly nods although not sure of how she is going to convince thando that her brother is not married

She sighs again “Since she left.....” she is a bit hesitant asking this as it’s a no go area for everyone who knows him but because he gladly updated her a month ago she will ask, he raises his eyebrow for her to continue “Since she left, the dreams came back?” she doesn’t need him to reply because his changed demeanour just confirmed that he is haunted once again in his sleep

“Thanks for updating me, if you don’t mind I need to get going” he says switching the tv off and collecting his wallet and car keys, that’s a way for him to ignore her and she knows that’s just about all she will get. She sighs and exit the door more heavily than when coming here.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 20

ONE LAST TIME

LINDIWE

So much for girl's night, Thando abandoned me last night leaving me to sleep alone. She mentioned something about spending quality time with her soul before he leaves and she's been out all night long but I'm not complaining I slept beautifully and peacefully because I know she is with Dalas, I still can't believe they are together like that. When I texted Buhle the news last night when we arrived home she was ecstatic, apparently I was the only one who didn't know that the two were fancying each other, sigh! Love world is really small, cousin and cousin relationships are coming soon.

If it wasn't for this constant pee breaks I take since I discovered I'm with child, I swear I would still be holding my blankets tight just for the comfort and warmth, it so bloody cold this morning, winter is waving it's goodbyes in the worst possible way. After my restroom break I flush and head out without washing my hands, I'm sorry im not about to touch cold water while I still want to sleep some more. I bump into Vuyani down the passage, he is a bit startled popping his beautiful eyes like he is seeing a ghost with testicles before him

"You slept here?" he questions in a whisper, more like telling himself, I nod "Where is thando?" I just shrug because I'm not really sure he knows the latest about the two love birds "Sorry, my manners, how did you sleep? Come sit down I will make you breakfast" he takes my hand without waiting for my reply, when our skin touch, I feel a pull of spark that causes our eyes to lock instantly. For a moment it's just him and I, everything about his look assures me of the place I occupy in his heart but in a split second he drops his eyes and continue holding my hand down the passage. When he reach the cross path to the kitchen and living room, he halts our walk and contemplates between the two entrance, I can't help the giggle that voluntarily escape my lips, he looks a bit frustrated

"What is it?" I'm amused by the frustration in his eyes

“I don’t know if I should put you in here” he points the lounge “and relax while I make you the most scrumptious breakfast you have ever tasted or should I let you watch me do my magic in the kitchen” laughter, the little things like this are the things that makes me love this guy

“I would like to watch you” he nods with a beautiful smile and pulls me toward the kitchen. He settles me on the chair first then turn around the table heading for the fridge

“Vuyani’s kitchen, what do you feel like having mama” I can’t help but die in laughter

“Anything you feel like serving sir, lately I eat just about anything” he stares at my bump seated a bit before he turns back to the fridge

“While you wait please indulge mama” he puts a tab of yoghurt with spoon before me “but please make sure the other madam of the house doesn’t find you eating it” I roll my eyes already opening it, this is payback for letting me sleep alone, I’m going to eat all her nice things. He takes out a tray of eggs and I instantly feel nauseous by just looking at them, me and eggs are currently in conflict since pregnancy

“No eggs please” he turns to me with a smile

“You too?” what does he mean me too? Is there someone pregnant for him?

“Do you know someone else pregnant?” he chuckles

“No, my mother once told me she hated eggs while pregnant with me” relief! I was five minutes to fainting, I’m honestly not ready to see him with someone else other than me “I see she is taking right after uncle vuyi, no eggs it is mama” he puts them back in the fridge and I can finally breath normally

“She could be a he”

“You’re far too beautiful to birth a boy but if she turns out with balls I think he will be gay nje! Period” he laughs hard when he finds me narrowing my eyes at him

Breakfast was as scrumptious as he had suggested and for the first time in a long time I cleaned my plate, nothing was left, lately I eat bit by bit because I just cannot stomach everything at once

“You going back home or you’re going to wait on thando?” he questions coming back from the kitchen to wash our dishes, he adamantly refused me to do them, I shake my head no standing. Truly speaking I’m treading going back home where I’ll be reminded that I’m someone’s fiancé and probably be forced to spend time with him

“I just want to do the bed, I was still going back to sleep when you hijacked me” he grins and takes my hand back to the couch

“I’ll do it for you sit, I miss spending time with you, my vila bantu” (lazy) I’m not even offended, everyone who knows me all cry about my laziness and they must all go hang themselves, I try okay! House chores ain’t child’s play “How are you” he asks more serious after settling back on the couch, his caressing my hand gently seated on the table before me, when he does things like this my breathe always hitches and I flush in places down south, I honestly cannot keep his stare, it sends sparks in my pleasure spot

“I guess I’m fine” I say with a forced smile just to convince him, I’m honestly slowly dying but it looks like it didn’t work as to how he raises his eyebrow but thankfully he lets it go because he sighs to erase it

“And how is she treating you” his hand leaves my palm and lowers to my bump caressing it, I feel spark of connection as he brushes my bump and my hand voluntarily place on top of his, when I raise my eyes I find him staring at me with begging eyes, I already know what his heart is saying

“I can’t” I say in whisper and he slowly shakes his head

“How am I supposed to go on, MaLindi your my purpose” his eyes sparkle with tears while mine voluntarily fall down my cheeks “Don’t break my heart like this MaNdlovu wami, don’t marry him please” he pleads

“Vuyani I can’t” that’s all I can say with my tears flowing down like Caledon river, he cups my face and wipes my tears with a smile as tears finally drop his cheeks

“Our love story may have been brief but for me it was all there is to love and I hope one day you’ll realise that I’m your home” he plants a long wet kiss on my forehead “when you finally realise please don’t hesitate to call me, even if it’s ten years later my heart will still beat for you” he abruptly leaves me and the ache in my heart can’t take it

“Ndlovu?!” I call out stopping him when he is just about to exit the room “Please look at me” my voice delivers in a whisper, he stays looking ahead a bit with his shoulders moving, he wipes his tears first and finally turn back to me, the pain in his eyes is unexplainable and maybe just one last time will soother his broken heart “Can I have my proper goodbye” through the pain in him he forces a smile and comes back “One last time” I whisper in his ear as he carries me like a baby from the couch and I wrap my legs around his waist while as my arms wrap around his neck

“I will always love you” he says in whisper before his lips tenderly meets mine in an emotional loving kiss walking us to his room

MUSA

It’s a rare thing to find the one meant for you in this world, the feeling of having that special person in your arms is priceless, nothing compares to the fulfilment, its soul’s satisfaction. I have been with lots of girls before but I have never felt this way, even in her partially snoring sleep I still see pure gold through her, my very own pure gold. She is my perfection, my very own piece of life art, the best I have ever been has to be her.

At this moment I’m content, the only thing that worries me is the dream, it came back again last night, that man asking me to look for his daughter in his death bed. I don’t even know where to start because even his first name is something foreign to me. It’s the only thing sitting on my shoulder heavily for now, maybe since I’m still home I should visit the police station to acquire information about the man, sigh!

I miss her now she has to wake up, we came here to spend time together and for me to tell her the truth about Sindi, I know how some screws ain’t tight with this one so I wanted her to hear it from me first before Buhle burst and breaks

the news for me. I don't know how Sindi is going to survive both thando and Buhle, including my mother in that equation and I hope for her sake the baby is really mine or else she will trend for decades in my hometown.

She was so happy yesterday night, even modelling all her new clothes for me and I couldn't break her heart like that so I let us be happy last night, just talk and laugh for a moment and push the headaches for tomorrow

I peck her slightly parted lips trying to wake her but nothing, she looks so peaceful sleeping like she is not capable of even hurting a fly. My girl is even swallowing in her sleep, her bushy eyebrows are a mess, my own morning mess. I thank God for this angel, I hope she will hold on to me like I intend on holding her. I scoop and place her on top of me and she starts fighting a bit

"Hmmm" she groans and I squeeze her behind hard on top of me

"Open your beautiful eyes" I whisper in her ear separating her legs and pacing mine in between hers. She slowly opens her sleepy eyes looking not pleased "Good morning thandolwami" if looks could kill a person I would be on my way to hell now. She tries to stand off me but I hold her waist tighter

"Dalas I want to wash my face and brush my teeth" even her voice is still lazy from sleep

"After this" I snuggle my hand behind her neck while the other one smoothly dance from her waist down her butt, she jumps when my lips touch hers

"Mmmm, I haven't....." I grip her warm body with my legs and forcefully capture her in a kiss, she lazily responds to the kiss but eventually relaxes taking in all the pleasure, when I push my bulge for her to feel she pulls back with a smile "I really do need to clean up"

"Your perfect just the way you are" she flushes

"Thank you, how did you sleep" she puts her chin on top of hand for balance staring at me still lying over my body

"I slept baby girl but I have this constant dream that troubles me" she furrows her eyebrows "nothing to worry about my love, go clean-up we have to go down for breakfast and I want to talk to you before we leave" she nods jumping off and I love I love the image, I know she is swaying that behind on purpose, the

day I burst that ass she won't believe me "Can I join you thandolwami?" I yell loudly so she could hear me

"Noo" she screams back so fast and I laugh kicking off the covers, she doesn't know me very well this one, I strip all my covers off and make my way in the shower with nothing on. She is already naked but not inside as yet, she is doing this thing of testing water with her hand. When I poke my member on her butt she jumps turning to me, she swallows dropping her stare from my chest down my waist where she flushes staring, she looks stunned just staring at my dick

"Wanna feel?" I ask staring down at her

"Huh" finally there is something that is capable of shutting my girl, I take her hand and try to make her feel but she jumps from me into the shower before she even places her palms, such a coward!

We are seated just watching movies after breakfast, in fact she is the one watching the damn thing, I'm just staring at her going through emotions over bloody pictures

"I can't believe she never remembered" the sadness in her voice is not hard to miss

"Me too" I don't even know what we are talking about

"But at least their vows brought them back together"

"Their vows?" I'm a bit lost

"The Vow, the movie we are watching"

"Oh!" she narrows her eyes at me "I'm sorry love, you know I'm not a movie person" she sighs "Can we pause a bit, I have to tell you something" she obliges switching off the tv, I pull and rest her head on my chest brushing it as we watch the perfect view through the opened sliding doors, it's just bare Greenland but it's so beautiful and peaceful for this moment "First I want to start by saying I love you Thando and what I'm about to tell you will not change anything, okay?" she nods "Yesterday Sindi's parents brought her home claiming she is pregnant by me" she quickly turns to my face

"Home your home?" I nod "Is she pregnant vele?" she shouts a bit confused

“Yah I think so, I’m not sure”

“Is it yours?”

“I don’t know my love but there is high possibility that it could be mine” this is me honestly speaking

“Jesus Dalas, couldn’t you even use plastics if condoms were something foreign to you” I can’t help but laugh her annoyance “You should get tested, Sindi.....”

“Thando” I cut her holding her hands “We can get tested some other time but now I want to know if you’re going to be okay with this”

“Do I have a choice?” I nod

“If you tell me to kick her out, I’ll do so, you have a choice and say in how I handle this” she rolls her eyes

“Can’t you take DNA tests before we think about anything?”

“That’s a good idea, I’ll talk to her about it”

“And I want to be there” she says arms folded

“Okay mommy, all you say is good with me” she sighs looking stressed “talk to me, what is wrong? If this is too much for.....” she cuts me

“It’s not that” I burn her with my stare for her to continue

“When are you leaving?”

“I have to leave tomorrow late because I have an important meeting to attend with Vuyani on Wednesday” she shutters a bit disappointed

“Do you really have to go?”

“Come with me” she rolls her eyes and I laugh “Will you be okay with Buhle? I’m taking Vuyani with me” she nods with a sigh “What’s wrong? Talk to me”

She heavily breathes first “It’s Lindi” I frown “What I’m about to tell you is very sensitive and I might lose my best friend....” I cut her

“Khuluma baby” (talk)

“MaBongani and MaMedupe are forcing her to marry Theo” say what!

“FORCE, WHY, HOW” I ask with a raised voice

“That’s the worst part, please promise to keep calm” I breathe out heavily “For BabNkosi, apparently he is not sick they have been poisoning him for years to die so they can claim his burial money” I can hear myself breath as my chest expands and contract the way I’m so mad, what is wrong with my mother mara? Through everything she is put us as her children, I was always sure she loves my father more than life itself, who is this woman that birthed me mara? The world we live in is slowly changing “I’m sorry” she softly say caressing my chest and I pull her palm to my lips kissing it

“I appreciate you telling me” she nods and jumps on me sitting astride my legs

“Are you still leaving?” clever girl, I laugh

“Not before I take my father to a doctor and kick my mother out of the house while at it” she rolls her eyes intertwining her palm with mine

“Even if I do this?” she rocks her waist on top of me staring in my eyes

“Don’t start things you won’t end thando” she giggles seizing her horny acts, she pops her eyes like she just remembered something

“Heee! Yazi I almost forgot to tell you” I laugh already because I know hot gossip is coming

“Drop them hot my love” I encourage in stitches

“Lindi and Vuyani once shagged and I saw the whole thing, the styles.....”

“WHAT?” I shout

“A.a don’t be like that, you also shagging me and my brother doesn’t have....” I interject once again

“I’m not shagging you”

“But you will”

“Even now I can?” she dies in laughter

“Not now, in three months” I gasp “90 day rule baby” that bald headed man is a snitch, the biggest of them all, he sold us

“The rule says nothing about touching, meaning I can” my hand is sliding down her core and rubbing on top of her panties “I can touch and feel” she buries her

head on my shoulder as I rub on her, 90 days my foot! “The day I fuck this ass, that 90 day shit will turn into 90 days of fucking non-stop”

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 21

MEN'S TALK

MUSA

The drive back home is not as splendid as the ride to the lounge yesterday, she is sulking and I know the reason why but because I don't want to be putting out flames for her tantrums I let her sulk all the way. I have to go hustle for us she needs to understand.

"Do you want anything?" I ask as we pull up at the petrol station to refill the tank

"Who is going to buy me anything when you leave" this is one of the problems encountered by all male species for falling in love with younger women, they never leave their kid stage behind, they sulk and throw tantrums bigger than KZN and Gauteng hearing that Msholozzi is going to prison for couple of months

"You'll call and I'll make a plan" she rolls her eyes and folds her arms to the chest putting her legs on the dash board. The petrol attendant is staring at her silky smooth yellow thighs and I feel a sting of jealousy hovering me "Sit up straight and pull this down" I'm already pulling her mini skirt down myself, she gives me one of her spontaneous naughty looks before she opens her legs wide and run her finger over her smooth skin slowly down her inner thighs, I feel a rush of hot blood rushing down town my member

"You like" the seduction in her voice! I respond by running my own hands down her smooth silky skin chasing the direction of the finger

"SHIT!" a voice disturbs our lustful moment, when I turn it's the petrol attendant, he spilled my petrol on the floor staring at our indecent behaviour, instead of being mad we laugh our lungs out

"Thandolwami please sit up straight and tell daddy what you want before we leave" I beg softly taking the naughty hand in mine caressing it so it stops

tempting me and the petrol attendant, she obliges taking her beautiful legs off the board

“I’ll have any snack you can buy but don’t forget chocolate, I need it to help me digest the news that my man is leaving me alone in this cold, cruel, lonely world” the shade! To think I’m just going to be a province away but she says it lie it’s going to be a country away.

With the look this boy is giving my woman, I’m no longer comfortable leaving her alone in the car so I turn to her side and open the door for her, instead of stepping off the car she frown glaring at me from head to toe

“Did you see one of your exes?” she whispers running her eyes all over the station

“What?” I’m confused

“Why are you opening doors for me, you never open doors for me” black woman!

“I’m being romantic, come let’s go” I give her my hand and she takes it full of amusement

“If we were already fucking I was going to give you dog style tonight” I halt on my steps and flush she laugh pulling me

“We can always go back and test the style” I whisper in her ear, she denies shaking her head still laughing

“If this is you sweetening me for leaving its working” well I’m glad opening a mere door for her is softening her even though it wasn’t my intended plan. Entering the store she takes a basket and starts putting things in right away, I make my way to the kiosk for a packet of cigarettes, I’m not much of a smoker but when I’m stressed I do and for what awaits me at home I’m going to need one or two “Have you ever eaten this peanuts?” she asks holding a packet of peanuts in yellow wrap, I throw my cigarette in her full basket and peck her cheek

“No”

“They look a nice, I’m taking them”

“What if they are not nice” I ask

“You’ll eat them” I decide to keep my peace before she sulks once again

“Are you sure we are still buying just snacks” I’m on her tail as she makes her way to the pie section

“Hello” she calls for help “Can I please have steak and kidney, burger pie and chicken.....wait what is that” she points another roll pie, the lady laughs and says

“Cheese grill pie”

“And that too” she nods with a smile and wrap her pies pricing them

10 minutes later we walk out of the store hand in hand but our happiness is short lived, Lawrence is walking out of his extravagant car with a beautiful petite woman and a little girl holding on to this hand. He let’s go of the little girl’s hand when his eyes fall on us, I feel my girl’s hold tightening around my grip and I hold her tighter just to assure her

“My my my, if it isn’t the angelic Musa or is it Dalas messing with my plans as always” hmk! Cocky bastard

“Lawrence” I’m not one to be throwing shade for no reason but come for me at my loved ones you’ll know why snakes are the most dangerous in their silent nature

“Waitse I was trying so hard to control my temper but now seeing you with him” (You know) he narrows his eyes at thando “Are you fucking him too?” he barks

“No, we don’t fuck, we make love, sweet gentle love which is something you know nothing about” Thando barks back and I couldn’t be happier

“THANDO DON’T.....” he tries to step closer to her fuming but I push her behind me and stand before him, the expression on his face looks deadly

“Baby girl go wait for me in the car” she doesn’t wait to be told twice, she is already marching towards the car before she raises her tiny middle finger at Law, it’s time for man talk “Listen here and listen attentively, let this be the first and the last time you disrespect me in front of my woman, ngicacile boy” (Am I clear) he chuckles

“So you are fucking her too” he pokes with an attitude “well let me educate you Kasi boy, that there is my woman” he points at Thando in my car “I made sure of it” what the fuck is he on about “and since you think you own the world lately, I want my money, all of it” I can’t help but die in laughter, such a bitch of a man!

“What money” I fake confusion

“My money” he hisses

“I don’t know what you’re talking about rasta” I respond with a smile

“Don’t test me Musa?”

“Don’t test me Lawrence, especially with my woman” I sternly say moving inches to his ear “and just so we are clear, if I hear that your even breathing meters close to her when I’m gone, the next call on my phone will be to the Interpol CID department helping them in their search for Thabo Pula with no dreadlocks who happens to now be Lawrence Pula with dreadlocks” I tap his shoulder with a smile “Never underestimate kasi boys cheese boy, keep the hair clean I hear inside all those with hair are turned into bitches” with that I leave him trembling, whether it’s fear or anger I don’t give a fuck, he was a fool if he thought I was just going to be his live bank and keep his dirty money for him, I’m was doing my research, gathering all information about him

My way back to the car I find my girl contained in fear, I pull her chin with my fingers for her to face me after settling on my sit

“Are you okay?” she nods, I pull her closer for a peck “I won’t let him hurt you okay” she nods again and sighs

“I don’t believe I slept with a married man”

“Hmk! Not just married only but someone’s father too, a family man to be precise” I poke intentionally stealing a glance at her as we drive out, she raises an eyebrow at me and I smile, I know what I’m aiming for and the way she is huffing it’s working

“Says the man who fell in love with a town bicycle and got her pregnant while at it” only when I laugh she realizes my intentions “You know how to play me neah?” she asks laughing

“Your my soul thandolwami, I know you like the back of my hand” she beams
“but on a serious note if he troubles you in any way please tell me okay” she
nods

“I will love, I promise”

“Good, now motivate me again with those thighs, put your feet back on the dash
board” she rolls her eyes but obliges “and the hand, run it way down low like
you were doing earlier and don’t forget to open a bit wider” she is hesitant
“Thando?” I threaten, she does as told as we drive back “Touch yourself for me”
she pops her eyes “Please love” she relaxes back to the seat, I take her left hand
in mine as I drive single handed “Sway your panty to the side mommy and touch
my cookie, I want to taste you through your fingers” she is flushing, her
breathing is escalating inside the car “Imagen daddy’s cork sliding inside you
filling you up with pleasure” a slight moan escapes her mouth eyes closed on
the seat

“Hmmm” I abruptly take her hand out of my cookie and hold it, she opens her
eyes swallowing her almost pleasure

“You really going to finger fuck yourself in my car while I drive” she grins
“naughty thandolwami, very naughty” I pull her assaulted hand to my nose and
sniff staring at her “You smell divine mama, I can’t wait to dine you” when I put
her moist finger in my mouth she gasp “Hmk! Tasty of pussy is taste of life” I
say sucking all her moisture in my mouth, this girl is a ball of fire and she is
going to be making an old guy go crazy, she flames me just perfect

Driving through the yard I notice Sindi on the stoep sitting alone, I feel sorry for
her because I know what is like to be hated by my mother and worse for her
none of my sisters are on her side so it must be hell for her. Thando is still by
my side, she said she wants to see Lindi but I know it’s pure lies, she just want
to mark her territory.

“Sindi” she smiles “Why are you sitting outside?” I’m trying so hard to ignore
the burning stare of the one by my side

“Aaah I’m just enjoying the sun” she dismisses me staring at thando “Hello
thando, you can go ahead I want to talk to the father of my child alone if you
don’t mind” I wish she didn’t, she doesn’t know the news about as yet, she

thinks thando is still the young girls who crushes me as she used to complain a lot about her while were together

“This one?” she points me with an attitude, sindi nods, she does the unexpected, she grabs my balls squeezing and I can’t.....can’t.....Jesus! “This one is mine baby mama so whatever you have to say, has to pass right through me first, right daddy” she squeezes harder

“HmMMM” I grunt a moan, both painful and pleasurable

When I hear the kitchen door opening only then my senses comes back to me as thando quickly frees my balls from her delicious painful hold, I’m horny as fuck right now and embarrassed as hell as I find my father staring at all three of us with a frown, he eventually sighs and shakes his head

“Neno” I see her rolling her eyes through the corners of mine “Get me a chair” she grunts disappearing in the house “Sindisiwe why didn’t you eat?” he asks sitting on the chair as thando holds it for him

“Chicken makes me nauseous” thando is rolling her eyes disbelievingly

“You should have told my wife, sit down Neno will fix you something” Sindi beams with joy while Thando is quarter to hell

“BabNkosi please refrain calling me Neno from now on, I’m not a child anymore” my father laughs

“And what should I call you” she looks at Sindi

“MaNkosi” both my dad and I die in laughter

“Okay MaNkosi” he collects himself “This woman is carrying your man’s child and as MaNkosi it’s your duty to make sure that she is fed and healthy, the child she is carrying is very much yours” the silence from thando and I is not heavy but it is astonishment, why is he so serious all of a sudden

“So vele vele you couldn’t wait to put your claws in my man” Sindi breaks the silence

“And I dug them so deep you won’t be getting him back sweetheart, come let me feet you my surrogate”

“I’m not your surrogate, if you can’t make your own bab.....” They follow each other back into the house arguing

“How many months left after four?” I question my dad already exhausted but he laughs hard

“Ten”

“This is going to be the longest ten months of..... hai! Baba it’s supposed to be nine months” he laughs

“I’m happy you finally grew a pair, she is your better half” I nod in agreement “but on a serious note, you think you can handle both your crazy women” laughs

“I can handle my woman tyma, the other one is carrying my child that’s all” he sighs with a nod “Tyma can we go to my room, I want us to address something that just befell my ears today” he gives me a suspicious look

“I hope you didn’t knock another woman up Musa” I laugh leading him to my room

“My soldiers don’t march that fast tyma, one woman at the time.....” and then? We are met with a sexy lingerie on top of my bed nicely placed looking ready for action, I huff in annoyance because part of me already know who it belongs to, the old man cracks in fits of laughter weighing down a chair in my room

“That doesn’t look like MaNkosi’s size” it is obviously Sindis, its indecent wildness gives her off and the mere sight of it retch me because I’m at point in my life where I see myself with one woman, if it was thandos hell I would even wash it for her but because it’s my ex lover’s I throw a fleece on top of it just for decency so I can have a conversation with my old man.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 22

LONG LOST BROTHER

MUSA

To say my father is devastated is indescribable, he is broken beyond repair, not once in his life he ever thought the woman he holds dear to his heart would plan his funeral while he still breathes, all this cruelty just for money- someone once said money is the root of all problems in this world, now I'm starting to believe that too. Now looking at how shattered he is I'm regretting breaking the devastating news to him, it stings back in my soul to see him this broken all because of the woman he loves

"Mabongani, my own wife Musa?" he questions once again in a whisper, his voice keeps lowering with every question

"I need us to go see the doctor before we take any further steps, now my main priority is to make sure you're okay and get Lindy out of this scam of a marriage before it even happens" a tear roll down his cheek and my heart aches at the sight, I don't want to see my father this broken

"I never listened to my family, I loved her against all odds and even gave up on them for her" that's the power of a woman, once you love her with all you are she becomes your soul

"Tyma don't talk like that" tears freely fall down his cheeks "I'm going to fix this tyma" I console squeezing his shoulder "Maa and Mamedupe are going to pay for this" he shakes his head wiping his tears with the back of his hand

"Son I don't want you to do anything, let them be their time will come" old people!

"Baba I can't leave you in the same house with a woman who plotted to kill you, I don't care that she is my mother I want her out" he stills shakes his head

"Musa" he sighs collecting his scattered emotions "This is how we going to deal with this, I want you to go to my room now and get the lobola money from the drawer next to my bed side" I nod "And find Lindiwe, we are going straight to

the Medupes to throw their lobola back to their faces” I couldn’t be happier
“And after that you’re driving me somewhere today, cancel your drip back to Joburg son I need to make things right before I leave this world”

“A.a tyma, you were coming okay until the last sentence, you’re not leaving this world” he smiles

“Go get the money Musa” I sigh exiting the room back to the house where I find Sindi eating chicken with Thando staring at her like a guard

“Sthandwa sami” I peck her cheek “I thought chicken makes you nauseous” I direct to Sindi

“Beggars can’t be choosers” she mumbles buried in her plate “And what can I say when my baby daddy’s bitch is Hercules who wants to kill my child” thando rolls her eyes

“Chicken never killed anyone and vele you must be content with what I give you because you have no choice”

“But thandolwami couldn’t you.....” she turns to me with a look that’s already burying my soul

“Don’t annoy me Dalas” Jesus! I raise my hands in surrender. She steps up the chair and pulls me a bit further from Sindi “I’m going to leave when she is done, don’t leave before giving me proper goodbyes” She whispers wrapped around my waist, I smile holding her to my chest

“Your man is not leaving anymore, at least not today” she beams in my hold as I peck her forehead “Maybe I will leave on Thursday, I need to handle few things first” she stands on her toes to reach my lips for a peck

“Thank you Musawami” that tickles me nicely, I explode looking down at her

“NXA!” Sindi abruptly spits pushing the kitchen chair “To think you said she was just a kid kanti you were cheating on me with her” I’m not explaining myself to her “Musa you are cruel, how can you.....”

“Oh! baby mama drama, the child is not even born yet but your already dramatic”

“THANDO I’M NOT YOUR MATE” she shouts with a trembling voice

“Exactly, act your age baby mama” the one in my hold respond calmly, and I make a mini prayer looking up before I intervene, dear lord can it be 5 months later already so my baby can be born “And tomorrow we are going for DNA test, I want to make sure that your lies catch up with you sooner than you thought” oh! that brings me back, I almost forgot

“What are you insinuating Thando?” she asks arms folded glaring at her

“Exactly that baby mama, you can’t just come out of nowhere claiming to be pregnant with Dala’s baby while you were everyone’s girlfriend and.....” she turns to me “When are you going for HIV test?” I laugh pushing her back to the table

“Sit down baby” I pull a chair for her and she does “Sindi sit down too” I order

“Why don’t you pull a chair for me too” she asks arms folded standing with an attitude for days

“SIT” I sternly command, she takes the sit huffing in annoyance, so much for being the older one “Sindi thando is my woman and you’re going to respect her through out, I don’t care that she is a kid to you but you’re going to do it” she nods rolling her eyes “and wena Mankosi” she smiles “Your also going to respect Sindi, help her throughout so she can have a safe smooth pregnancy” she rolls her eyes too “And for that to happen we are all going for DNA test before I leave so we can all be at ease with this pregnancy” Sindi cringes

“The doctor said it’s not wise testing the child while I’m still pregnant, he said it might harm the baby” Haibo! This girl

“And when was that?” thando asks

“None of your business”

“Sindi why would you ask a doctor about DNA tests if you’re sure the child is mine” she swallows

“I just wanted to prove to you that the child is really yours, I knew you might have doubts” Thando laughs clapping her hands

“I guess tomorrow will put an ease to those doubts neah baby mama” Sindi just glares at her bored, this two will never be at peace

“Listen mama, I have to go but I’ll see you tonight neah” she nods

“You’re sleeping at her place?” Sindi asks

“Yes and you better remove that skanky whorish petticoat on my bed before I get back” Thando gasps looking at her

“Are you even pregnant, or you trying to get pregnant.....” I cut her

“We’ll be sure tomorrow love, listen if I don’t come back early don’t wait up for me I’ll find you at home” she nods again as I stand off the chair “I love you thandolwami” I whisper in her ear as I peck her cheek

“I love you Musawami” her response doesn’t match mine, she is a bit higher causing someone to huff. I leave them in a staring battle attending the matter that brought me in the house from the first place.

After throwing the Medupes their money on their faces I expected my father and I to drive home so we can address Lindiwe but he demanded I take him somewhere, we have been on the road for more than three hours now and it’s getting late

“Baba where exactly are we going?” I question once again, I have asked this question more than once today. He finally sighs looking out of the window

“Home, to my little brother, I need to make things right before I die?” home? Come to think of it I never heard my father talk about home

“You have a home?” he chuckles

“Every man has a home and yes I have a brother too” I have never heard him talk about his family, I didn’t even know I have an uncle “I need to make things right” he says to himself but he is audible enough for me to make out what he is saying

“What happened baba?”

“I choose my wife, I believed my wife, I put her above all but little did I know I choose a snake and now that it has bitten me, it’s all coming back that I broke my little brother’s heart, I just hope it’s not too late for him to forgive me” the drive is silent throughout, heavy silence because I have questions but because

my father seems to be deep in troubled thoughts I keep to myself and digest what he just said as we drive.

THE NEXT DAY

Waking up from my seat in the car I look at the man beside me, when he adamantly refused to see the doctor and begged me to drive him back home I had to oblige and do as told. He promised to see the doctor once he is made things right with his brother. All my life I never thought my father had a home, I thought his home was Sakhile because that's what he told us 'I was born and raised in this township' and like kids longing for a sense of belonging we believed him.

This place is damn too far, another province to be precise. He is not familiar with the surroundings and directions anymore, we have been rolling in circles all morning long until we decided to take a nap and continue when the sun rises. I gently shake him so we continue our search, I wish I had tea to offer him before we do just about anything because I know he is a tea person

"Hmmm, my legs" he complains

"They will be fine, it's the car" he nods stretching his arms "Are you okay though?" he nods once again but with a sigh this time

"Once I see my brother I will be fine"

"Who are we looking for so I can at least ask around?" he heavily sighs

"Musa Nkosi" he looks outside as I stare at him "He named you after him" he explains not looking at me but outside "I know my home Musa, it was here, I left them here" he insist once again what he is been saying before we took a nap

"Okay let me go knock and ask, they must be awake by now" he nods and I quickly climb down the car stretching my legs as I walk to the house supposedly to be his home. I gently knock the door before a teenage girl in school uniform opens the door for me, she stares at me with a look I cannot describe without saying anything

"Hello baby girl" she smiles

"Hi" sigh! Teenagers!

“Sorry to disturb your home, I’m a bit lost. I’m looking for a man called Musa Nkosi, apparently he used to live here”

“Are you his son” I nod

“Something like that”

“You look like him by the way” she says before she steps aside for me to come in “Maa” she screams “There is a hunk here looking Mr. Nkosi”

“Who is that?” a woman’s voice screams back

“Bab Nkosi Maa, Mandisa’s father” she screams back disappearing down the passage but she quickly comes back and shove a paper in my hand “Call me” I read her lips as she say, I shove the damn thing in my pants waiting on the mother

“Yebo Bhuti” an old woman comes out fastening her doek looking dressed for work

“Yebo Maa, I’m looking for Musa Nkosi, I was told he lives here” she smiles

“Wow if you weren’t younger I was going to say you’re his twin” she applies Vaseline on her lips staring at me “He sold me this house and moved to town but I can drop you at his house on my way to work, I’m a principal at a school around where he lives” I nod in relief

“Thank you so much, I’m traveling with my father and he is outside in the car, we would appreciate following you with our car to his place” she smiles before saying

“Give me ten minute, I’ll be ready”

My father is trembling, holding on to his hand I feel his palm sweating. The wonderful lady and her daughter showed us this gigantic house and said this is where Musa Nkosi lives, if they didn’t insist that I look like the man I would have thought we are lost because the house looks like it belongs to a retired prime minister’s. We buzzed the gate and asked to see Mr. Nkosi before a bunch of security attended us with questions like we are asking to see God, just when we were about to give up, one of them looked at me and asked the others to escort us to the house.

He buzzed the door once and another teenage girl wearing the same uniform as the one who dropped us here with her mother opened the door, her eyes remained on my dad like she is seeing a miracle

“Mandisa, this two gentlemen are.....” the security tries to explain but he is cut off

“Mkhulu” (Grandpa) the girl says looking at my father “Baaaaaaa” she screams still rooted at the door

“Mandisa, nana, baby” multiple male voices reply her screams running to the door, they all stand looking at us just like their sister

“Someone pinch me” one of the males say

“Did Mkhulu just resurrect from the dead?” another one asks still staring at us

“Mandisa what did I say about screaming in my house and what’s with the door” an older woman’s voice comes from behind pushing through the bunch before us “Oh! Lord” she also says in astonishment “Baba” she also screams still staring at us

“WHAT’S WITH THE NOISES IN MY HOUSE SO EARLY IN THE MORINING?” deep male voice complains “AND WHY ARE YOU ALL STANDING OVER MY DOOR LIKE?” the wife steps aside and before us stands what looks like me in ten to twenty years to come, his mouth also form an O shape in shock “Nkosi” he finally says in a whisper

“Nkosi” my father acknowledges back, he pulls my father in a tight hug staring back at me

“Is this him?” he asks still holding my father but looking at me

“Yebo Nkosi”

“Thank you bhuti wami” he let him off the hug and stare at him with a smile “You aged just like the old man” the both laugh walking further in

“Come in bhuti, siyabonga spider” (Thank you) the woman say to the security, I turn looking back at him, what kind of a name is spider

“There is crocodile too” one of the males say walking besides me “I’m Mondli by the way, the eldest, named after your father and you must be the long lost brother that.....”

“MONDLI” the lady sternly admonishes heading us to a long ass table full of breakfast of all sorts “Would you like to freshen up first or you’ll.....” Mondli cut her

“Maa, he is a man food comes first” I just smile taking a sit with people staring at me like a ghost and worse part my father and uncle disappeared in this house leaving me to be the centre of attention on this table.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 23

THROUGH EVERY MAN THERE IS ALWAYS ANOTHER SIDE

THANDO

Anger is too wee to describe how she feels at this moment, with every day that passes by without any contact she feels more enraged, she feels like a joko tea bag in a small cup of tea, even when you add more sugar the strong bitterness refuse to defuse. It's been two damn days for heaven sake and he hasn't made any contact, if this is his kind of love then its sucks and it is definitely not for her.

What exasperate her even more is the fact that they were supposed to go for DNA test yesterday but like damn period, he disappeared when he was really needed the most. But in the midst of her dawn she received fantastic news yesterday and she eagerly wanted to share her pleasant escapades with the one who owns her heart.

Finally after the longest wait she was called that there is space for her at college, she can finally begin her classes like all the other kids. She long registered but when she went to attend she was told there is no space for her, she was told to wait to be squeezed where there is space, mind you she is squeezed in another course she didn't even apply for but because this has been her dream, she is thankful regardless.

After cleaning her night away into morning sunrise, she head to the kitchen to start breakfast but it looks and smells like someone already beat her to it, just as she is still taking in the awe Vuyani walks in humming 'Ballerina girl by Lionel Richie' which is softly playing lightly from the speakers in the living room "May I have this dance" he asks already swiftly swaying alone holding on to nothing for partner, she is happy to see him this delighted, he hasn't been himself in a while. She takes his hand and allow him to lead her in a dance because she really is a terrible dancer "I'm proud of you" she beams, it warms her heart to know that for once she made her only brother proud

“It’s better than sitting at home and selling fat cakes for a living”

“That was your start and don’t forget where you started when you reach the top” she nods “You have money for transport right?” she nods again

“But you can always add sister allowance” he laughs pulling a chair for her to sit

“This is my allowance to you” he points food on the table as he grabs a lunch box placing it in his nicely packed bag pack, now that she pays attention without dancing he looks good, he is in formal wear

“Where are you going?” he smiles

“Took you long enough to notice, let’s just say if today goes well, you’ll be looking at the new Supervisor of NN Pty Ltd which will be supplying Tutuka power station with oil from now on”

“NN?” she questions in shock

“Nkosi-Ndlovu” wow she thinks

“How?” her question comes in a whisper

“Let’s just say Dalas pulled few strings and made things happen, he earned the contract through our councillor who vouched that we are locals so first preference was given to us”

“Wow I’m happy for you” he smiles grateful

“Thank you, anyway my lift is here” she pops her head through the window and see the councillor’s car parked outside the gate “He is standing in for Dalas” she nods happily

“Go murder the whole eskom” he laughs

“You also go kill college” he plants a kiss on her cheek and exit happily

It’s a beautiful day, going to be prosperous throughout, she feels in in her veins as she staffs herself with a scrumptious breakfast. A soft knock disturbs her wonderful breakfast and without even asking she offers permission for whoever it is to come in, and in walks Lililan bringing darkness in her bright day like the devil she is

“Hello” she sighs first calming her tits down, the way she is so mad she wants to jump her this instant

“What do you want Lilian” she asks with nothing but boredom

“Thando please I need to explain” she just look at her “I’m sorry I lied to you”

“Noted, now fuck off” Lilian sighs walking further in

“Thando I know I lied to you but please listen to me, I did what I did because he asked me, in fact he begged me to cover for him”

“Lilian what are you doing here” this one is definitely going to ruin her day

She heavily sighs “I need you to take him back” she can’t help but laugh, some people are way too crazy out here

“And why would I do that?”

“Thando he is not the same without you, he.....” she thinks a bit “he is not normal okay, you’re the only one who in years have managed to calm him down”

“Lilian please listen and listen carefully, this better be the last time you come here pleading your brother’s case, he was a mistake to me and a big mistake I wouldn’t want to repeat never again so tell him to find another peace because I’m not taking him back okay, now get out”

“Thando....” she cut her

“OUT LILIAN, HAU!” she sheepishly walks out looking like a rained chicken, she can’t believe the liver of this woman, to come in her home pleading her rotten brother’s case

AT THE NKOSIS

The girls are seated at home after their sour breakfast watching tv, it’s been two days of nothing, they haven’t heard from their father and brother in two days. Things like this always takes them back to their brother Bongani, whenever one leave without saying anything it always revives their fear that maybe they will never see them like their elder brother. Buhle is trying to be strong for the young ones but she is failing as her mother is also not making thing easy. Speak

of the devil she shall rise, she walks in looking sorrowful and she retires on the couch like the rest

“You haven’t heard anything?” she asks Buhle not looking at her but staring at the tv in front of them like the others

“No” sigh! She is worried, after what Mamedupe told her, she is been worried ‘Your husband and son brought the money back and told us to never sat out foot in their yard, even my grandchild they said will only know when he is born but from now on they want no friendship with the medupes, listen I have to go I can’t talk my husband is still mad at me because your husband mentioned me and you plotting to kill him’ that’s all her accomplice said before they woke up the following day to the news that Mr. Medupe beat her to a pulp, she is currently in hospital and can’t be seen at the moment.

So she is worried because she is not sure what is going on, does her husband know and how did he find out?

“Lindiwe you didn’t perhaps slip somehow?” she asks her daughter once again, she is been denying all day long

“Maa I swear I didn’t”

“Slip what out?” Buhle questions

“None of your damn business” Sindi chuckles “What’s funny whore?” Sindi looks down “Fuck off my house and don’t come back”

“Maa” buhle tries to intervene

“I SAID OUT, THAT GOOD FOR NOTHING MONSTER I CALL A SON CAME BACK FROM JOBURG TO RUIN MY LIFE, OUT, I WANT THAT THING OF HIM YOU’RE CARRYING OUT OF HERE BEFORE I DO SOMETHING I MIGHT REGRET” Sindi is naturally a coward so before she is manhandled she flies out of the house before it hits her that she has nowhere to go, she was kicked home because of this pregnancy and out of the blue all her friends turned their backs on her when she punched from the pregnancy so she definitely has nowhere to go.

BabNkosi’s words pop in her mind as she passes her house “This woman is carrying your man’s child and as MaNkosi it’s your duty to make sure that she is fed and healthy, the child she is carrying is very much yours’, perfect! She thinks turning on her steps but something catches her, a fancy car parked just

outside her home, hmmm even in her slaying days she didn't catch those kind of fish

"Hi" the gorgeous dreadlock guy greets just when she opens the gate

"Hello" she greets back with a smile that could warm the whole of Sakhile Township

"Eish I'm lost waitse, can you help me" she turns back to the car to help "I'm Lawrence Pula, what can I call you beautiful" she blushes

"Sindi, I'm Sindisiwe Ndaba" he takes her hands and plants a wet kiss on it

"Nice meeting you beautiful, aaa my wife in the car" he points back in the car and there is woman seated, she is a bit disappointed but she covers it quickly with a fake smile "She is pregnant and craving for fat cakes and acher, someone directed us to come somewhere this side but we can't seem to find the place" the woman doesn't look pregnant but maybe she is still in her first trimester

"I'm actually pregnant too and I know what it's like to crave for something, you're actually in the right place" Law raises an eyebrow

"Really?"

"Yep, you can follow me, I know the owner, she is dating my baby daddy" Law beams

"Is it?" he questions as they walk further in, Sindi nods "What's your name again?"

"Sindisiwe Ndaba" he nods repeatedly as if storing the name for further use

"Law?!" the woman from the car calls out "Don't do anything stupid" Sindi can't make out Law's expression

"I will be back Lilian" he says cold and turns to Sindi with a smile "Woman and jealousy, she thinks I will court you" Sindi laughs "but I don't blame her, you're quite the eye candy, maybe you can give me you numbers so we can talk" she doesn't wait, she quickly punches her digits before she knocks thando's house but just like someone on her way out she opens the door with her bag plugged under her arm, her eyes widen at the sight of the two villains before her and they instantly consume all the energy she has left, looks like this day is not going to be as pleasing as she had thought.

“It smells nice in here” Sindi pushes her off the entrance walking in, she will deal with her afterwards, now she has the devil in pants to deal with

“You look beautiful” she tries to shut the door on his face but he restrict her shutting with his foot “Thando please” he begs pushing his way in

“Lawrence can you please fuck off my life, please” she begs in exasperation

“I’m afraid I can’t” he tries taking her hands in his walking further in but she keeps cowering “Thando your my soul keeper, I can’t go on without your love” she is losing patience

“Hee motho! Listen I don’t love you, I never did, I just filled the void in my heart for someone with you” his face changes

“It’s one thing that your fucking this bastard thando but don’t dare tell me you love him too” she heaves a sigh

“I do, I’m sorry Law but please, this is no longer healthy, you’re a married man, you have someone and I have some.....” she didn’t see it coming, a rough back slap that causes her ear to temporarily go deaf making an annoying single stinging sound lands on her cheek, before she can recover and process what is happening, another one that causes her to go blind for a moment lands on her other cheek making her to see stars circling her sight, she falls down the floor and he punches her hard on her stomach

She runs her hands over the floor trying to find something to hold on to for support but repeated kicks throw her back to the floor kicking her abdomen like a ball causing her to sweat, right now she cannot scream, the only voice she has left is to plead for her life

“Law.....I’m.....sorry” she softly say in sobs “Please” she begs, he roughly pin his knee on her stomach pressing her to the floor, she whimpers more in pain

“You are mine, you hear that thando” he breathes over her face with nothing but anger

“Yes, yes please do....don’t kill me” she continues to beg for her life

“If you fuck with me again” he pauses pressing his knee harder and she feels something flush “I’ll kill that bastard you call a boyfriend like I killed his friend, tell him I don’t miss, my bullets always meet the target no matter what” she is

in pool of tears and blood nodding rapidly to all he says “And while at it, fucken clean up I want you all nice and fresh for me tomorrow when I come to pick you up thando, don’t make me beg for your pussy, I’m not the type to beg bitches I always get what I want” he gets off her and she instantly feels weak, she feels his steps descending and him opening the door “And one more important tiny little detail, don’t try anything sweetheart, I own the damn Sakhile police station. Make sure you accept your fate with me soon so we can raise my buddle of joy your carrying and oh! love make sure you don’t sleep with no one, your HIV positive I infected you on purpose just to cement my commitment to you, keep well for our family baby” only then she wails out loud as he shuts the door, she feels everything closing in on her, her breath hitches, her visuals gets more darker, her body sweat flushing liquid she can’t make exactly where it’s coming from. She feels soft hands touching her

“Oh! my God thando, I’m so sorry, I was scared.....he...he changed and I hid.....i’m sorry, where is your phone so I can call the ambulance” Sindi asks trembling in her touch and voice

“My....my bag” she chokes from blood coming out of her mouth

“I’m sorry” is the last thing she hears before its lights out for her “Thando your password” Sindi turns to her to find out it’s too late, she screams painfully causing neighbours to come flooding.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 24

CARRY YOUR NAME WITH PRIDE BLACK CHILD

MUSA

It's been two days of greatest woes and bliss, in all his life he is never seen his father this content, for someone whose time on earth is clocked he seems to be elated regardless of how his wife took his life right in broad daylight. In his death bed his full of joy, he looks ready to conquer whatever lies ahead in the next life if there is one.

Coming here he kept his promise to his son, a day after he had time to rejoice and unite with his brother he finally agreed to see the doctor but unfortunately their delight was short lived, they received nothing but sorrowful news from all the doctors. After thorough checks, tests and second to third opinion organised by a tormented little brother who was more than thrilled having his brother back in his life, they all announced the same thing, it is too late for BabNkosi, the poison had already digested most of his organs. Doctors are still amazed of how he made it this far, it's only a matter of time before he depart this world, any day any time could be the end.

The way he is been so consumed by his father's sorrow news he forgot he had commitments at home, he watches his father with his soul, he doesn't want to let him out of his sight and he is afraid if he leaves he might not see his father's last moments on earth.

When coming here they didn't plan on anything, he had initially thought they were going to the Medupes and going back home but little did he know he would be dragged to another province, he left his phone in his room charging and what makes things worse also is that the old man also left his phone.

Although his father is said to be dying inside, he looks perfectly fine on the outside. The way he rejoice with his brother laughing going down memory lane one would swear there is nothing wrong with the man. His brother does not want to let him off his sight, he follows his brother all over the house.

His eyes fall on the two staring at him like they are discussing him

“They are gossiping” the deadbeat stupid cousin Mondli named after his father who also follows him around like a lost puppy remarks next to him. He is the snobbish zulu man his ever seen, 27, married, educated and unemployed not because he can’t find a job but because nothing satisfies him, he is not sure what he wants to do, he did IT at school just for the sake of going to school. For an unemployed man with a pregnant wife he is too picky but then again daddy is freaking loaded so he has nothing to worry about

“Man don’t gossip, can I borrow your phone?” he frowns hesitantly taking it out of his pocket

“What are you going to do with my phone?”

“I need to check how they are doing back at home” he hands him the phone still not at ease

“Don’t be going through my pictures please, you’ll see my wife’s nudes” Musa just slightly laughs taking the phone, he may be a snob but he loves him anyway “Thank God we are summoned, I’ll organise you a phone when we get back” Musa raises his head to see his uncle waving them up the stairs. From all his cousins, he is the one that is always on his tail, there is four of them, Mondli 27, Langa 24, Sihle 21 mostly mistaken as Langa’s twin because he is too tall and lastly Mandisa 17 who is the only girl.

They both enter the study to find both the brothers and wife seated. Musa instantly searches his father’s eyes for affirmation, the atmosphere in the room is not pleasant at all, it’s like there is a dark storm hovering the room but when he sees that his father is still well he sighs taking a seat next to Mondli. For some reason even the joker Mondli seems to have digested whatever is going on because he just turned dead cold and unease like the others

“Son I have to tell you something” he hesitantly nods to his father

“First I want to apologize for not telling you this sooner but I want you to know that you will always be my son no matter what” Musa frowns staring at his father who heaves an exhausted sigh and begin “I was once a young man and I was in love, well I thought it was love but now I know better considering where

my love took me” he sighs “Like any young man in love, I made stupid decisions that destroyed my family” he gulps a glass of water and continue

“Son, when I married your mother I was a mine worker, I was the only bread winner at home, taking care of my parents and putting my little brother to school was all my duty on this earth but eventually like all the other young man I got married and my wife and I were blessed with a beautiful boy Bongani. With the growth in the family I needed more money, my wife and mother didn’t get along so I had to build my wife her own house

Being a mine worker I asked salary increase at work which resulted in more work, which also meant I couldn’t frequently come home as I used to, back then mines were not the same as now, to earn extra cash meant you had to work hard which meant not coming home for years at times but you could always sent money home monthly through post office but in my case it only took me two years to finally have enough money to build my wife her dream house so I excitedly returned back home but what I found when I got home crushed me, I found my wife heavily pregnant” Musa gasps

“Maa cheated?” uncle Musa heaves a sigh before he continues where his brother left

“Two months after my brother left, Mabongani went to collect money from post office that my brother use to send every month but that month she came back with news that broke us, Mabongani said she received a letter saying my brother was dead, she said the mine had collapsed on top of him. We believed her and because were mourning and confused we never asked to see the letter, in a week my brother’s memorial service was held and there was no funeral as yet because we didn’t have the body.

Six months after my brother’s so called death, my father started growing wary of his daughter in law, he was scared she will leave and get married somewhere else with a Nkosi child being only Bongani at that time, so like any black family I was asked to step in for my brother and like a black man I stepped to the plate and did what I had to do to keep the Nkosi children within the yard. A year later Mabongani was pregnant again and the family couldn’t be happier about the news but later during the pregnancy our joy turned in to ashes. My brother returned home well alive and healthy like he was never presumed to be dead” Musa is honestly defeated, he is staring at the two brothers in disbelief, already

he is put two and two together and came out with four “when my brother questioned his wife’s condition, Mabongani turned against family.....” BabNkosi interrupts his brother

“She told me my brother forced himself on her repeatedly and my parents did nothing about it. Because Musa growing up he had a bit of a reputation of running under every skirt back then and because I loved my wife I believed her, I took her word over anyone else, even when my father begged me to listen I didn’t instead I left, I took my wife and son and left. I started afresh in Sakhile with my little family and in two months after our move we were blessed with another son” he chuckles teary “the minute I held my son in the hospital I laughed, I laughed because he was my blood although the spitting image of my brother but he was still mine. In that moment I remembered my brother’s cries when he begged me to forgive him, he said “Bhuti Mondli if you ever forgive me please name him Musa, I hope he brings peace in your heart and protect you through fire, after fire, I hope he shield you from the evils of this world and lastly I hope he brings us back together when the time is right” so I name you Musa, I named you because I forgave my brother the minute I held you, I named you because it’s what he asked me to do and indeed you lived up to your name son, you’re the best son I have ever had and I may have not brought you to this world but your mine in every way” silence fills the room after all is said, Musa has his head buried in his hands burrowing the poor floor with his tears, Mondli squeezes his shoulder next to him, he finally sighs and asks

“Is that all?” no one knows how to answer that so the room welcomes more silence to his questions “Can you organise me that phone?” he looks at Mondli

“Sure bafo” he stands with Mondli on his tail as they exit the room leaving the brothers heavier in worry, truly speaking he is not mad, he is just shocked and he doesn’t know how to take in the news “Uright bafo?” he asks opening a drawer in his room with different kinds of cell phones, Musa frowns looking at the drawer of cell phones

“I’m fine, I’m just going to need time to take it in” he nods in understanding “What are you, a cell phone thief?” Mondli laughs

“Let’s just say if you ever need to hack your girlfriend’s phone im your guy” Musa shakes his head weighing the bed down

“And why would I want to hack my woman’s phone?” Mondli frown looking back at him

“To keep tabs on her, like know who she chats to and calls” Musa just lightly laughs taking the phone he is offered, the only number he dials is Buhle’s number because it’s the only number he knows by heart, she used this number from high school until today it’s still the same number while the others lose phones like him, it rings for a while before she picks it up

“Hello” her voice sounds a bit sombre

“Buhle” she sighs in relief

“Thank God, Musa you need to come home as in now”

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s thando, she was.....she....please come home” she sniffs

“Buhle?!” he calls out on his feet, his sister is not a cry baby whatever is going on has to be quite serious

“Please come home urgently” she drops the call before he asks further questions, he instantly knows that something is wrong, he runs to the room he was offered as his and grabs his car keys flying down the stairs, Mondli is right behind him

“Listen, tell baba I’ll come back something has happened at home I have to rush there” Mondli grabs his keys from his hand as they reach the garage

“You’re not driving in this state and we are not taking that death trap if we want to arrive where you’re going fast and alive” he brings his Audi A5 to live and Musa quickly hoops the passenger seat. The Weekend’s I feel it coming loudly blast the speakers as they fly back home, Mondli is singing along out loud shaking his body sometimes leaving the wheel to move his hand to the rhythm of the song while Musa is praying they make it safe and for whatever awaits him not be as bad as he thinks

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 25

ACCEPTANCE IS THE BEST HEALING.....EMBRACE YOUR SCARS FOR NOW
THEY ARE FOREVER YOUR SKIN

THANDO

Ever had the kind of dream where you feel like something is pressing you down even though you try so hard to fight but it keeps pressing you further down into darkness. She feels like she is between two phases, there is darkness descending and somehow light slowly emerging above, the light keeps getting brighter and brighter and she cannot take much of it anymore. A machine beeps rapidly causing her to look around the bright room and her eyes meet her brother's pained teary eyes. In a blink tears helplessly fall from his eyes, she wants to raise her hand to wipe him but her whole body feels immersed in pain.

"Neno" her slight chuckle response causes her to feel a sting of pain in her ribs "don't say anything baby I'll get the doctor" he springs out before she can even utter a word. Now taking in the room and making sense of it all comes back like a hurricane, the pieces cluster together forming an image in her mind she doesn't want to remember. She was beat into a pulp, never once in her life she thought she would become a statistic, suffer in the hands of a man she thought she loved, it's true when they say not all glitter is gold. On the outside Lawrence Pula is a true gentleman, a bit spiky here and there but what harbours in him is a true definition of a cruel monster

"NENO?!" he loudly calls out "The doctor has been speaking to you, are you okay?" she heaves a sigh and nods coming back to reality

"Ms Ndlovu" she offers her simple smile "I'm doctor Phila, how are you feeling?"

"Okay I guess" he nods with sympathy displayed all over his face

"Any pain?"

"My ribs and the lower of my stomach" he nods writing something on the file

"You remember what happened?" she nods once again "Good because I have to inform the police that you have regained consciousness so you can press

charges against this monster that did this to you” she just smiles to assure him “but before that I have some bad news to share” he looks at Vuyani as in kicking him out

“You can say anything, he is my brother” the doctor nods

“The pain in your abdomen is from the womb, you suffered a miscarriage” she just closes her eyes taking in the news, she didn’t even know she was pregnant until the fateful morning, her eyes glisten with tears when it registers all he said “but I want to assure you that we cleaned and checked any internal damages and I’m happy to inform you that you suffered none, should you consider trying again in the future you’ll be perfectly fine” she just curl her lip biting it so she doesn’t fall apart “that’s all for now, I’m going to keep you for a couple of days just to monitor you and make sure you have no internal bleeding” she nods “I’ll see you later” he says turning on his steps but she stops him

“Before you go” he turns back “can you organise me a rapid HIV test” he stares a bit before he responds

“Do you need some counselling before?” she shakes her head no “I’ll get you someone to come help you with the test” she nods to the doctor before she stares up the white ceiling after he walks out, she cannot look at her brother

“Don’t press charges” his voice brings her back

“Hmm?” only then she turns and find him still in tears, Vuyani can be such a cry baby she thinks chuckling staring at him

“Don’t press charges against him” she wasn’t even going to do it, he told her he owns the damn police so that is just a waste of breath “You want me to be here for the test?”

“Please” he holds her hand as the nurse walks in, she nicely introduces herself before she explains the test and drawing her blood, in that two minutes watching the second line form she didn’t cry, she felt she deserves all that because she went to school, she knows all about unprotected sex but because she was still high in lust she went ahead and allowed Law to infect her.

The poor nurse consoled her before updating her file, she also offered her counselling but she refused. Acceptance is the best healing, she accepted her status as it is, she brought this to herself and the only way out of this dark hole

is accepting what she put herself through and embracing her scars for they are now forever her skin

“Promise me you’ll take treatment, your all I have thando I don’t want to not have you” he says squeezing her hand

“I wouldn’t want to not see your crying face again” he chuckles pinching her a bit “thanks for being here”

“Anytime baby girl, listen I have to sort something out, I’ll be back” he says looking through a message that just beeped through his phone

“Bring me some real food when you come back” he kisses her cheek and look through her eyes

“You’re going to be okay and he is going to pay dearly”

“Please don’t do anything Vuyani just let him be” he smiles looking at his sister

“An eye for an eye baby girl, remember not to press charges when the police come” she nods with a sigh, he kisses her forehead and shut the door on his way out leaving her in her new reality, she is HIV positive and there is nothing she can do about it even though she was given a three months window period to confirm the terrible news deep down she knows the test will come back still the same

MUSA

Walking through the door he is welcomed by dullness, it’s late in the evening and for soapy time it’s quite dull unlike the other days, the sour mood in the house confirms that all is not okay. He finds everyone seated in the lounge watching tv and to his surprise no one replies his greeting, they are staring at him like they are seeing a character from a scary movie

“Oh! I’m Mondli, the long lost handsome cousin” damn! He forgot he has a photocopy behind him, after introducing himself he squashes a single couch staring back at everyone as they all follow him with their eyes “I know there is Buhle, Lindi and Mazet, but I don’t know who is who” Zinhle giggles and says

“You look like my father”

“Hence I said I’m the cousin, your father happens to be my uncle” Mabongani gasps popping her eyes

“Can we do this later, Buhle you said something over the phone” she sighs taking her eyes off Mondli

“Thando is in the hospital” he feels his knees weakening, he hold the couch for support and stare at her to continue “Lawrence almost killed her, there was blood everywhere” she buries her face in her hands sniffing

“Which hospital?”

“Standerton hospital” he nods exiting the room, Mondli is right behind him as he starts the car

“I take it thando is the one you bury Nkosi in” he raises his hands in surrender when he burns him with a displeased look “I’m sorry but she is your girl right” he just heavily sigh to confirm “Who is law?” when he keeps his eyes on the road he gets that he doesn’t want to talk about it but this is Mondli “Is he an ex or a side nigger?” Musa is flying down the road not replying, his mind is no longer here, he wants to see his girl and deal with Lawrence once and for all “My wife once cheated on me too, I was so furious I went to the guy’s apartment to confront him but damn, he wiped the floor with my ass, he mashed me into a pulp I couldn’t walk the entire week” Musa just chuckles shaking his head, he brings the radio to live to stop him from revealing more of his snobbish coward side and indeed it works, he sings along out loud moving his body with the beat

Walking into the hospital it was not as easy as he had anticipated, the nurses gave him the run around about not being visiting hours, Mondli eventually bribed the nurses and they were let in. When he walked in the room he was prepared for what he saw, yes he was told she was badly hurt but he didn’t think the image would be this horrific, he looks up exhaling to release the tightening in his chest and stop tears from falling

“Can you find your way back home” he whispers to Mondli who is also in shock

“Yeah yeah”

“Go, I’ll see you tomorrow morning they will show you my room” Mondli sighs and looks at his brother

“Call if you need anything bafo” he nods with a pained heart looking at his girl, after Mondli leaves the room he take off his shoes and gently climbs the bed not to wake her, he takes this time to look at her closely, how can a man do this to a woman, is he even human to do something so outrageous to a soul so fragile

“I failed you thandolwami” he whispers gently running his hands over her bruises but she jumps almost screaming falling from the bed, he holds her tightly “hey hey it’s me” she breathes in and out calming down “It’s me baby I’m so sorry I wasn’t there to protect you” she buries her face in his chest with him brushing her head as she weeps “I’m so sorry MaNkosi”

“He.....he.... he said he shot Dalas” she softly say in between hiccups

“What?” he cups her face and look at her teary face

“He killed my brother” anger takes over his emotions, he feels his touch trembling in range “Dalas your hurting me” he quickly releases her of his strong tight hold and regrets it, he clenches his jaws to calm down

“I’m sorry mama” he says through gritted teeth “he is going to pay” he thought he said it in his mind but he was loud enough

“Please don’t do anything, he said he owns the police, I told Vuyani the same thing” Vuyani! Shit! This might have pushed him over the edge

“Sleep my love, nothing is going to happen to you, I’m here” he assures planting a kiss on her head and she snuggles closer to his chest “he will never hurt you again” he whispers in her ear slowly brushing her back to put her to sleep, with the medication and the warm feeling it seems to be working

“Don’t....lea..ve me” she says drowsy before she closes her eyes allowing sleep to take over. Musa waits for an hour holding her tight to make sure she is asleep before he goes back home for his gun and phone, Lawrence needs to pay before morning so he can come back to his girl

It’s a one man mission plan, he is so mad he didn’t think his plan through, he just wants to put two bullets in Lawrence’s skull, one for his friend and one for his woman. Arriving back home he goes straight to his room where he finds Mondli on top of the bed naked showing his wife his hard dick through a video call, Musa closes his eyes and laughs in the midst of his sorrows

“Why don’t you knock” Mondli asks pulling the covers over his nakedness, and whose room is it anyway

“Remind me to change those sheets before I sleep on that bed” he takes a safe box on top of the wardrobe and opens it with a key from the shelve, Mondli is watching closely as he do all this

“I thought you were coming back in the morning, what are you doing?” he shades Mondli’s view when he takes the gun and quickly tuck it in his waist, he had placed the gun here because Zinhle likes washing his car when he is home so he was afraid she might find it, it is originally always kept in his car

“Taking some money to pay the hospital” he lies but when he turns to face him he has cash in his hand for him to believe, the safe does have a bit of cash “I need a bit of a favour from you?” Mondli raises his eyebrow for him to continue “You mentioned something about tracking people, can you also trace their locations through cell phone numbers” Mondli suspects something but he keeps to himself

“Yes if the cell phone is on it will take less than 30 minutes but if it’s switched off.....aaah maybe couple of hours”

“Get to work then, trace this number for me” he calls out Lawrence’s number through his cell

“You’re lucky I have my tracking device installed in my phone, who is it anyway that you want so high in the middle on the night?” he smiles a deceiving smile just to get him to back off

“Just a guy I work with, his wife is worried about him” Mondli nods looking down his phone

“While we wait for the location you can be darling and get me a cup of hot coffee, plus I’m not even getting paid for my services while I was disturbed having a conversation with my wife” Musa just shakes his head heading to the main house to make his brother payment coffee, walking in the house he remember his mother’s sinful deeds but he pushes all that to the back off his head, right now he wants to deal with Lawrence once and for all. Coming back to his room he finds Mondli now seated covered in his gown, he throws him his phone with Lawrence’s location when he gets in

“Thank you boy boy, go back to sexting, I’ll see you in the morning and please don’t ejaculate all over my gown” Mondli huffs

“It’s not sexting, it’s.....it doesn’t have a term”

“I think the word you’re looking for is porn” Mondli narrows his eyes at him as Musa takes his car keys and wave him bye closing the door. He initially thought of taking him with but this is the man who just admitted to being panel beat by his wife’s side nigger so he is a big NO but little did he know Mondli is following him, he ubered when Musa was making him coffee, as soon as he was sure he is out of side he fastened the gown tight and got in his uber following his brother to the suspicious location

Musa wonders as he parks where the location pointed Lawrence to be, what in the hell is he doing in such deserted place. He switches his light off when he approaches the place and parks from a distance. He gently walks through the bush to the isolated house standing alone in a neglected farm just outside Standerton, when he reaches the house he hears voices and a bit of faint screams. He decides to peek through the key hole but he doesn’t see anything, while he still figures how to see the faces inside he makes out a voice he knows very well from those inside, what the hell would this boy be doing here? He kicks the door open and he freezes, he was not prepared for what he sees before him

“VUYANI?!” It’s too late to try and hide it, he has a hammer in his hand smashing Lawrence’s hands

“Grootmaan” his eyes are blood shot red, he is with a group of five boys who belongs to a gang Musa and Sipho fought so hard to pull him through, it’s a group of young local boys that Musa know very well

“HAVE YOU FUCKEN LOST YOUR MIND, WHAT DID I SAY ABOUT THIS”

“He hurt my sister” he defends

“You should have waited for me to handle this, who is this?” he asks of a woman who looks dead on the floor

“His sister, an eye for an eye” Musa breathes heavily looking up, this boys have messed up so bad, he squats down holding his gun and checks the woman’s

pulse, it's faint but there, he looks up at the chained bloody Lawrence, he looks badly dealt with, even the cocky attitude is gone

"Take your boys and leave, take the woman and drop her outside the hospital, I'll finish up this dog" he says glancing at Law who is oozing blood from the nose and mouth with his fingers smashed on the table "But tomorrow I want to see you all or else I'm going to your mothers" they all quickly nod, no one wants their parents knowing they are part of a gang. Lawrence weakly laughs gaining himself everyone stare

"I told all of you I'm.....i'm untouchable.....say bye to...each other fuckers.....my my guys are here" like lightning a gunshot goes off

"GET DOWN!" Musa whispers to the guys

"IN HERE, ONLY ONE HAS A GUN" Law screams but he earns himself a hammer knock out from Vuyani that causes all his teeth to fly across the room "hmmmmmmmm" he groans in pain with more blood oozing from his mouth, Musa pulls Vuyani with his feet causing him to fall down

"STAY THE FUCK DOWN" he commands spanking his stupid head and then he crawls to the window, he stands by side peeping outside, just as he picks through the blanket curtain another gun goes off shattering the window and he quickly kneels back down shielding from bullets. They all stay down waiting for a chance to attack back but the door abruptly opens and in walks Mondli kicking a dead body of a guy wearing police uniform

"YOU. HAD. TO. FUCKEN. STAIN. MY. BROTHER'S. GOWN. WITH. YOUR. DIRTY. BLOOD" with every word he kicks the poor guy "Your twin is here" he says giving Musa his hand helping him up, everyone gets up looking at the guy they don't know but looks like Musa in every way

"You followed me"

"I wasn't about to let you have fun alone" he looks at the knocked out Law "Damn! But looks like I missed all the fun" Musa shakes his head pointing his gun in Lawrence's forehead

"I hate mess, two bullets is all I meant for him" he shoot twice and Lawrence's brain scatter across the room, he turns to the boys and throws vuyani Mondli's

car keys “I still want to see you all, take the car and drop the woman at the hospital entrance”

“What if she talks” one of the boys asks

“We can cut her tongue to prevent that” Vuyani responds causing Mondli to laugh happily

“That’s a perfect idea, i.....”

“HAI!” Musa reprimands the two already kneeling down the poor woman

“No one is taking no one’s tongue here, leave her I’ll get her help, all of you go” everyone leaves the room except Vuyani and Mondli “ALL MEANS EVERYONE” Mondli whistles I’ll make love to you by BoyzII men analysing Law’s dead body, who sings a love song in situations like this

“He was a handsome man, where do you think we should bury him” Vuyani looks closely

“Handsome boys deserves all the beauty, maybe burn him and make jelly of his ashes for his sister to eat” Mondli laughs hard and says

“I love you man” this is going to be a long night before he makes it to his woman in the hospital, he stares up at the two stupid’s in front of him

“Let’s get rid of this bodies, I have to be in the hospital when my woman wakes up”

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 26

THE LENGTHS WE GO THROUGH FOR LOVE

MUSA

It's been one heck of a night, walking down the hospital corridor at exactly 9 o'clock he feels like another disappointment. He failed to make it in time before morning dawn as he had anticipated because getting rid of five bodies is not child's play and on top of that four of those were supposedly police officers. He had to call in his big man who introduced this notorious life to him by helping him clean his money and like a bored retired criminal he is, Mr. Mohapi was more than happy to wrestle in mud with pigs.

They waited the entire night for him to come with his people to help them clean the mess up, the hardest mess was the police guys because obviously they had to be found or else the feds would be involved in their disappearance, another pothole was Lilian, Mr. Mohapi took her with assuring he will have someone help her heal and wipe her entire memory, she will be like a blank book waiting to be written obviously he is not happy about this but he cannot risk getting Vuyani and the boys in trouble so he rolled with the punches he can bear.

After the mess was spotlessly cleaned he went home to freshen up, clean-up for his girl leaving Mondli and Vuyani conversing like old crooks who have known each other for decades. He picked up a bunch of roses on his way and a plastic of goodies, his girl is a foodie, he knows that she can eat until the sun dies. There is laughter as he approaches the room, he wonders who it could be because his sisters promised to come at lunch time.

He stands by the door astonished by what he sees before him, this is something he never thought he would see at least not in this life time. Both his baby mama and woman getting along. Sindi is lying on the bed next to thando and they are both giggling buried in tablet which they seem to be browsing through. He clears his throat to earn himself attention from the tablet and when they both see him, thando smiles happily stuck in bed while Sindi jumps throwing her arms around his neck in a tight hug

“Thank God you’re here” she says still hugging him and he questions thando with his eyes, she laughs shrugging her shoulders

“I’m glad to be here too, what are you doing here?” he asks gently pulling her off his neck

“To see thando, what else would I be doing here?” he runs his eyes from her to thando who doesn’t look like she minds all this, he sighs walking further to his girls and he crushes her in a hug and whispers

“I’m sorry” he brushes her back gently still in her hold

“It’s okay” she whispers back “What do you have for me” he frees her from the hug and give her roses first, she sniffs them with a smile but her eyes are stuck on the plastic of goodies, he laughs giving her the plastic she eagerly wants “thank God the food sucks here, Vuyani promised to bring me food but he didn’t come back” she munches on steers burger meal but Sindi’s eyes makes it hard to enjoy her food “my food too?” she asks looking at sindi who quickly nods “Damn! mi” she gives her half eaten burger and looks for something in the plastic, Musa is still taken back by all this

“Am I missing something?” he looks between the two now friends out of nowhere

“Sindi please give us a minute” thando asks looking at sindi who takes the tab of yoghurt from the plastic first and turn on her steps but she stops by the door and look back at Musa

“I don’t have transport money to go back and I’m also hungry” Musa huffs looking at thando, she nods with a giggle for him to give her what she demands. He gives her three 200 notes and she smiles waving the cash in his face and then placing it in her boobs “Later thando, I’ll send you the second book to keep busy”

“Konje what’s the name of the page?”

“Simple escapes reading, his forever”

“Is the son going to turn into a reptile vele” Musa is lost in whatever is being discussed

“I’m still halfway through the book but it looks like it, Vula was warned never to kill again and he killed the man that kissed his wife so....”

“Oh my god, can you send it now? I.....” Musa interrupts pissed

“Enough, your excused Sindi” she rolls her eyes banging the door on her way out

“That was rude” he looks at her in disbelief

“Since when are you too friends?” she rolls her eyes patting a vacant space next to her

“Come sit down and I’ll tell you everything” he takes the offered seat and look at her suspiciously “She is the one that helped me and ever since that she is been so nice and caring” he chuckles “and she currently has no where to stay so she is crushing at my home” he raises his eyebrow in question “Your mom kicked her out” she explains

“WHAT?” she nods assuring him “Damn Maa!” he pulls her to his chest “I’m sorry my love I’ll fix it” she smiles looking up at him

“You cannot fix everything you know that”

“For you I’ll fix just about anything, I’m so sorry sthandwa sami I wasn’t there when you needed me” she brushes his arms around her

“You’re here now and that’s all that matters” he kisses her forehead and stare at her for quite some time with nothing but spark of love in his eyes “What?” she blushes

“Your beautiful even in your worst, you still sparkle in my heart” she raises her lips for him to peck and he does so effortlessly

“But where were you vele in that two days” he laughs cupping her face planting multiple kisses all over her bruised face

“You won’t believe sthandwa sami” she probes with a look “I found out my father is dying and then I also found out I have another father who happens to be my father’s brother” she looks so confused staring at him, he pecks her lips with a chuckle “that’s a story for us to gossip about when you’re out of this place” she smiles, he is finally joining the club “Now tell me, how are you feeling? And what are the doctors saying?” she shifts uncomfortably, there is so

much to tell him and the peak being her status but she is scared, what if doesn't understand?

"Aaaah nothing much except that I was pregnant and lost the baby" he frowns in shock

"What?" his voice comes in a whisper, she nods to confirm him that he heard correct "I'm so sorry mami, do you need to speak to someone?" she laughs rolling her eyes

"I'm a black girl, nothing can break me, I have one favour to ask you though" she looks quite serious

"I'm listening" she takes his hands and sighs

"Please take me with you" he looks at her lost "I'm scared he is going to come back and finish me off like he promised, please don't leave me I'll ask for transfer at school I'm sure they have another campus that side" he smiles happily, such a dog of a man, not all bad things bring sorrows after all, he is been asking her to come with him and he was denied so many times, he pecks her forehead happily

"My place is with you thando, you don't need to ask. But school? What school are we talking about?" she dramatically rolls her eyes

"Angisho when you were too busy for your girlfriend I was busy obtaining my masters to phds" he laughs

"In two days" she nods laughing back "I love you thando" he pulls her in another hug brushing her back

"I love you too musawami" her expression says otherwise, she doesn't know how to reveal her status to him

LINDIWE

Ever since the fateful day when lobola was returned she has not heard from her fiancé in days and regarding how their engagement was broken off she was okay with not hearing from the guy. But today seems like he woke up on the wrong side of the bed, she woke up to missed calls of Theo and she didn't bother returning them. She makes her way to the kitchen after freshening up for

breakfast but she walks into a lounge occupied by Vuyani and Mondli. It still odd for all of them seeing someone who looks so much like Musa but because he is like a solvent, he dissolves in just about any situation

“Are we that cute?” Mondli brings her back putting his feet on top of the table, if Mabongani was to see him, hell out break loose

“No your both ugly, where is my brother?” her eyes are stuck on Vuyani who is also burning her back with his stare

“Here” he points himself

“Oh really?” he nods, she weighs the couch down rubbing her now visible bump
“well dear brother can you please be a darling brother and make your little sister and niece some breakfast” Vuyani laughs while as Mondli frowns

“Shouldn’t you be the one making us breakfast?”

“Well my brother always makes me breakfast and if you’re going to win my love you need to do the same, get to work bhuti Mondli I’m hungry tuuu” he sighs standing to the kitchen

“Oh! I love my eggs well-made and please use butter when you make mine” Vuyani informs Mondli who huffs looking at him not pleased. Now that Mondli went to prove his cooking skills in the kitchen it’s just the two love birds sitting in awkward silence “I’m sorry about your engagement?” he breaks the uncomfortable silence

“Are you?” she asks with a chuckle and he laughs shaking his head

“Not at all” he stares, looking at her without saying anything while there is so much he wants to say

“Staring is rude” he smiles leaning closer to her couch

“You look beautiful” she looks away but he burns her with his stare until she looks back at him “does she treat you right?” he points her bump with his look

“She is perfect except when I feed her eggs” she brushes her bump looking down at it, she is brought back from bonding with her child when he says

“We need to talk, I can’t do this hide and seek anymore, I want to officially make you mine” she stills taking in what he just said, this is finally happening, she can finally be with the man she is been longing so long to wake up in his hold

“I wanna be yours too” it comes in a whisper but he heard her loud and clear, there is that sparkle forming in his eyes, this are the tears of happiness for him, his knee hits the carpet as he puts his hands on her thighs aiming for her touch but.....

“Breakfast is served” Mondli places a tray on the table without realising the tension he walked in on

“What’s this” she is not pleased

“Breakfast” there is a loaf of bread on the tray and longlife milk

“You have got to be kidding me” she says exiting the room to make her won breakfast but as lazy as she is, she decides otherwise when she has to start. Kota will do. It’s days like this when she misses thando’s fat cakes and achar, that girl can cook just about anything, she thinks walking down the street to Shake’s Kota king. As she continues walking she feels like she is being looked at, so she turns to inspect and indeed Theo is walking right to her, this moron is about to ruin her day before it even starts

“Lindiwe” he walks up to her

“Theo” she stops and stare at him with a blank expression

“Lindiwe you cannot ignore me forever, we need to talk” she sighs

“Theo I’m going to say this once and it better be the last time, please please leave me alone, you and I are over, I’m no longer in love with you so please move on, be happy, find someone who makes you happy, someone who makes your heart skip when you see them, okay” he just stares “I’ll contact you when your child is born, only then will talk” he huffs with a pinched nose

“You’re crazy lindiwe if you think you’re going to keep me out of my son’s life” stupid aren’t those that collects papers on the streets only

“Didn’t you hear a word I just said” she shouts “I SAID I WILL CALL YOU WHEN SHE IS BORN”

“What about the pregnancy? I want to be part of his journey to life” this is unbelievable, the man hasn’t even attendant a single doctor’s appointment with her but out of the blue he wants to be part of the pregnancy

“You’re a waste of breath, a waste of life really” she surrenders leaving him on the spot but he holds her arm to stop her

“Okay fine you win lindiwe, can I at least touch my son one last time before you take him away from me” she sighs letting him be, she just wants him out of his sight. He runs his hand on her bump for a while mumbling things only he can hear and when she still stunned by all this, he pulls her in a hug unexpectedly, she tries to fight him but he is too strong “One last hug lindiwe” he whispers in her ear and she lets him be. A minute later he releases her of his forced hug

“Goodbye theo” she turns on her steps leaving him on the same spot not even bordered. When he is sure she is out of sight he looks around inspecting if there is anyone watching him before he kneels down and pinches soil of her foot print where she was standing, he seals the soil in a black plastic

“You will be Lindiwe Medupe, whether you like it or not” he reaches for his phone making a call as he also turns on his steps

“Maa, I have the soil” he informs when his mother picks up

“Good boy, call mabongani too she will give you her hair, tomorrow when I get released will go straight gogo”

“Don’t worry Maa, I have her hair too we don’t need mabongani anymore” he says looking at the hair in his hand he cut while giving her a hug

“Good boy, they are all going to pay, including your father” he bits his mother goodbye and enter his polo driving off

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 27

NOT ALL OF US END UP WITH OUR SOULMATES

THANDO

It's been a week since she was discharged from the hospital, everything has been going smoothly with her settling back home and healing. As planned today she and Dalas are moving to Joburg, it's a bit sudden for her considering she wanted to do things differently after the whole Law hype lust, but because she fears for her life as she thinks he is still out there, she took a leap of faith, maybe Dalas is meant for her and he won't let harm come her way so she gave moving to Joburg with him a chance but she thinks as soon as she gets on her feet she is moving out, if only she knew the man she is in love with

They have been on the road now for two hours and she feels a bit drowsy, the ARV's she has started taking immediately and her natural fatigue to long distance travelling is adding to her exhaustion so she pulled the chair down and lied a bit, only now she feels wet kisses all over her face she opens her eyes to find Dalas breathing all over her face

"We are here" his nose is brushing on hers the way he is so close staring in her sleepy eyes "I can't believe you made me travel this long lonely road alone while you were right by my side" she chuckles pouting her lips to his for a peck

"I'm sorry, help me up" he pulls her chair up and feels her temperature putting his hand on her forehead

"Are you okay? You look a bit pale and your sweating" she smiles to assure him but he wants more "THANDO?!" his voice comes out more firm

"I'm fine, you know I hate long distances" he sighs with a nod and opens his door stepping off the car, he turns to her side and opens hers too. He gives her his hand and she takes it stepping off but she stumbles a bit as if she is dizzy

"Ha.ah thandolwami are you okay" he worriedly enquire staring at her

“I’m fine Dalas jeez” she snaps but sighs immediately regretting it “I’m sorry, I’m just.....you know I hate long distances traveling” he pulls her to his chest and kisses the top of her head wrapping her in a hug

“I’m sorry too I’m just worried, the dizziness, the vomiting, the sweating and nightmares, you have been a mess sthandwa sami since the incident, I just..... I feel like you are not 100% okay, like I’m missing something” he is brushing her head looking down at her

“I’m fine I promise” she leans on her toes to reach his lips for a peck, he smiles and peck her nose back

“Come let’s go, I’ll get our bags after you settled in” he pulls her hand to a beautiful house that looks like something owned by a CEO

“What exactly do you do Dalas?” he laughs opening the door with him pressed tightly behind her, he pushes his bulge to her behind so she feels it but she quickly tries to shift, he holds her in place and whisper

“kungani kubukeka sengathi wesaba ukubhejwa?” (Why does it look like you’re afraid of dick) she chokes instead of replying and he dies in laughter opening the door “Welcome home, our home” they both stand still in awe, he too is taken back, he bought the house before going home but he didn’t get the chance to furniture it. He only left his bags in what looked like the master bedroom and asked Dimpho to take care of the rest and sent him an invoice for all the expenses “DAMN!” he exclaims shocked

“This is..... wow.... I’m lost for words, this is top billing staff” she untangles herself from his grip running her hands and eyes all over the exquisite kitchen they just walked in on “How many rooms do you have in this house?” he didn’t hear her because his eyes are in the lounge where he just caught sight of a clutch bag that looks exactly like the one Dimpho would own. This girl better have not started her flirtatious ways with him, especially not now with his woman here “Hello, earth to dalas” she snaps her fingers over his sight

“Sorry love, let me show you around then I’ll fetch our bags” he takes her hand and leads the way opening every room, they are both in awe with the beauty of all rooms

“Hai! I didn’t know you have such a beautiful feminine taste” he clears his throat and lets that slide leading her to the final room, he opens the door and grit his teeth in silent fury

“Supri.....” she stops herself when she sees the woman by his side, Dimpho is on top of the bed with nothing but a sexy black lingerie on her. Everything is awkward and silent, this has to be the worst home coming surprise ever “Musa who is this?” Dimpho asks grabbing a white gown on top of the bed covering herself. Thando’s eyes are running from dalas to the sexy dimpho on top of the bed, if she wasn’t so worn out because of her body adapting to ARV’s she would jump this girl right this moment

“I will be in the lounge” she says squeezing Musa’s hand that’s holding hers but he holds her firmly as she tries to leave

“No need, you’ll be right here” he challenges dimpho with his displeased look and she squirms a bit uncomfortable, he eventually speaks extremely bored “What’s this dimpho?” he points the scattered roses and champagne bottles with chocolates on top of the bed “Didn’t we have a conversation about this?” his voice is laced with annoyance

“I’m sorry, I thought.....” she can’t finish her sentence with him looking at her like a piece of rubbish

“YOU THOUGHT WHAT? HMM? DON’T YOU HAVE DIGNITY?” he shouts and she looks nowhere but him, a bit ashamed holding tightly to the edges of her gown “FUCK OUT OF HERE AND LET THIS BE THE LAST TIME YOU PULL A STUNT LIKE THIS” she doesn’t wait to be told twice, she is never seen him this deadly. She takes her nice silky dress on the ottoman and drops her gown putting back her dress on, Musa huffs in irritation and says “I’m honestly being tested today” he holds thando’s hand out of the room but she stands her ground firmly, he leaves her by the entrance hoping she might deal with this the way he knows her to

“You must be Dimpho” she sarcastically say folding her arms to her chest, she knows her very well, she is all over Musa’s timeline and there is that altercation of her asking thando tips on lingerie, she glares at her as she fixes her beautiful dress over her sexy petite body

“And we finally meet, thando the girlfriend” she chuckles marching to the door, she looks at thando from head to toe and say “Free advice, if you’re going to be with a man of that status, level up sweetie and loose that FNB stadium around your waist” she frowns in shock touching her belly, is she that fat? Dimpho flies out of the room while she still inspects her belly

VUYANI

Walking back in the house he misses thando, it’s only been a day since she left but her absence is felt. He throws his car keys on the table and weigh down the couch completely exhausted. Musa gave him his BMW 3 series while he took the black Mercedes c class his uncle bought him which was brought by the guys who came to pick the girls last week to meet their uncle. He hasn’t seen Lindiwe since then and today when she called asking to meet up, he dropped everything and came home early. He is over the moon that he can finally love her the way he wishes.

When his fatigue wears off, he stands from the couch and decide to put on his shorts and vest while he prepared her something light. She walks in while he is still busy in the kitchen, he turns with a content smile walking closer to her but she steps back, that’s unlike her. he stops on his steps and look at her confused, she is a bit.....he can’t find the correct word for how she looks and feels, this is her but not his her.

“MaNdlovu” her expression is plain, usually she blushes like she is the only one meant to blush when he calls her with his last name, she doesn’t respond instead she walks further in and passes him to the kitchen chairs

“Come sit down vuyani” she sounds so cold, what did he do? He thinks inwardly doing as told “I’m not going to beat around the bush with this so listen attentively vuyani, I’m fixing things with my fiancé and the wedding is.....”

“Huh” he thinks his hearing has deserted him

“Listen let me finish, I’m getting married and we need to stop cheating, I love my man and I’m making things right with him” he feels like his head has been hit by a mountain

“What are you saying?” he asks shaking his head hoping all this is a bad dream

“I’m saying we are over” he chuckles

“But we never started” she huffs irritated

“I’m saying we can no longer fuck” this one cause him to laugh but he compose himself

“Are you being for real right now?”

“Yes as a matter of fact the wedding is back on” she says brushing her circled finger

“Wow” he rests his head on the chair looking up “Thank you Lindiwe, thank you for making me love you and breaking my heart when I thought we can finally be together without any obstacles” he sniffs still looking up “I’ll definitely keep my distance but please remember what I once said to you, even if it’s ten years later don’t be afraid to come knock my door and mend my heart that you deliberately shattered and left in pieces” he stands and peck her forehead for a long time before he goes to the door and open for her “Goodbye MaNdlovu” she nonchalantly leaves the house without looking back at the mess she left behind, that man loves her, she is his world “I hope you remember home when you’re ready to come back” he mumbles looking at the love of his life leaving him, this is hard for him but he accepts that not all of us will end up with our loved ones, maybe theirs was that kind of love. Loving someone you can’t have.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 28

SOME TRUTHS WILL BE TOLD SOME WILL REVEAL IT'S SELF

THANDO

Some of life's lessons are hard to bear even for strong-willed people. Some things life throws at us are just way too much to withstand. She looks at the man sleeping peacefully beside her, earning for that peaceful sleep so bad, since a week ago she hasn't had any in a while but that's not what's troubling her the most. The pain in her heart is telling her the truth, how will he take it? What if he leaves her? These questions and many others roam in her mind every time she thinks of coming clean.

An alarm disturbs her troubled mind and she jumps fast before it wakes him, she is a bit baffled about why he is still in bed while he was so eager to come back claiming to have a lot of work, but it's 9 o'clock in the morning and he is still in bed with her. She chooses to take her one pill medication at his time because she thought nine best suits her alone time in the mornings but because God always has his own plans for us, this man is still right here next to her.

She tiptoes to her bag and opens it with ease so it doesn't make noise, her head keeps looking back to check if the coast is still clear as she opens the noisy pills container. She tiptoes further to the bathroom to have some water, another mountain to conquer, she is one of those who don't know how to take pills so taking this huge one is always a struggle. She tries a couple of times before it finally goes down and she immediately leaves the bathroom to find Musa awake stretching his arms on the bed.

"Mami" he greets with a smile before she even weighs the bed.

"Papi" his morning laughter is still beautiful, she stares as he dies to being referred to as 'papi'.

"Dad will do thank you, come here" he wraps his arm around her waist making her drop to his chest "How was your first night with your man in our house?"

“A house clothed by his whore” she remarks, the whole mood immediately drift back to yesterday, they didn’t talk about it because she wanted to just eat and sleep

“Sthandwa sami I’m really sorry about what happened yesterday, I had given dimpho the keys to furniture and decorate the house only not also to beautifully decorate herself too in my house” he chuckles thinking back of what they walked in on while she takes in what he just said

“So you think she is beautiful?”

“What?... Yea.... No.... I mean.....” she cuts him from the hurried exasperation growing in her

“Yes or No? Which one is it Dalas” he picks the annoyance in her latter question

“She is a beautiful girl in her own way but she is not beautiful for me, my beauty is here” he squeezes her waist “right by my side”

“Don’t soften me dalas I still don’t like that girl” he laughs

“I know and I will try my best to keep her away from you”

“Thank you, I don’t want to find myself breathing the same air with that bitch, she is rude and disrespectful as fuck” he heaves a sigh

“Okay Mankosi, your heard loud and clear, can I get my morning kiss now and stop yelling at me for people who are satan’s agents who came to destroy us” she steals a quick peck on his lips but he frowns “I’m not Vuyani thando” she cracks up in laughter

“I don’t kiss vuyani’s mouth.....” she keeps silent meet way trying so hard to fight vomit she feels coming up her throat, she signals him with a finger that she will be back and rush to the bathroom where she pukes immediately when she opens the toilet, she pukes for a while until she sees the pill she just took also come back. Damn! This means she is going to have to take another one again, this are all the after effects of her treatment, she was warned off all this signs for at least two weeks maximum, if her system still rejects the medication by then she has to go back. She walks back after cleaning up to find Musa seated on the bed facing at her direction.

“I’m taking you to a doctor” that came out more like a command or an order and with that expression on his face she cannot argue. She instead nods and walk back to the bathroom for her morning bath, her mind is racing a million miles thinking what will the doctor say but she keeps consoling herself with doctor patient confidentiality, unless he wants to get in with her..... Musa walks in the middle of her shower opening the door, she pops her eyes when she turns to find him naked behind her “I still didn’t get my morning kiss” he devours her lips before she can even deny him, his hand wrap around her waist picking her to his toes while the other one slippery travel way down town to her booty, she pulls back when she feels the kiss getting heated “What’s wrong? Is it still painful?” he touches the side of her ribs that were bruised by the kicking she was subjected to

“Yeah! Maybe in a week time it will heal” he sighs nodding because he is sexually frustrated as hell, this means another week of no sex “Let me finish up and go make the bed” her lies are choking her, she is totally healed she just doesn’t know how she is going to sleep with him without telling him the truth.

He finds her in the lounge staring at the television like it owes her answers, this worries him a lot because lately she is been lost in her own mind. He heaves a heavy sigh and sits next to her but she jumps scared, she is a bit jumpy after the incident but it’s quite understandable, she is been through a lot. He takes her hands and change position to sit before her on the table, he gently squeezes them staring at her with nothing but worry

“Khuluma nami my baby, what is wrong?” (Talk to me...) he pleads

“Dalas i....” he interjects her

“Thando please, I can feel and see you’re not totally okay talk to me” she forces her eyes to look in his, there is sincerity there, something that assures that her fragile heart will be well taken care of by this man, no matter the mountains they have to climb, this man will hold her through all “Please baby” he wipes the tears streaming down her cheeks

“I.... I.....don’t know how..... to say...it” she says in between sobs, he chuckles still wiping her tears

“Just say it, then we’ll fix it”

“It can’t be fixed” he smiles pecking her two teary cheeks

“Then we’ll get through it together, this is me thando, I’m your brother before your lover, it’s my duty to protect you and hold your hand through fire, after fire” she composes her episode heavily sighing to calm down

“Promise you’ll say something immediately after I tell, I need you to say something” he laughs a bit

“What am I supposed to say?” he jokingly asks

“I’m serious Dalas just say something, anything that’s in your mind” he nods and look at her to break the news, she heavily sighs looking up and say “I’m HIV positive” his lips firstly curve in to a smile thinking it’s a joke but he immediately stills and freezes glaring at her when he realises she is not kidding “Dalas say...something” she begs in pull of tears but he sits in shock with his mouth open agape, she yanks her hands off his hold and storm to back to the bedroom weeping as she leaves him sited in the same position

LINDIWE

After so long in a while she feels rejuvenate, the spark came back out of nowhere and with him it feels like she belongs. Because they are still fixing things she slept here with the help of her mother who gladly didn’t have any problem with her coming to spend the night with her fiancé, she tries to think of why she was so mad and wanted to leave him but she cannot come up with the answer, she must have been really blind to want to leave the man who loves her this much.

He walks in talking on the phone but quickly drops it when he realize she is awake

“Hey babe” she smiles from the bed

“I can’t believe my sick mother had to make me food while you’re in here sleeping like you’re on holiday” he complains “what kind of a wife are you going to be lindiwe?”

“But babe it’s not me, it’s your son” that replaces the frown on his face with a smile

“Has he started moving yet?” she nods

“I can’t believe you kept me from my boy’s growth lindiwe”

“I’m sorry babe, I was just mad but we are fine now” he nods and peck her cheek
“good, your boy is hungry now, can you please make us something to eat” he chuckles

“You must be kidding me, you want me to go make you food?” she nods “I ain’t pussy lindiwe, go make yourself some food”

“But you used to make me food every time I’m with you” he thinks back and come up with not even a single incident where he made her something to eat
“You always make me breakfast sthandwa sami” she tenderly say staring in his eyes looking for something that seems to be lost

“Stop annoying me, go make yourself some food” she steps down the bed and takes his gown covering herself, she stops midway to the door when she is asked..... “Aren’t you going to make the bed first?” this is one of her lazy habits but she turns back and make it silence, something in her is totally wrong but she cannot pinpoint exactly what it is “You see, perfect, nothing was going to eat you from making the bed and while at it go wash your mouth you stink”

“But I don’t have a toothbrush here I only rinsed my mouth”

“Use mine I’ll buy another one today, lord knows I cannot use the same toothbrush as you with that stinky mouth” that hits hard, she fights back the forming sparkle and goes to the bathroom, she stares at herself in the mirror for a while, there is something missing in her, a void she cannot explain.....

“Make it snappy lindiwe I want to take you maternity shopping, I can’t have you dressing my child in your rags” he screams from the bedroom and she immediately washes her mouth and leave him on the bed texting with a smile on his face.

In the kitchen she finds the badly beaten MaMedupe with her daughter who is currently here taking care of her mother

“Dumelang” her sotho is not totally there but she tries, Mamedupe smiles whole heartedly, she has always been nice to her but she cannot say much about Rose (Theo’s sister) who seems to not like her much

“Makoti you’re awake, sit and let me make you something to eat” she smiles taking a seat next to Rose whose nose is pinched in annoyance

“No eggs please Maa, I can’t stand eggs lately” Mamedupe turns with a frown

“How is that possible? All Medupes love their eggs and milk like no other” she just shrug because she really doesn’t know why her child doesn’t like eggs “Hmk! That’s strange” she dismisses it going back to preparing her food “Theo tells me the wedding is back on, have you picked the date yet”

“No Maa, I still have to convince my father, uncle and brother first”

“But we don’t need them” Rose says with a pinched nose like there is something smelly in the kitchen “You too can just sign and we’ll make a ceremony to introduce as a Medupe that’s all”

“Yes, if they don’t come on board don’t stress my dear you two will be perfectly fine” Mrs. Medupe adds putting a plate of food in front of her, she waste no time and devour it immediately.

After the awkward breakfast she was taken shopping as he had suggested, he was so jolly while they were bouncing from store to store buying clothes for her and his son and now they just retired at food court for lunch

“Your mom was asking about the wedding date” he smiles

“I was thinking we do it this month before you get too huge to ruin my pictures, I don’t want my wedding picture ugly because of your big belly” that hurts but she smiles, she doesn’t even know why she is smiling “And i.....” he stops meet sentence staring at his friend that is approaching them, he looks a bit unsteady.

“Hey lindi” the friendly thabiso (Theo’s friends) greets her standing

“Hey, I haven’t seen you in a while, where have you been?” thabiso laughs

“Aaa lindi I’m still around, nursing my broken heart” she forms a pity face

“Askies, sit, tell me all about it” he drags an empty chair “You don’t mind right love” lindiwe ask Theo touching his hand but he removes his hand from the table immediately, he just shakes his head to approve

“You’re sweating Theo, are you okay?” thabiso nicely asks theo who just nods like he lost his voice

“You were telling me about your broken heart” lindiwe breaks the staring battle between two best friends, thabiso smiles turning back to her

“The person who broke my heart is getting married to some else, no explanations, no nothing, I just heard he got the girl pregnant and sent his uncles to pay lobola for her” she frowns with her mouth open agape

“Get out of here? She is a bitch” lindiwe remarks shocked

“Girl you missed what I said, it’s not even a she, he is a he” Theo chokes beating his chest repeatedly

“Oh my God, you’re gay?” lindiwe asks shocked

“All the way sweetie, I even have the bastard’s name tattooed on my ankle, you want to see?” she immediately nods but Theo roughly pulls her arms up making her stand

“That’s enough, let’s go wena” he takes notes and throw them on the table
“You’ll buy yourself something sthabi” he gently say

“You lost the right to call me that a long time ago” he drags lindiwe away before he says any more damaging information

“You were rude to your friend, he was just.....” she doesn’t finish he interject shouting

“CAN YOU FUCKEN SHUT UP, FOR ONCE JUST SHUT THE HELL UP” everyone walking around them in the mall stares at them, he huffs leaving her there to take in all the embarrassment.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 29

A MAN'S JOB IS TO HELP HIS WOMAN EMBRACE HER SCARS AND WEAR THEM WITH DIGNITY

MUSA

Ever fall in deep thoughts that all around you stills and you just focus on the words echoing in your head. I have always been one to fix thing but this one is way above me, I would say it's a dream but no, it's not. How did this one happen? How did I miss this? Who infected her? If my memory and maths vocab serves me correctly I think thando has had only two boyfriend in her life, the first one being the high school bastard that broke her and the imbecile Lawrence dancing with his useless underground gang right now, how did she.....my ringing phone disturbs my thoughts that are currently in coma due to the unsolved equation that Thando just dropped on me. This man is trying so hard, he calls almost everyday

'Hello' I still don't know how to react around him

'Gama unjani?' (name) he calls me Gama because we share the same name

'I'm fine malume, how is my father?' I know not referring to him as my father hurts him but I hope he understands that it will take time for me to see him as my father, right now he is just an uncle

'He is fine Gama, well taken care of, he only complains of your sisters he wants them to come this side every weekend'

'I'll speak to them' we fall into minutes of silence, this happens just about every day, he calls and keeps quiet

'How do you find the car' thank god, the silence was starting to feel uncomfortable, two grown ass man listening to each other breath, a.a that's weird

'It's amazing and I love it, thank you'

'No sweat my name, listen Musa if you ever need anything or want to talk or vent to someone know I'm here as your father, your uncle and even your friend'

'Thanks name, I'll keep that in mind' he laughs

'I think I like you also calling me name more than malume' I laugh back

'Can I ask you something ke friend, right now I want you to be a friend'

'Anything, anything my boy' he was coming okay until he called me boy, but that's a debate for another day

'What would you do if the woman you love more than anything told you she is HIV positive?' there is brief silence

'Do you see your future with this woman?' I tartly remark yes, thando is the woman I want to spend the rest of my life with no matter what 'Then stand by her side, hold her through it, don't judge or criticize her, be her peace and her doctor if need be, make sure she keeps healthy for my grandchildren' I have realized a bit of Mondli is in him, he has a tendency of saying stupid things at the end of his comments, what grandchildren is he talking about now?

'Thank you name I'll definitely take your advice but except the grandchildren one, I already have a baby mama that's driving me crazy' he laughs hard

'Nkosi tells me your baby mama and woman are always at each other's throats'

'Yoooooh! You have no idea, one day I will bring them both so you can see for yourself'

'Why don't you come with them this weekend and the girls will be here, we'll make it a small family weekend'

'Eish i....' he interjects

'Please Musa, Nkosi doesn't have much time left on this earth, it would mean a lot for him to see his family together' everyone knows I can do anything for my father, blackmail me with my father I will jump to whatever you demand

'Okay I'll come, greet everyone for me'

'Thank you name, Mondli wants to speak to.....' he doesn't even finish I hear shuffling like he just abruptly took the phone from him

'Listen I just sent you my cv, it should be in you inbox any minute now, your hiring me' this idiot doesn't take a break yazi

'Mondli I'm not hiring, I don't have any post available at the moment'

'I don't care, your my brother and your giving me a job, fire someone if you have to' haibo! 'Right pops' I hear a big yes in the background

'I'll look at your CV, but I'm not promising any.....'

'I'll take the CEO position thanks bro you're the best.....'

'Mondli....' I try to admonish

'Your finishing father's airtime Musa, I'm coming with Tshepo please prepare a room for us and please load your fridge you know all her cravings' Jesus!

'You don't even know where I live'

'Oh! Dear brother by now you should know I know just about anything, see you soon bafo' he drops the call before I can even breath, why is he so much? I think Langa and sihle are my favourite this moron is too much

I make my way to the bedroom to fix the mess I created, she specifically begged me to say something but I zoned out on her, so much for dealing with things together. She is holding my laptop on top of the bed dead in laughter, I'm confused because I thought I would find her in a sour mood, she tries to contain her laughter when she sees me but fails dismally, whatever she is watching must be quite amusing to tickle her like that

"Thandolwami" she raises her hand in my face when I sit next to her and just continue to laugh

"Oh! My god, your brother, is he okay upstairs mara?" I'm lost "Your brother just sent you a cv and I opened it by mistake, look" she turns the laptop to my sight and I can't help but laugh too, is he being for real right now "I love the nationality part" nxa! I can't believe this moron, I shut the laptop and put it aside

"Can we talk my love" she shakes her heard no "Okay just listen ke...."

“Dalas I don’t want to talk about it I have.....” it’s time to force matters if she doesn’t want to talk, she tries to fight me as I lie on the bed and put her on top of me, this is her position and she knows it

“Be still thando, stop fighting” she huffs annoyed as hell but stills, she doesn’t want to look at me but I cage her face to look in mine “I’m sorry” if eyes could kill I would be on my way to hell right now “I’m really sorry thandolwami I was just shocked my baby.....” she cuts me

“And now you’re not?” the attitude

“I still am my love but the difference is now I can speak, I can finally say what’s on my mind like you asked me” she just stares and I know that’s a go ahead to continue “Before I say if you don’t mind me asking, who or how did you get infected?” she swallows before she speaks

“Lawrence, he told me the day he hit me that he infected me on purpose to keep me”

“That bastard, I shouldn’t have made his death so quick and.....”

“What death? What are you talking about?” there is mondli in me too, too much mouth

“No...no, what I meant is that I should kill him quick” she is doubtful but believes me, thando cannot know about that side of things ever “But on a real note sthandwa sami forgive me for reacting the way I did, I was just shocked, I wouldn’t hurt you with your truth like that, I want you to know and be sure that our love is forever, I’m not going anywhere with your status positive or negative I love you for eternity” girls dear lord! “Don’t cry mami, you know you’re going to make me cry too” she sniffs smiling

“You’re accepting me with my status”

“My job as your man is to help you embrace your scars and wear them with dignity, I wouldn’t have you not flawed because your flaws are what make you who you are, you’re a prove to me that you fell but dusted yourself up and went ahead and that for me is the true definition of a strong woman, a woman I want by my side, a woman that will be with me through fire, after fire”

“I love you Musawami” that tickles my fancy perfectly

“I love you too Thandolwami, come here” I bring her messy teary face to mine and smooch her lips “wait the vomiting, dizziness and all that does it mean you have started taking treatment” she nods “Jesus thando, you have been doing all that by yourself?”

“I was scared to tell you”

“You shouldn’t keep things like this from me, let’s set an alarm in my phone too so It can remind me too” she rolls her eyes but hands me the phone anyway “When do you take them?”

“9 in the morning and it’s just one pill”

“Let me see them”

“Serious Dalas!”

“I just want to see” she huffs stepping off me and reaching for her bag, it’s true when they say never go through a woman’s bag, it carries their whole world “Don’t ever hide them in the bag again, put them on the dressing table……”

“Haibo! What if someone sees them?”

“This is our bedroom thando, who would invade our privacy like that” she is looking at me like I lost my marbles

“Thanks but my bag will do” she throws them back in the bag “Why aren’t you going to work anyway?”

“Thought we can go buy food and pass by college to confirm your attendance and get your timetable” the rolling of the eyes, I wonder what that is all about one day those eyes won’t come back, they will keep rolling until she doesn’t want to roll them anymore

“I’m not sure about school anymore, I’m going to do graphic design this side, it was the only course with space, what the fuck do I even know about design?”

“It’s better than sitting at home and doing nothing, at least you have space, there are kids out there who would kill for school” she huffs

“Okay I will go but there is no need to babysit me Dalas, I can do all that by myself I know how to uber and I definitely know my way around Joburg” she barks

“No need to bite my head off, okay madam”

“Good, I’ll stock food since your model girlfriend forgot to buy them, was she going to feed you her skinny ass only” I’ll never hear the end of dimpho “I’m going to change and leave, don’t forget to leave your card behind”

“Okay mam, make it fast I’ll leave you at the mall after we have breakfast there”

DIMPHO

I don’t know if it’s my heart being stupid or what but I have never felt this way about any guy ever in my life, his got me hypnotized by his being. I can’t believe he brought that fat bimbo after all the efforts I made to make his house a home, nxa! Maybe this temporary lecturing gig I got to hold the fork for someone at maternity is all the distraction I need to erase Musa off my mind. I made sure to look on point today, I don’t want students picking on my attire, I was once a student and I definitely know how they roll, lectures who repeat the same clothes or who doesn’t know how to match are always the laughing stocks

Finding a parking at campus is a night mare but after few minutes of driving around I finally do, problem with my driving is that I always have a driver but since my father discovered yesterday that his brother was killed in some heist and buried by the state because no one knew who he was, he decided to shut down and give all the staff some time off including my driver.

I sway my body down the corridor making sure my heel and floor complement each other earning myself more stares, just as I turn corner my eyes fall on her looking down a paper, what could she be doing here? My guts refuse to not question her, I find myself heading in her direction, she sees me before I reach her and I can smell her attitude from here, if she wasn’t Zulu I would say she is my father’s daughter, her attitude is just like mine

“Yah mathambo” (bones) who is this thing think she is to call me bones?

“Listen here you fat.....” she cuts me standing inches from my face

“No you listen here you skinny mosquito, if I ever see your snooker sticks hanging around my man, I will chop them and feet them to all the hobos around joburg, are we clear mathambo?”

“Fuck you”

“Oh skeleton, my fat ass don’t fuck myself, you know who fucks me?” she smirks
“No need to say, keep skinny baby while us fat girls get those men” she waves
bye on my face leaving me stunned like I have just been struck by lightning, I
hate this bitch.

Making my way to the Head of department’s office I’m not as confident as when
I walked in here, running in to that thing really subsided my mood, I pray this
was the last time I see the likes of that thing in my life. Raising my hand to knock
the door open before my knuckles could meet the hard wood door, the person
walking out and I both stand stunned looking at each other, I don’t know if it’s
my eyes still seeing Musa everywhere but this guy looks exactly like him, a bit
older and lighter but definitely Musa

“Oh Ms Moharpy you can come in” Gerald, the HOD shouts from inside
murdering my last name when he realises us standing still by the door, Musa’s
replica steps aside for me to walk in and closes the door also walking back in “I
thought you were going to get yourself some coffee” Gerald directs to Musa’s
replica

“No need to waste time since she is already here” Jesus! Even the way he speaks,
Gerald nods to him showing he and I seats, I cannot take my eyes of this man

“Ms Moharpy this is Mr. Ngosy.....”

“Nkosi” the guy corrects, this can’t be a coincident, he is also a Nkosi?

“Yes sir, as I was saying he is Letticia’s lawyer (the woman im feeling in for) he
is here to see that you sign the 6 months contract we offered you, his client
doesn’t want to see herself fighting for her position when she comes back”
dramatic much, I just took this to keep busy I wouldn’t even fight her for her job

“No problem, where do I sign Mr. Nkosi” he takes out two typed papers from
his file bag and place it before me with a pen

“Call me Bongani, aren’t you going to read” he asks as I sign

“I know Nkosi men to be trust worthy, I don’t think you would make me sign
my life away” he smirks sitting back staring at me

“I guess you would also trust me with your phone numbers” he places another black paper before me, Gerald laughs but we both glance at him, he looks down suppressing his laugh, I quickly write the numbers down and he folds it nicely placing the paper in his jacket inner pocket “It was nice meeting you Ms Dimpho Mohapi” he says standing up fixing his expensive jacket, he smells like his loaded, wait.....how did he know my name? “Gerald” they shake hands before he exits the room leaving his expensive cologne behind

“Excuse me” my guts refuse me once again, I run out of the office too before Gerald could even breathe in search for bongani, luckily he is a slow walker, I find him still marching the corridor “Hey bongani” he turns back to me with a smile “Aaaa.....” where is this voice jwale “I....I....” He laughs

“Breath” dear lord, Jesus, some man are fine out there, I breathe hard to calm my throbbing heart and my twitching clit, I need to visit the ladies straight after this conversation

“Arghm! I was just wondering.....you look like a friend of mine, do you perhaps know Musa Nkosi?” the smirk on his face is immediately replaced with a frown

“I don’t know any Musa Nkosi” with that he quickly leaves me there wondering, that was strange.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 30

GOD WILL SENT HELP EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW YOU NEED HELP

LINDIWE

I feel like a bowl of jelly as I take in all the embarrassment thrown at me, strong on the outside as the glassy bowl but slowly fading and shaky inside as the jelly. My wobbly knees try to carry me further off people's stares but I totally fail, retiring at the bench in the mall is all the options I have as I breath hard burrowing the poor floor with my stare ashamed to face all the shame thrown at me. I feel a tap on my shoulder as I'm still burning the poor white tiled floor with my stare, I raised my head to find an old man, probably in my father's age smiling down at me.

There is something pure about him, something that draws you to his presence, his look is a bit unsettling but it gives out assurance in its uncomfortableness, he eventually sits next to me still smiling.

"Lindiwe" I can't bring my voice to reply, I'm just staring at him "Lindiwe Nkosi but now Lindiwe Ndlovu" that wakes my shamed voice from the depths of shame it's slowly descending to

"How....how do you know my name? And I'm Nkosi not Ndlovu" he smiles

"Let me not scare you, my name is Maseko and I'm a healer, do you know what that means?" I shake my head no "It means I can see into the past, future and communicate with your elders" he unfolds as gently as he can be "I don't usually do this but I just saw what happened and my spirit couldn't just turn a blind eye" his still smiling looking at me with so much pity "Can I read you?" I nod and he reciprocates with one of his killer smiles "Well I already did" that cause a minor laugh to escape my lips, he takes both my hands and look in my eyes "Lindiwe, you're no longer lindiwe nkosi, the day Vuyani welcomed you in his home reciting his clans before you stepped in the house calling you MaNdlovu, that's the day aboGatsheni took you in as their daughter in law and they blessed the both of you with a beautiful priceless gift your carrying, Theo is not the man for you. But because you're under a dark cloud brought by theo and his mother,

you see theo as your man and my baby if you continue with this charade aboGatsheni are going to take their daughter and you're going to end up living with a man who lives a double life, his family will hate you because you will no longer be able to conceive" when he squeezes my hands only then I exhale audible causing him to smile further "Do you want me to help you out of this spell?"

"Ye....yes.....please, if you can" he laughs

"I'm going to need you to....." he looks around "Why don't you go and buy water in there" he points a store "and empty it, collect water from the tap with the bottle and come back here" my feet carry me so fast but I remember I don't have money on me, he smiles again holding out 50 rand note to me when I turn with disappointment. This old man is God sent, God will sent help even when you don't know you need help.

After collecting water from the tap, I flew back to him like hurricane, I was afraid he would change his mind or I would not find him anymore, but to my luck he was still seated there but now with a guy maybe my brother's age conversing with him. I'm a bit reluctant as I approach him seeing he is with someone but he urges me with that welcoming smile of his and wave his hand to me.

"Sit MaNdlovu" he commands patting the empty space next to him, his between me and the guy that's giggling on his phone, he takes the bottle from me and hold it between both his palms. He stares up lowly mumbling things only he can hear with his eyes turning all white, the guy seem unbothered by all this while me on the other hand I'm a bit shaky. In less than two minutes he opens his eyes and heavily exhales before he looks back at me smiling "You're going to drink this water now, all of it" I nod already opening the cab "And make sure you sleep at home today, but please in future be careful of the things your mother gives you"

"Like food?"

"Yes but anything, if she gives something to you only question it and pray hard before you accept them, at the end of the day we cannot choose family can we?" I shake my head no "Now drink your water and make sure he takes you straight

home, tomorrow you'll wake up fresh and ready to go fight for your man, you broke his heart but because it belongs to you, you can also mend it, fight for him to give it back to you"

"Thank you" he smiles

"It was a pleasure, tell your brother that no matter the darkness coming his way, there is always light at the end of the tunnel, he should listen to his friend in his dreams carefully, his always with him and Vuyani" that's confusing but I'll definitely pass the message "Now go before gorilla comes looking for you" I nod standing up finishing up my water

"Not before you pay" the guy say with a straight face, for the first time since I have been under the old man sphere I feel sweat shooting off me, I didn't think of the money "that will be 2k and we only take cash" shit! My heart is palpitating in a way I cannot explain, only when I see bab Maseko trying so hard to suppress his laugh I breath, the guy also dies in laughter standing for my reach, he brings me to his embrace hugging me still dead in laughter and whisper in my ear "Your one in a million for my father to not turn a blind eye on you, use his advice wisely" I nod down his face when he releases me "Do you have a sister?" that's random but I nod

"Hai! Tieho fotsek" bab Maseko reprimands also standing

"Hau! I was just asking....." Maseko interjects him and dismisses me

"Goodbye MaNdlovu" I nod in gratitude and turn on my steps going to the parking lot

"At least take my number and give it to your sister" I hear him screaming when I exit the mall, I turn to find the old man spanking his head. Him and Buhle? My poor sister wouldn't survive a day with a hunk like that, he is too hot to be single.

THANDO

Coming back from school and grocery shopping I'm exhausted as hell, I expected to find Dalas already home but there seems to be no sign of him as the house is still roamed by darkness. The poor uber driver helps me unload my grocery to the door and he leaves after I tip him nicely. My nice tip emanates

from shame, he was a nice guy throughout the ride while I on the other hand was an ass to him, telling him terrible stories I have heard about uber drivers, some I even made them up just so he can know I have pepper spray and okapi knife in my hand bag, but the poor guy killed me with kindness, he was laughing the whole way.

After turning the kitchen lights on and placing the plastics in the middle of the kitchen, I feel the need to light the whole house first before packing the groceries. The first house lighting process starts with the lounge, passage and our bedroom, the other rooms will remain in darkness, I'm saving electricity, they always warn us about saving electricity. Opening the bedroom door I see a figure sitting on the bed, it's too late to run so I light the room to at least see who the intruder is and I instantly go numb. He also kinder looks shocked to see me, well so am I.

"Tha...thando" he stutters in shock

"Bhuti Bongani?!" I call out too in disbelief

"You have grown" I hate that statement with passion, the next thing he is going to ask is what I do for a living "Please close the curtain from the sliding door or switch off the light" I look from him and the sliding door behind him and bounce back to the light switch, I'm a bit hesitant about all this and I think he can see through me "Please" he begs, I hope he is not going to murder me. I prefer the curtains closing and leave the lights on "What are you doing here?" he finally looks like he can breath and what's with stupid questions

"Aaaa...mmmh....Visiting" he nods but looks at me questionably or am I the one feeling guilty for him to find out I have grown enough to be his brother's girlfriend

"Musa and Siphon both stay here?"

"Aaaa my brother passed on" he stands on his feet and tries to approach me but I step back, he stills on his steps and looks at me numb, I take it he didn't know, they were both his 'ntwanas' growing up "he was shot on their way home from work"

"Who shot him?" I pick a bit of range in his question

"I don't know, the police are still investigating even today"

“Fuck” he retires back to the bed with a heavy sigh, I see his shoulders moving as evidence that he is still breathing as he is buried his head between his legs staring down in silence “Can you please call Musa, don’t tell him I’m here, just tell him to come urgently” and why shouldn’t I mention that he is here? That sounds dodgy so I still on my steps and fold my arms looking at him until he raises his head and say “now thando”

“Why?” he sighs

“I can’t explain to you now but do you honestly think I would ask you to call my brother to harm him” there is something sincere about him, even my always on guard subconscious seems sure of him. I sigh and take my phone from my jacket dialling Dalas, it rings a couple of time before he answers

‘Thandolwami’

‘Can you come home now’ he laughs

‘No hey babe, how was your day, I missed.....’ I cut him

‘Please come home’

‘Hey what’s wrong’ he sounds like his on his feet already

‘Just come home and please be fast’ I drop the call before he can respond, bhuti bongani is looking at me with what looks like a smile but because he looks too serious one cannot tell

“You too are dating aren’t you” I roll my eyes and disappear to the closet, I hear him laughing out loud “How is Vuyani and my punkies” punkies are his sisters, he used to call all of us like that growing up until he abandoned the family

“Everyone is okay except for bab Nkosi” I scream back wrapping myself with a gown, when I turn he is right at the door “Jeez! What if I was naked?” he blinks rapidly frustratingly brushing his face

“I’m sorry, you said my father is not okay”

“I’m not comfortable speaking with you in the closet, why are you in our bedroom anyway” his chest expands heavily as he sighs

“Thando, still dramatic as ever, you’re a kid to me, I have bathed you couple of times, I would never look at you any other way” I think the bathing part is a lie, I don’t remember that

“Still, back off, let’s go to the lounge, your way too tall for my liking” he laughs stepping aside for me to pass

“For some reason you going to have to trust that I can’t.....” something beeps in his pants and he curses taking out a small device like a tracker, there is red light reflecting from it “Listen, I have to go, my time is up” he searches his pants again and throws a ‘mastjhotjha’ (small button cell phone) cell phone at me “tell Musa to call me using this phone, my number is saved in that phone and he should only use it to call me only, just me” I nod even though I have tons of questions “And please please tell him to call me immediately, I need to know what is happening, how did he achieve all this” he points around with his finger and that also leaves a question in me, I never asked how all this happened so fast in such a short space of time “it was nice seeing you thando, take care of him for me” he heads to the sliding door and opens but he turns back “My father, you said something”

“Oh, he is dying” he stills and look at me cold “Apparently your mom was feeding him poison so it damaged all his organs” he still standing cold “I’m sorry” I whisper embarrassed of how I broke the news, his thing rings again and only then he sighs looking up

“Thank you punkie, if you ever see him, tell him he didn’t fail, tell him I’m sorry I disappointed him but please tell him I love him and I appreciate all he did for me and he should rest in peace knowing that soon I’ll do what he always asked me to do. Take care of my siblings. Pass that for me neah punkie” I nod and he smiles one last time wearing a cap as he leaves the room looking down, I’m left in shock with lot of questions, my body remains glued in the same position as I try to figure the equation in my head. What the hell just happened?

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 31

COUSIN FROM HELL

THANDO

Thirty minutes later only now I hear his car driving in, where exactly does this man work? Across the border perhaps? If there was a real intruder in the house they would have slaughtered me and sold my parts to all the perverts across the world by now. He barges in like his being chased by a ghost, when he sees me in the kitchen packing my shopping he heavily sighs like he was running a marathon, I bet caster's got nothing on his running skills.

"Babe" he surveys the place by running his eyes around approaching me "Are you okay?" I shake my head no "What's wrong?"

"There was an intruder in the house?" he pops his eyes staring down at me

"Huh? What? Where are they?" black man, he should be Mike tyson'ing the whole place now but he is standing before me like a cold ghost

"They raped me" he blinks rapidly and moves his head backwards a bit studying me I think, I make my puppy sad face to assure him that I was violated. He forms fists shaking in range, he grit his teeth in silent fury and I feel sorry for my supposed intruders, he was going to bite them to death "I'm kidding" I'm laughing my lungs out as I break the prank but he is still glancing down at me in range

"THANDO?!" my name comes through his harshly pressed teeth

"I'm kidding, can't you take a joke"

"That's no joke damn it" oh oh! I'm in trouble, he still mad

"I'm sorry my love" I take both his hands and push him to a chair "I bought you something nice" I peck his nose and he smiles, thank god the glacier is melting, he wrap his hand around my waist bringing me closer to him

"Don't ever joke about staff like that" I nod "What did you buy me?" eish! You see lying, I was just softening him, I didn't buy him anything

“Aaaa it’s....it’s nice” he laughs

“Letha phela I want to see it” (bring it) consequences of lying, I head to the poor fridge and open the door inspecting what could be nice, I didn’t even buy any snacks because my hands were full, I had intended on finishing up my shopping tomorrow, I only bought main things today. Parmalat cheese looks nice enough for me, I tear the pack and grab two slices for him, he is looking at me in disbelief when I put two cheese slices before him

“Eat, you’re going to need something cheesy for what I’m about to tell you” ungrateful bastard, he is just staring at me not eating his cheese, I sit astride him and wrap my arms around his neck “Letha I’ll eat it for you” he tears one and put it in my mouth giggling, if only he knew how nice this cheese is, it was going to help him a great deal “So when I got home.....” an abrupt knock disturbs me, we both turn looking at the door and look at each other “You expecting someone?” I ask him

“No, you?” I also shake my head no, he stands with me wrapped around his waist and put me on the counter, he fixes his bulge before attending the door and I laugh “I’ll see if you’ll laugh like that tonight when I pipe that prank you just pulled on me out of you” what’s that supposed to mean? Who lied to him and said I’m sleeping with him tonight? I would like to keep my virginity intact for a little while longer thank you. When he opens the door all the jolly mood flies out the door, some bitches are meant to test my patience in this world, this girls resides in my ass I tell you, the day I squeeze her between my butt cheeks she will take her last useless breath on earth.

“Dimpho” his voice comes out slowly bored

“Hey” she marches in swaying her two cent ass, the day I stab that ant ass she will have nothing to sway for my man “I don’t come with bad attempts, I’m just here to tell you something important” she offers herself a chair crossing those long spider like legs

“Would you like something to drink?” they both turn to look at me with frowns

“I doubt you would have what I drink, a glass of champagne will do” I don’t have that indeed, I’m a savannah, brutal girl, ciders are my thing

“Will coffee do?” my smile at this moment could warm all the cold hearts in South Africa, Dala is making me uncomfortable with his stare

“Whatever, I take two spoons by the way” I thank aboGatsheni for helping me, their troubled daughter as I turn to on the kettle “So I was at GT college for my contract signing.....”

“What contract, you work there?” I couldn’t help it, I don’t want to be running in to this devil’s advocate at school, I thought she was just passing by today.

“Yes dear starting tomorrow I will be lecturing there” I feel my chest closing in on me, she cannot lecture at the school I attend

“Why?” she sarcastically laughs, I think even dalas laughs but supresses it when I look at him

“Because I’m educated, beautiful, inter.....” dalas interjects

“Oh okay cut it, let’s get back to what brought you here so late” she rolls her eyes like me before she looks back at my man, I hate that she even rolls her eyes like me, her attitude is too much, she is ruining my innocence with that attitude of hers.

“As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted” she steals a quick ugly glance at me emphasising that I’m the one who interrupted her stinking mouth “The lawyer that was representing the lecturer I’m filling in for, was something like your twin” Dalas frowns and I also look back at them astonished “A bit older and lighter nyana but what surprised me is that his last name is also Nkosi” oh my God, she also saw bhuti bongani? I spit in her coffee twice and nicely stir to dissolve and make my way to her with a smile “Not bad at all, you could actually be a human if you like” she jabs sipping my coffee and I just smile content sitting next to my man, when I wrap my hand around my man’s neck brushing his head too she rolls her ugly eyes sipping my spit

“Couldn’t it be just a coincidence?” dalas asks also running his hand on my thigh, I love this man, he gets it when I want to be bitchy and he helps me a great deal

“I don’t know but I asked him about you and he said he knows no one of that name”

“That’s a lie, it was bhuti bongani he wouldn’t say he doesn’t know you” dalas turns to me with a frown “that’s the intruder I was telling you about, he was just here”

“WHAT” he is on his feet

“Please sit” he sits back and look at me “Before we were rudely interrupted” I throw a mean look at the one sipping my spit “I was about to tell you, your brother was here” he is in disbelief

“He is your brother? Why would he deny knowing him?” Dimpho asks

“I don’t know but he was here babe and he wanted to see you but his thingy rang and he left, but he left a phone for you to call him” Dimpho chuckles

“Sounds like a movie to me, why would he.....”

“Yeah wena! Toothpick can’t you mind your damn business” she smirks

“I guess it was too early to call you human, you fat ugly.....”

“OOOOH!” dalas bangs the table and we both jump “Can the both of you fucken calm down and tell me what happened”

“I’ll go first because my version of events sounds real unlike the movie in her head” Dimpho throws a jab at me and narrates her story, I also do the same “but the guy I saw was in suits, he looked like a real lawyer not the regular guy your describing in track pants and caps”

“Well whore mayb.....” dalas interrupts once again

“Where is the phone?” he calmly asks me

“In the bedroom in your drawer” he leaves us there staring at each other ready for kills

“I hate you”

“I spat in your coffee, twice” her mouth forms O shape in shock “how does my spit taste like? Sweet? Sour?” she does the unbelievable, she throws the remains of her coffee and cup on my face. My hands instantly grab on her weave banging her head on the table, her weave desert her head living her bald covered in pantyhose “Whose beautiful now bitch” I throw her useless weave back on her face, I don’t know how she managed to raise the table with her hands below it pushing it on top of my chest, I underestimated this bitch. Thin but strong as fuck. I grab a chair and bang it on her head, I see she is a bit dizzy trying to stand still as I form fist ready to punch the shit out of her, she back slaps me causing me to balance by the counter taking in the pain, fuck she hits like a man. I turn back with a punch tearing her lip instantly, she bleeds holding on to her jaw line

“You fat bitch.....” Dalas interjects her shouting

“WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON HERE? I leave for two minutes and you too are wrestling each other like fucken maniacs”

“She spat in my coffee” bitchy snitch

“SHUT UP, Both of you clean this mess” his got to be kidding me “wena I’m calling your driver” I smile at my opponent and fly a kiss at her without dalas seeing “NOW?” we both jump picking up pieces broken during our wrestling match, Dalas leaves the room again cursing

“I’m going to cleanse my system straight when I get home” she complains picking up the chair as I sweep the poor floor

“Drink sanitizer, and make sure you drink a litre of it so it can thoroughly polish that stinky attitude, maybe also sanitize the worms in your system so you can gain some weight, you look like a needle.....” I keep my innocence when I see dalas walking back in, he is pissed as hell I can tell from a distance. We both keep busy with him staring at us in the lounge, the house kitchen and lounge is open space so he can actually inspect us sitting in the lounge.

An hour later after sitting still with my opponent staring at each other in silence the doorbell rings and dalas heavily sighs attending to it

“Thank God” he mumbles walking to the door “Mr. Mohapi?” he asks in astonishment opening the door

“I gave all my staff a week off” the older guy explains walking in “I thought I could pick her myself and we enjoy a glass of whisky, my emotions are all over the place” he waves a bottled whisky walking in the house as dalas happily receives it “Nice staff, now your rolling with the bosses” he admires the house running his eyes around as they shake hands.

“I learned from the best” the old man laughs further walking to us in the lounge, he stands still looking between me and his daughter “I’m sorry about your brother” dalas hands the old man his glass of whisky after pouring both of them but he doesn’t take it, his eyes are busy running between the two of us, dalas follow his eyes and laughs “Like I said, they were fighting but please ntate Mohapi I need you to reprimand dimpho ab.....”

“Who is this?” Mr. Mohapi finally asks looking at me

“My woman” he turns to look at dalas

“Who is she? Like her name, surname, where is she from”

“Not important papa, she is a no one” princess Diana jumps in and I roll my eyes, papa? I bet mama is milk

“Look at them” he urges dalas with his stare on us, dalas also look at us for a while and eventually frowns

“The fuck!” he curses

“Exactly, who is she?” he asks again

“How did I miss this?” dalas asks still surprised

“Help me out here man, young lady come here” I sit tight on my sit, I’m not ready to be murdered “What’s your name?” he asks taking a sit next to his daughter glaring at me while dalas is standing rooted like a rained chicken

“Thando Ndlovu” he probes more with his stare “from sakhile Mpumalanga”

“Your parents?”

“My mother was thandeka ndlovu and I don’t know my father”

“Was?” he questions

“She passed away” I say with a shrug as he continues digging me with his stare and questions

“No wonder your busy dating older guys, you have daddy issues” she can’t tool can she?

“The person who is got daddy issues is you missy busy chasing after my man, maybe daddy does not give you much love”

“Can you both shut up, im trying to think” ntate Mohapi reprimands taking out his phone and dialling someone busy mumbling my mother’s name lower, only now dalas comes and sits next to me, he gulps both his glass and ntate mohapi’s glass of whisky “Tieho, ask your father who is the name of the woman his brother used to fool around with in Mpumalanga’ he asks talking to the person on the phone ‘Maseko and I are not on speaking terms you know that very

well' 'Now Tieho this is important' 'I see, tell him I found the daughter before his useless gift could show him' 'Are you both still in Mpumalanga' 'has he been shown where he died yet' 'Keep me updated, and tell him my blood money as he say could help a lot, I could've..... Fine, sure boy' he drops the call and look at me smiling "I'm going to need your blood" I frown

"Why?"

"You might be my late brother's child" Dalas coughs hard hitting his chest, what's wrong with him

"No it can't be, this beast cannot be my cousin"

"And I will freely give my blood just so I can prove that my ancestors loves themselves enough to associate themselves with the likes of skinny meatless nobodies like you" Mr. Mohapi laughs

"You two are related, Nkosi let's talk in your study" dalas is busy sweating next to me, his mind is not here "Nkosi?!" Mr. Mohapi calls out again

"Huh?" he looks like someone who is in deep shit, he eventually sighs and pushes the chair standing "Your brother, you mentioned that he was killed in a heist, where was it again?" he asks as they both disappear to the study

"I'm not sure of the details as yet, my brother and his son are in your hometown fetching his spirit, this happened somewhere there" I hear dalas curse a big shit as their voices also disappears.

"I can't believe God hate me this much to make you my cousin" the toothpick brings my mind back from eavesdropping. I just narrow my eyes at her and leave her there before I end up in jail, my hands are itching to rearrange that bony figure of hers, I feel like breaking her in to two, bloody cousin from hell.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 32

SOME DOORS WILL CLOSE AND ONLY OPEN WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT

LINDIWE

As the first rays of morning sunlight beams brightly through the lace curtain in her room widely opened, she sighs rubbing her hands on her eyes that cannot stand the brightness reflected by the light. Sharing a room with Buhle is exhausting, she is the one responsible for opening the curtains so early in the morning. She reaches for her phone on the side table to check time and damn! It's not morning as she thought, time reports to be 11:45 in the morning heading to midday. She had hoped to catch Vuyani in the morning before he goes to work.

Buhle walks in looking lively as ever

"And ivila lase'khaya wakes up, how are you feeling" (my lazy sister) she worriedly squats next to her sister and touches her forehead to feel her temperature

"Better than I deserve but definitely ready to right my wrongs" buhle frowns staring down at her

"Let's focus on the better part first, I want you to be 100% okay, not better. How is the vomiting?" she vomited the whole night but she wasn't worried because bab Maseko had warned her of the vomiting "I made you soft porridge, you think you can stomach it?" she nods appreciatively and buhle quickly leaves the room to fix her a bowl of soft porridge. She takes this time to go relieve herself and wash her face, she gets back in the covers after freshening up. She takes her phone and unblocks Vuyani firstly ignoring Theo's thousands texts.

Hey she sends the text hesitantly not sure what to say to him, he blue ticks it

Can I see you after work another blue tick, she sighs looking up her sorrows as buhle walks back in with her breakfast

"I don't ever want to fall pregnant, if you pregnant people vomit the whole night" she forces a smile to her sister's remark

“It wasn’t the pregnancy, my system was cleansing the dark cloud I was under” Buhle frowns watching her to explain. She explains the whole dilemma and Buhle cannot believe her ears.

“LINDIWE!” she exclaims shocked

“I’m telling you sis, but I’m glad I got the help when I didn’t even know I needed help” Buhle nods in agreement

“I’m sorry you went through all of that and I’m glad you finally came to your senses, I was worried about you marrying that imbecile” they both laugh

“You have always been team Vuyani” Buhle laughs in agreement once again

“And I don’t regret it, now we have a mini Vuyani in here” she playfully tickles her baby bump “And I will vouch for him till you understand that the guy loves you” Lindiwe sighs

“And I don’t know if he will believe me or forgive me, I sent him a text hoping to spark a conversation but he blue ticked me” she brushes her arm consoling her

“Give him time but tell him about the pregnancy so he knows the truth, he has the right to know that he is the father, and you also have to explain your baby daddy drama to baba, Malume and Musa” she looks at her sister exhaustedly

“I honestly never thought my baby was Vuyani, I just took Theo’s word when he said he impregnated me on purpose but now thinking of it, it makes sense, Vuyani and I never used protection in our cheating escapades” Buhle shakes her head in disapproval

“You’re such a cheater Lindiwe, Theo is a dog but you two did him wrong”

“My perfect sister can you not stress me now, right now I would like to focus on fixing things with my man first before worrying about my cheating and telling the family about the rightful father of the child. Buhle what if he thinks I’m two timing him” Buhle laughs

“This is Vuyani, yes he may be mad but he is anything but an asshole, he will be doubtful as he should be but you will fight and assure him” she says looking in her eyes “Right?” Lindiwe nods with a smile

“To think how you always advise me with my love life yet your single, when are you getting your groove on” Buhle laughs hard

“With all the drama I see all of you going through, no thank you I’m very fine” they both laugh “Listen, why don’t you text thando and ask her house key number then we can go cut it and you go cook for your man, I’m sure he would appreciate a home cooked meal after an exhausting day at work” Lindiwe agrees although doubtful “What?”

“Cook?” Buhle laughs

“At some point you’re going to have to learn house chores lindi, I won’t always be around”

“But you my lovely sis can come with me and cook.....” Buhle cuts her with her hand raised over her face

“This is you, solely you fighting for your man, I’m not saving you this time” she sighs putting her now empty bowl aside and stepping off the bed

“I guess I should go bath and start winning my man process” Buhle raises her eyebrow at her

“And who is going to make this bed and clean this room? You can do all that after we done.....” she pleads with her puppy face

“Please sis wami, the energy I have is for Vuyani plus I still have to clean his house too maybe” Buhle laughs

“I feel sorry for Vuyani who is going to spend the rest of his life with you” lindiwe waves her off leaving the room but she stops her “WAIT!” she pops back in “Sindi is off today right?” Lindiwe thinks a bit, thinking of which day it is

“Yah, its Tuesday she is off”

“I didn’t see her in the morning when I was preparing Zinhle’s breakfast”

“Maybe she is still asleep” Lindiwe replies with a shrug

“No she is not in my room, even Musa’s she is not there”

“Mabye she went for a walk or something I don’t know” Lindiwe responds already walking down the passage for her shower

“She didn’t even take her basin back in the kitchen, Lindiwe is lazy maan” Buhle complains alone cleaning after her sister as always “I can’t wait to go back to my room after Sindisiwe gives birth, I don’t know why I had to be the one sacrificing my room for my brother’s slay queen, now I have to share a room with lindiwe who snores and is lazy as hell” she complains further making the bed

“I love you too sis” lindiwe walks in taking her toiletry bag as she receive a murdering look from her sister.

She didn’t have to cut the key, thando told her to pick the flower pot on the stoep she will find the spare key they all use when they forgot theirs or lost them. But to her surprise when she opens the door it’s unlocked, she can tell that there is someone in the house. She heavily sighs before further walking in the house thinking it’s him, but to her surprise she finds Sindi with her feet on the table munching on yoghurt and lays with the tv on

“SINDI?!” she also looks surprised to see her here

“What are you doing here?” Lindiwe huffs

“This is my.....wait I don’t have to explain shit to you, what are you doing here?” she asks back

“None of your business too” she turns her eyes back to whatever she is watching on tv

“For your sake I hope you’re not here messing with vuyani coz....” Sindi chuckles and scan her from toe to head

“What if I am? Aren’t you getting married to cheese boy?”

“Aren’t you pregnant with my brother’s child?”

“Exactly, pregnant with his child not in a relationship or you forgot he left me for your best friend? As far as I’m concerned I’m single and so is Vuyani, what I do with him doesn’t concern you or your brother” lindi blinks rapidly when she feels tears coming down, she sighs and disappear in Vuyani’s room but she stands disgusted looking at the bed thinking of the things they could have done

on that bed. She bangs the door out and walk to thando's room but she also find Sindi's bag on top of the bed

"MY BEST FRIEND'S ROOM TOO, BITCH YOU TAKE, TAKE, YOU TAKE EVERYTHING FROM ME" she screams in the room and Sindi sarcastically laughs loud enough for her to hear her. She bangs it too and flies to Siphos room where she decides to peacefully nap, she is not sure about cooking for him anymore because Sindi has digested all her energy but she is definitely staying to tell him the truth

AT THE MEDUPES

MaMedupe and Rose are busy finishing up the feast of lunch meant to introduce their daughter in law to the rest of the family before they put a stamp to the supposed big day. Ntate Medupe is in a jolly mood, he is never been so proud of his son. He walks in the kitchen and gently pats his wife's shoulder who jumps first before she can sigh deeply and smile at her husband, she is still jumpy after he panel beat her to a pulp for having a hand in poisoning Nkosi so he can die for her and Mabongani to claim his money. He had been stiff since then but seeing lindiwe around calmed his ire, his son may not be what his rumoured he is after all and today he wanted his whole family who whisper about his son's sexuality to actually see that his son is a man. Ready to raise the Medupe family higher.

"Where is Theohelo?" he asks brushing his wife's back with a smile

"He went to fetch lindiwe" he continues smiling

"Good, good, he bought her clothes yesterday right?" Rose agrees instead of her mother

"Eya papa he did, today morning he also took her to the salon" (Yes dad)

"Now that's a Medupe there, we spoil our woman. Call them and tell them to hurry up we are about to start" he happily say and exits the kitchen, only then MaMedupe sighs heavily

"Call him Rose" she says still breathing heavy

"Calm down mama, I'm doing so"

Meanwhile Theo has been driving around looking for Lindiwe, he went to her home first but he found the furious Buhle who splashed water all over his suit kicking him out of the yard. He called her several times but his calls and texts were not answered. He parks before thando's home as his last hope thinking she is visiting thando. He knocks coupled times before a female voice tells him to come in, to his surprise he finds Sindi, they know each other because they are all from the same hood

"Sindiz"

"Cheeseboy" he laughs "I'm looking for lindiwe, is she here?"

"She is somewhere in the rooms"

"Please call her for me" she rolls her eyes before she turns to the rooms, this people are disturbing her and she is bored that she is going to have to deal with lindiwe again. She checks Vuyani's room first but she is not there, then thando's room but still no sight of her. The last room is Siphos room which she was specifically told never to get in even in her wildest dreams, she sighs before she knocks first but her knocks are not answered

"LINDIWE?!" she irritably calls her out but nothing "Lindiwe maan?!" this time her irritation forces her hand to turn the lock opening but the door seem to be locked, she kneels a bit and peep through the key hole but there is no key. She sighs and turns back to the kitchen "Seems like she left, she is not here anymore" she immediately informs theo walking in the kitchen

"How sindi, you just said she is here?" he questions confused

"I don't know, she was here, she must have left while I zoned out on the couch" he roughly bumps her walking to the bedrooms himself "Suit yourself" she takes 2l of coke and retire back to the lounge "CAN YOU STOP MAKING NOISE, my baby hates noise" she screams back to theo who is banging the doors screaming Lindiwe's name "Askies baby, it's your aunt and her baby daddy" she sighs brushing her bump. Vuyani laughs walking in. "Thank god you're here" he laughs hard

"You missed me?" she rolls her eyes

“Theo is in here banging doors looking.....” Just as she explains theo bangs the door loud and screams for lindiwe to open up. Vuyani frowns immediately walking to the passage where he finds theo in front of his brother’s bedroom door

“WHAT THE FUCK” Theo looks back at him sweating but sighs

“Vuyi, I’m sorry about this man but lindiwe locked herself in here, we supposed to.....”

“I don’t give a shit if you’re supposed to see each other, you don’t come in my house banging my doors like a Declerk police officer”

“I’m sorry man but.....” he cuts him fuming

“Get the hell out of my house” he stands still breathing heavily “NOW BEFORE I LOSE IT DAMN IT” only when he shouts Theo leaves but stands at the doorway and say

“I’ll be outside, just get her to come please” nxa! He harshly say before disappearing to his room

“What about Lindiwe?” Sindi asks drinking coke straight from the bottle still standing in the passage

“There is no Lindiwe here, that room doesn’t even have a key, there is no way it could be locked”

“But it is locked” he turns with a frown and tries to open the door but it’s indeed locked

“That’s strange, I don’t remember this door being locked or even having a key, I’ll call thando maybe she changed locks and locked it before she left” he dismisses it going to his room “But please tell that thing to leave my yard, there is no lindiwe here” Sindi nods also exiting the house to chase theo out

Two hours later, the time reads about 16:30 in the afternoon lindiwe walks out of Siphos room stretching her hands, tired as hell from her nap that turned in to day sleep, she has never slept this peacefully in a while. Her eyes lands on Sindi first still in the lounge, now with an empty 2l coke in front of her and half eaten kota, she doesn’t see Vuyani behind her looking at her in awe

“You don’t leave don’t you?” she annoyingly jabs Sindi whose mouth is open agape in shock “Sindi can you leave, please maan, your annoying” Sindi doesn’t say anything, she is still looking at her shocked

“Where were you?” she finally asks with a frown

“SLEEPING, WHAT ARE YOU STILL DOING HERE” Vuyani clears his throat behind her, she turns and swallows when she realise him behind her “Babe, your back” he remains with a frown

“Where were you sleeping?” he asks calm but with a frown

“In Dala’s room, can we....” He cuts her

“But we....wait, did you lock the room? You have the key to the room?” she frowns confused

“What are you talking about, I didn’t lock any room, I opened the room and slept that’s all, can we talk, what’s she doing here?” he slightly laughs looking up and whisper

“Gatsheni”

“Can we talk, privately” she pleads looking at him

“Whatever you want to say, you can say in front of Sindi” Sindi sarcastically burps and say

“Preach Vuyi preach” she swallows the lump down her throat

“Vuyani I made a mistake, I was bewitched and I couldn’t think straight, babe im sorry please forgive me for breaking your heart” she says in tears

“Really?” he asks

“Yes babe please I was under some spell or something, but now I’m cleaned and I can finally see clearly that you’re the man for me and I will do anything to have you in our lives” he laughs

“Anything?” she nods quickly when he asks, he moves to sindi’s couch and gives her his hand, she takes it and stands by his side “You said anything right?” she doubtfully nods with her heart beating so fast “Well I might as well come clean, Sindi and I are fucking, can you take that” Lindiwe retires on the couch behind her that Vuyani was sitting on, she silently cries looking at the two before her

“You said anything right?” she nods in tears and snots mixed together
“LINDIWE?!”

“Ye...Yes.... Baby.....will....work....through it together” she says in between sobs
as she now loudly cries

“And the child she is carrying is mine, not Dalas, can you take that” she now
wails loudly with hiccups.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 33

THE END OF MEDUPE

LINDIWE

“And the child she is carrying is mine, not Dalas, can you take that” she now wails loudly with hiccups.

“Vuyani.....how....how.....oh my God” she cannot finish her sentence crying, she is torn, not once she ever thought Vuyani would cheat, especially with her brother’s baby mama “how could you do this?” her voice trembles with so much pain as she asks

“You said you can take anything to have me back, can you take this?” he asks again with his hand wrapped around Sindi’s waist

“It....hurts vuyani.....you hurt me..... but we’ll work through it baby, I love you and im so....sorry” he smiles but she doesn’t see it because she is buried in sobs looking down, he lets go of Sindi’s waist who rolls her eyes before sitting back on her spot, he kneels in front of her and raise her chin for her teary face to look at his

“Sindi is not pregnant with my child and we are definitely not sleeping together, I just did that to hurt you the same way you hurt me when you went back to Theo” tears are still falling down her cheeks, she is still in disbelief

“You’re not sleeping with her?” she asks sniffing?

“I wouldn’t touch her even if she and I were the only humans left to protect our species from extinction....” Sindi interjects pissed as Lindiwe smiles with Vuyani wiping her tears

“Hai wena Vuyani don’t insult me please, I wouldn’t touch your peanut dick too, I prefer my man with big, monstrous, firm dicks like Musas’, God that man knew how to pipe me right” she says lost in fantasy as the two laugh at her

“Stop crying sthandwa sami I just wanted you to feel the same pain you inflicted in me, I wouldn’t do you like that”

“I’m sorry” it comes as a whisper as she holds his firm hairy arm holding his face, he pecks her forehead and bring her to his chest

“So vele vele you two are banging each other? Aren’t you pregnant with your fiancé’s baby while.....” Vuyani turns to her

“Can you excuse us” she looks at him disbelievingly

“And you’ll call me a whore kanti you too are also busy whoring like me, anyway where should I go coz her hateful mother is going to chase me out the minute she sees me”

“She is not home” Lindiwe informs in Vuyani’s arms

“I’d rather go in thando’s room, only because I need to take a nap with my baby but when I get back you two better be done whoring” she takes her kota and go discard the empty coke bottle then pass to thando’s bedroom “I need another coke when I wake up Vuyani” she screams walking down the passage

“Babe what’s she doing here?” Lindiwe immediately asks as soon as they are alone

“Apparently she and your mother don’t get along quite well, so thando asked me to accommodate her when Mabongani kicks her out” Lindiwe frowns

“Since when is she and thando friends?”

“Since thando’s unpleasant escapades they have been quite close” something in her is not at ease with this sudden friendship

“I don’t trust her” Vuyani laughs

“Me either but to be honest she is been..... I don’t know when she is here she just eat and complain about missing Dala’s dick, she hasn’t done anything questionable, I think she is slowly bonding with her child and finding her feet”

“Still, I’m not at ease with her, I don’t want her around you”

“Now that one you have nothing to worry about, I only have eyes for one woman only who constantly breaks my heart every now and then, today we are together, tomorrow we are not, I really don’t know anymore where.....” she places her index finger on his mouth to shush him

“This time is forever my love, we are not going anywhere, we are here to stay till death do us apart”

“We?” he asks confused, she takes his hand and put it on her bump

“Me and our daughter” he pecks her lips

“And I want you to know for as long as I live, I will be a father to her but please promise not to mention Theo being her father, I would.....” he is being cut with laughter and he looks at her more confused “did I say anything funny”

“Babe she is yours” he frowns still lost

“Mine?”

“Vuyani im carrying your child, not theos” his mouth open agape forming an O in shock

“Me, me, me..... you carrying the mini me in there?” he asks with spark of tears in his eyes, Lindiwe already knew his crying moments were to come as soon as he find out, this compels more laughter to shoot out of her

“Yes baby I didn’t know.....” He abruptly pulls her to his chest standing with her in his hold and whisper

“I love you woman” holding her tightly as she hears his heart beating in her ear drums

“I love you too baby and I’m so sorry” he lets go and look at her adoringly

“But you still need to be punished for making me cry” she giggles wiping his tears

“And I will take all the punishment brought upon me, just no pregnant Sindis in the future please, you almost made me lose my mind” he laughs pulling her to the kitchen

“I didn’t know you would cry for me like that, I’m glad you don’t see your world without me” he pulls a chair for her to sit “let me feed you my girls” lindiwe beams in joy

“Tonight I’m cooking” Vuyani abruptly turns with a frown from the fridge

“You?” he asks surprised

“Yes me, im cooking for my baby daddy hau!” he burst laughing

“Well I better feed my daughter and make sure she is full, I don’t think she will be able to take mommy’s poison” she pouts “But I can take your poison everyday”

“You better, you haven’t signed today” she says seductively, he puts all the ingredients down and rounds the table dusting his hands to her

“I’m a bad bad daddy” he picks her from the chair and puts her on the table getting between her legs, he raises her dress and put his hand on her cookie while his lips lands on her bump constantly pecking “What...do...you....think mommy should do to bad daddy” he asks the bump kissing it

“Mommy would like the French signature” he takes his head out with a smile and wrap his one hand around her waist bringing her closer to his while the other one remains rubbing on her cookie as he French kiss the shit out of her “maybe you can feed us after you properly sign back in” she says in between the kiss, he laughs still dancing his tongue with hers

“Music to my ears” she wraps her legs around his waist as he walks her to the bedroom still Frenching her. They unseeingly pass Sindi in the lounge who was watching them admiring what they have, she sadly brushes her own bump looking down at it and talk to her baby

“Mommy had all that but she ruined it for money and glam, but for you I promise to do better” she feels her child kick for the first time and smiles happily “Please do it again my baby, I want to show aunty and daddy” she quickly reaches for her phone and happily take a video of her left side of the bump kicking “I can’t wait to meet you my girl” she laughs “I hope you’re a girl, I want you to be beautiful like me, slay more than me but wena you’re going to go to school, be educated and slay my baby, slay for mommy, aunty thando and daddy” when her baby stops kicking she quickly send the video to thando happily

AT THE MEDUPES

Time reports to be 17:00 in the afternoon, Theo dreaded going back home hoping everyone would have left by then but to his surprise all the cars seems to still be here, he firstly thinks of going back but it’s too late, his uncle had

already seen him. He loudly screams “bafihlile” (they are here) causing all his cousins to come running to his sight. He sighs heavily and steps off the car alone, he can already hear them murmuring as he approaches

“O kae makoti” (Where is our daughter in law) his uncle asks following him to the house with brood of cousins laughing behind him. All eyes turn on him when he walks in to the lounge where the family is nicely seated, everything keeps still with all eyes on him, he searches for his mom with his eyes to at least stand next to her when he breaks the news.

“Ngwetsi yaka e kae Theohelo” (Where is my daughter in law Theohelo) his father asks with a face he knows very well, a face he can never forget even in his wildest dreams because he grew with that face constantly reminding him his a man growing up, constantly beating him for trying on his mother’s lipsticks, shoes, dresses.

“O.... she....she left me” everyone gasps

“Don’t worry baby, she wasn’t in your league anyway” his mom say behind him patting his shoulder, only now he can breathe but his father’s look at him takes all the oxygen away from him

“WHY?” his father shouts standing “WHY?” he keeps approaching him as Theo keeps backing until he hits the wall and have nowhere to go “I ASKED YOU A DAMN QUESTION” he hits the wall behind Theo causing the mirror on the wall to come down crumbling, some pieces shatter on the table next to them while some shatter down the tiled floor

“DINNER IS OVER” MaMedupe shouts to all the family members who were still seated enjoying the show, everyone takes their belongings leaving the house in flames. When all have departed her house, she turns to her husband who is trapping theo against the wall looking at him with nothing but hate “My husband please calm down, let’s talk this as family.....” she doesn’t finish, a back slap lands on her cheek causing her to stumble to the floor, her daughter runs to her aid

“This is all your fault, you nursed this boy so much he.....” He looks back at the terrified Theo glued to the wall “I don’t care what you do or how you do it but I want that girl in this house giving birth to Medupe children, I won’t have my legacy spat at just because you refuse to be a man and use this” he grabs his

manhood hard “Fucken leave this house, and make sure you only come back with that girl next to you” Theo rapidly nods to his fuming father, his father turns to the other table and pours himself a scotch, he downs it hissing “YOU STILL HERE, LEAVE MY HOUSE” he shouts again when he turns to find Theo still glued on the same spot

“Theo baby be careful” his mother cries down the floor

“THEO? What the fuck is theo? I name this boy Theohelo but I regret it with every piece in me, he is such a downgrade, so down he bends for other men” his father spits on his face “fucken wom....” Theo angrily grabs a piece of the broken mirror on the table and stab his father in anger, he stabs him straight on his chest, blood splash all over his face as his father stumble a bit dizzy before he falls down struggling to breath

“THEO WHAT HAVE YOU DONE” Rose asks terrified holding her father’s head on the floor

“You.....you.....” his father tries to speak pointing at him but his wife crawls to him and hardly press the mirror straight to his heart

“Die satan, I have had it with you” she press it harder also tearing her palms in the process, her husband shakes until he stills, Rose cries loudly but receives a slap from her mother

“Shut up, shut the hell up and woman up” she looks at her brother who is rooted like a dead person standing with blood all over his face “Go wake him” Rose stands from the floor shaking, she also slaps theo hard and he jumps taking a deep breath “Rose go empty the deep freezer in the store room, theo come help me carry him to the freezer”

“Maa!” Theo exclaims

“Do you want to go to jail?” he shakes his head “Now come help me get rid of this, this man was going to kill us first if we didn’t kill him first” Theo goes to his legs while his mom goes for the hands, they both heavily drag the corpse to the store room where they find Rose still unpacking the fridge. They all lift him and throw him in the fridge and close it. “If any of you have any goodbyes I suggest you say it now because there will be no funeral”

“What are we going to do with him?” Rose asks still staring at the closed fridge

“How many funerals do we have this week?” she asks Theo who looks up thinking a bit

“Two I think”

“Open or closed casket?” Rose is looking at her mother in disbelief

“Mama NO” she shakes her head

“I SAID OPEN OR CLOSED” she shouts

“Both closed” Theo replies with his heart beating so fast

“Then we’ll make sure he’s buried with one of those, this is the end of Medupe, rest in hell Medupe” she spits on the fridge and leaves her children standing there appalled by their mother’s lack of emotions

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 34

WOMAN'S WORK

THANDO

As dusk wears the afternoon cloud, I sit exhausted as hell in the lounge binging on some snacks while I await the man of the house as I cook him a warm meal, I hope he adds extra cows when he marry me for my free services. Yesterday we didn't have time to talk about all that transpired because he came to bed late and I was already in dreamland by then, skinny people tend to annoy me a lot lately and on top of the list being Dimpho, that toothpick knows how to drain all the energy in me.

As if he can read my mind, he walks in looking like a therapist, in my mind therapist are the most drained people on earth because they carry people's problems, I don't know why one would torment themselves by being a therapist, those people are.....you know I bet a male therapist also endure more problems in sheets department because I don't think it manages to stand with such stress, yoh!

I carefully study him and I can attest that my man is carrying the whole world by himself, even today when he left he wasn't himself. I'm thankful we not sexing as yet or else today was a draw for me, he wasn't going to score at all with that stress weighing him down, I bet it wouldn't stand for action. He comes to me and kisses my cheek then throws himself next to me on the couch

"Unjani mama?" (How are you) he takes my bowl of snacks and munch on it staring at whatever I'm watching on tv, truly speaking this tv is watching it's self my focus is on WhatsApp as I chat with Sindi

"You okay" he turns to look at me and smiles unbuttoning his shirt a bit

"I'm fine my baby, just tired, who you smiling with there" he grabs my phone when I'm still trying to articulate my response, Sindi is a sensitive subject in this house because of him, his look tells me his already seen who I'm chatting to "She send me a cute video of your girl, you wanna see?" my nerves are failing me, my heart is palpitating like I did something wrong while I know I didn't

“I don’t like this sudden friendship of you two” he complains, I take the phone and open the video then I give it to him “What’s this?”

“Listen” thankfully he does, I was hoping to see his lips curve into a smile but he looks like he just swallowed an alkaline substance or is it Cerebos withdrawals im not sure but the latter I’m sure there is some deposit that could be found in his system because he hasn’t had any in a while, unless if his a cheater “How did I forget the paternity test issue?” Jesus! I show this guy a video of his child and yena his concerned about fathering the child

“I know I was the one who wanted that test more than anyone but now....”

“And you were right to want it, and it still has to happen, I’m not going to attach myself with the baby until I’m hundred percent sure the child is mine” at least we are getting somewhere

“So if she agrees to the test you’ll stop mopping around and support her” he throws me a look “Baby she needs support, her family and friends already deserted her, she doesn’t need more stress in her condition” I plead as gentle as I can be, phela with this other gender sometimes you have to baby talk to make a point valid

“Okay I will but please tell me what changed your mind about her?” a light chuckle escapes me

“Sindi is.... Let me say I think seeing Lawrence panel beat me changed something I her, she saw the whole thing transpire before her eyes and the fact that she knows about my status and hasn’t told even a single soul, I respect her for that. At first I thought she would tell you but she didn’t and that for me made me respect her” he kisses my cheek

“You have a big beautiful heart my love and I hope your right about her”

“I am and I can feel it, she deserves a second chance” he just sighs dismissing me “now back to you, what’s eating you” he raises an eyebrow and look at me

“Too much Cerebos in my system love, if only I could get one roundnyana I will be super” I roll my eyes standing to check on my pots, his problems are too big for me, and I’m too innocent for such “Baby at some point you going to have to give it up, I can’t walk around with a boner like I don’t have a woman in my life”

when I grow up, I'm going to date a woman, men tend to think they own our cookies

"Dalas we talked about this" my response emerges from the kitchen as I mind my pots. I don't want to sleep with him because he hinted that he doesn't want to use protection when he asked me if I had gone for prevention, this man knows my status and he shouldn't be putting me in that kind of position.

"No we didn't" he says behind me and I'm a bit startled, I thought he was still in the lounge. He wraps his one hand around my waist and pull me to his chest staring down at me with nothing but lust

"Dalas don't....." he whispers in my ear biting my earlobe in the process

"Please allow me in mama" his voice comes seductive, and it instantly magnets me to his indecent desires. He gently trace his other hand down my behind squeezing it "Allow me entrance in my palace baby, please" the change in my breathing gives me away, his gets the assurance he needs but him being him, he still wants to hear me agree "Please" he begs needy with sexual desire

"You can have me" the words escape my lips and I immediately look down, I tend to be shy about such staff, this are adults things after all. He raises my face by pulling my chin up, he smiles and turns me aside switching the stove off then he carries me like a sack of potatoes on his shoulder spanking my huge behind "Stop it" I giggle enjoying my free ride to be eaten, his going to eat me.

The minute he enters our bedroom he puts me down by the bed and hooks my dress up as I raise my arms, he turns me around and unhook my bra throwing it on the floor. He steps away a bit and I feel him burn my bare back down my ass with his lustful stare. From the reflection of the mirror on the side I see him quickly take off his jacket and shirt, hits pants also follow with his boxers biting his upper lip still staring at my ass ready to relish himself. He comes closer again and places both his hands on the side of my pelvic bone bringing me back to his warm touch, he presses his erection on my behind and I gasps.

"Dalas what's that?" I turns to find him stuck naked biting his lips, I have seen it before but I have never seen it aroused, it looks angry "A.A.A that is not getting in....." I'm abruptly shut with a demanding wet kiss, his long fingers reach between my thighs, he hooks my undies aside and gently massage on my clitoris, circling it slowly while his tongue sweeps all desire off me

“You feel so good” his voice comes in my lips, I’m lost in desire as I also starts to circle my well with his finger “Don’t move” he orders, his voice is soft but full of lust, he slowly inserts his thumb in me and rotate it anti-clockwise while his index finger is pressing hard on my clit. My body long betrayed me, his thumb is dancing in my juices. An appalling pleasure spikes through me and I fails to hold myself, I moan in desire

“Haa baaabe” he doesn’t lose his rhythm as he feels my walls clenching around his thumb

“Let it go, I want you wet” he seductively whisper in my ear causing all the sensation to flow down my throbbing well, my knees weaken failing to still me, I tremble but hold on to him tight. He picks me and puts me on the edge of the bed taking the rest of my moist undies off, I feel like disappearing the scene when he sniffs them before throwing them down the floor “Open for me” he orders still on his feet, he strokes his member staring at my moist well. He kneels on the edge of the bed and push me little further, then he slippers his member on my wet slippery folds, I jump when I feel him knocking my well and remind him

“Dalas condom” he takes my mouth in his a bit and suck on my boob peaking my sexual desire

“Relax babe, I’ll put it” he gently lays me back nibbling on my boob with his tongue, he goes back to stroking my already aching well with his head, another wave build in me and I bury my head deep in the sheets as I swallow all the pleasure, he sees I’m about to quiver again and take this opportunity to slowly ease into me. My wall expands allowing him in but his too big, I try to take him but I fail, I feel him still easing slowly in my well when I think it’s all in and I fail to woman up any longer, an excruciating pain hits my core and I flinch stopping him

“Dalas no no no” I jump back from him but he laughs crawling to me until I hit the headboard “Baby it’s too big” my heart is pounding with both desire and fear

“I’ll be gentle” he pecks my nose with a smile and go back to kneeling, he widely spreads me up once again and slowly ease into my well gently “tell me when

you can't take it anymore" my body replies with a moan taking in the pleasure once again, it feels so nice when it gets in

"Hhhmm" he slowly eases now rotating opening up more space for his member "Babe there....there....it's enough" that's all I can take, he laughs

"Half" he laughs again looking at our intersection, half my foot, I compromised "I can work with it" he hugs my legs with his arms and starts gently pounding into me, his thrusts starts slow, gentle and rhythmical. I feel an overwhelming urge to cry as he rotates in me, the pleasure is mind blowing and just when I'm still in the peak of my wave, he plunges all of it in my well and I cry real tears, both pleasure and pain but the pleasure over takes the pain. I come instantly from the sudden slamming, he deliciously dig his way in my well with my juices paving a way for his member

"Fuck" he finally also lets go, he growls through clenched teeth "thandoo" he shatters into fragments of pleasure and silently stills pounding deeper in me.

I expect him to pull out but he does the opposite, he flips himself still inserted in me putting me on top of him, his member feels still firm in well "Let's see what this ass can do" he roughly squeezes my behind opening me up "Move sthadwa sami" I'm frozen, I have never been the wild type, I still had lessons to learn from lindi but I forgot to attend. He takes my butt cheeks and moves them urging movement, I pick the rhythm mirroring my waist in the movement of his hand on my ass "take my hands" I clasp his hands slowly pinning them on the pillow, his breathing changes as I take the ride by myself, he also moves his waist below meeting my thrusts. I enjoy the firm fullness in me and watching him shiver and pant in pleasure beneath me, this motivates me to rotate on him "AAAH BABE!" he dies further

"I'm fucking you" he laughs holding my waist still as he shatters again in my well, he closes his eyes and hiss deep in the pillow, the look and feel of him cum urges my own peak and I climax around him shouting his name "Dalas, dalas" I slowly die on top of him retiring my head on his chest

"Your fucking me" he asks laughing as he gently brushes on my bare back "Hmmm, maybe I should fuck you back so we can see who fucks better" he tries to move his waist but I stop him, too much pleasure is not good, I feel so weak I don't think I'll wake tomorrow

“Babe please I’m tired, please” he laughs and gently pull out of me, he places me on the side and I feel him watching me as I succumb to sleep

“And she fucks me” he continues laughing as he reaches for the drawer his side and takes a towel cleaning her up

“Hhhmhh” she murmur in sleep when he opens her thighs once again cleaning her juices, he pecks her well after wiping it clean and say

“Thank you Mrs. Im fucking you, and she is the one dead in sleep yet she was fucking me” he adoringly watch her drift to sleep before he decides to clean up too and go finish up whatever was cooked, he cannot go to bed without eating and knowing thando she is also going to wake up at night just to eat.

There is an itching light and breeze that causes my skin to shiver, I try so hard to ignore the feeling but it over powers me and forces me to wake from my deep beautiful sleep. Only to open my eyes and find the sliding door widely opened, I hate that its morning already and it disguises me more that Dalas decided to open the door so wide so early in the morning. I hiss in ire as I force my feet into morning shoes to go close the door, my feet allow me off the bed but I can’t seem to move, there is a stinging pain down there that reminds me that I was thoroughly serviced yesterday, this forces a stupid grin on my face, I have no word to describe the deliciousness I was in. Some moments deserves to be captured in a bottle and opened when things turn sour in the relationship.

I finally beg my feet to carry me and gently walk to the door making sure not to hurt my already swollen well, I stand still by the door and watch him go about preparing our breakfast outside, he looks so ravishing in those shorts, if I wasn’t swollen I was going to rape him, let me tell him

“Hey” he turns with a smile

“Hey what?” I laugh at the serious face his trying to make

“Hey love, daddy, dodo, dudu.....” he dies in laughter coming my way, he wraps his arms around me and peck my forehead

“I love the scene but are you aware your just in morning shoes naked by the door” only when he say I gasp looking down my body, how can I miss this

“Dalas!” I try to run back in the bedroom but that stinging pain stops me, he is dead in laughter besides me

“It hurts?” I nod, he abruptly scoops me off the ground and walk me to the bathroom, the bath is already filled with warm water and there is a sweet lavender scent filling the whole room “Let’s get you cleaned up first, you’ll feel better after this” he pecks my nose gently dipping me in warm soothing water “I would love to help you bath but I have to go finish up our breakfast setup, will you manage?”

“Dalas you hurt my cookie not my hands, I will be fine” he laughs standing

“Next time I’m going to fuck that loose mouth” I roll my eyes and immediately close them enjoying the soothing sensation of the water

After my much needed bath that truly helped me with my stinging problem I find him already seated but busy on his phone, he puts it down when I take my chair before him

“I was waiting for you, I’m starved”

“This is nice, I didn’t know you can be romantic” I appreciate but he laughs at me

“If you call breakfast from wimpy romantic then thank you, I’ll take all the credit” in my next life I’m not dating a black man, majority of them don’t know how to be romantic

“You’re a bore” he laughs shortly being interrupted by his phone

“It’s nine o’clock, medication time” he says switching off the alarm buzzing his phone and putting my pills container on the table

“You went through my bag?”

“I swear I just took what I needed, I didn’t search it” he pops the pills for me and hand me a glass of water

“Don’t ever go through my bag, I will kill you and flush your ashes down the drain” I make my mini daily amen before downing the pills, I pray it doesn’t come back and cause me to vomit my nice breakfast

“Okay Maa, I will never go through your bag again” he takes my hand from the table as we both dig in, he squeezes it looking at me with a grin I cannot explain “Last night was amazing, ngiyabonga mama neah” (Thank you) I’m a shy blushing mess, I can’t keep his stare, he laughs some more “But on a serious note, I got you morning afters please take them after this meal” that changes my whole mood from bubbly to sour

“Dalas you didn’t use protection?” he nods with no care in the world like what he did isn’t a big deal, I immediately lose my appetite and push the chair leaving breakfast

“Babe come on” he is right behind me with his plate in his hands, I’m mad and he is still eating

“Where is the damn thing?” he looks at me confused “THE DAMN PILLS, YAZI I ASKED YOU NICELY, I ASKED YOU TO USE PROTECTION BUT JUST LIKE LAWRENCE YOU MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS WITH MY BODY, YOUR JUST LIKE HIM” he puts his plate on the dressing table and come toward me, he takes my trembling hands in his

“Sthandwa sami no matter how angry you are, you don’t shout at me siyezwana?” My emotions are still over the place, instead of replying him I huff with a pinched nose “THANDO!” he shouts an order and I breathe heavily taking all my emotions together

“I just hate it when you don’t listen to me, you’re doing the same thing he did, I asked him nicely but he didn’t, he infected me and now you want me to infect you too? Dalas I can’t live with the guilt knowing I infected you, please don’t put me in that position” he wraps me to his chest kissing my forehead

“No matter how we fight, don’t compare with that selfish man, thando your mine now and how I sex you is my business, I’m not going to use protection with you, that one I want you to know and be sure of it so you can go needle your sexy ass before I plant my seed in you, not that it would be a bad idea.....” I reprimand him

“Dalas!”

“Okay okay, but babe this is my life and I’m intentionally choosing to sleep with you without protection, so it’s my choice and I’m asking you to respect it”

“Can’t you respect mine too? I’m asking you to protect yourself” he leans to my lips and peck them staring in my eyes

“That’s bullshit” the range in me cannot be described at this moment

“I’m never sleeping with you again” I storm to the dressing room leaving him there

“Where are you going?” he yells

“To dress myself for school, do I need to make you understand that too or you’re going to force yourself in my classes too”

“That’s unnecessary and dramatic, open this door so I can dress too” I open the door looking at him with nothing but hate, he ignores me going to his jeans. We both dress in silence minding our clothing, the jean im trying to wear is stubborn, I know it fits me well but for some reason it’s stuck on my hips, I keep trying to pull it up and I’m failing, I feel him behind me and when I try to turn he picks me up with my jeans holding it on the waist and I easily slipper down the jean “The ass is too big”

“Fuck you” eish! It just slipped my lips, he is standing rooted in disbelief and I’m also in disbelief myself, me and my big loose mouth.

“Thando!” he strides towards me and I’m second ahead of him, I run out of the room to the living room where I immediately pause on my step, he also pauses too behind me and we watch the two invaders in our home

“Ntate Mohapi” he exclaims shocked as I am, his in black jeans unzipped with nothing on top and im in my bra and jeans too, nothing on top too. This is awkward considering we are standing in front of my supposed uncle and this old woman.

“She let me in” Ntate Mohapi points the old woman next to him, dalas nonchalantly zips his pants and shakes ntate Mohapi’s hand looking at the woman

“Babe go get dressed” I will go but not before I know who the woman is “Maa” he respectfully acknowledges shaking her hand too

“Eya abuti, my name is Mme Mpho I was sent by the agency”

“What agency?” I can’t hold myself

“The one you called mam asking for a helper. Spotless clean agency” Dalas looks at me with a questioning eye and I shrug

“I didn’t call no agency and I definitely don’t need no helper”

“Madam Dimpho please mam I need this job, I have been on the wait.....”

“Wait, madam Dimpho? Is that the lady that called the agency” she thinks a bit confused

“I’m not sure but I was dropped here and told that my madam is madam Dimpho” that skinny...jesus I feel like hitting something out

“DAAAALAAASSS” I scream

“Sthandwa sami I will fix it, Mme there is been some mistake, we don’t need a helper in.....” the woman kneels before me begging

“Madam please, I need a job, I have been on waiting list for way too long and I have a family to take care of, please mam, I’m begging you” Lord why me mara? I’m going to kill that boneless meat next time I see her

“Ntate Mohapi can you please talk to that trash you call a daughter before I find myself rocking orange for her murder” he is laughing like this is a joke “Mme please stand up” I pull her up glaring at my supposed uncle having a field day of laughter

“I will definitely talk to that trash cousin of yours” I hate that statement “Anyway I came here this early because I wanted us to go for DNA testing”

“Eish! I have classes today and im already behind with two weeks, maybe we can go in the afternoon” he nods

“No problem, give me your number so I can pick you up” Dalas jumps in

“No no need I will bring her, I will come with her”

“Okay, I better get going then, Lerato ke tla o bona thapama hee akere ngwanaka” (Lerato I will see you later my daughter) I know thando translate to lerato in Sesotho and that’s the only part I heard, I just smile to whatever he says as dalas walks him out

“Madam Lerato kea o kopa hle” (I’m begging you please) the old woman is on my face once again begging, dalas comes back and just keeps quite looking at

me “I can cook, clean, do laundry, take care of the children, madam please I can do just about anything” I hate that dalas is not being helpful right now

“Can you say something” he raises his hands

“It’s your choice sthandwa sami”

“You’ll pay her?” he nods

“If you want to keep her I will” I sigh and turn to Mme

“Mme you can have a sit, we’ll be back” I drag this man of mine to go have a talk about this

As soon as I shut the door to our bedroom I ask “Baby are you sure about this? I don’t want to burden you with more responsibilities you know I’m more than capable of taking care of the house, even when I move out I will still.....” he cuts me

“Wait move out, where are you going?” haibo! Why does he look mad?

“Babe I’m going to move out as soon as I get on my feed” he chuckles in disbelief

“That’s utter nonsense, you’re not going anywhere, now go handle that Mme situation out there, if you decide to keep her I’ll pay but if you decide to release her then I’m also fine with whatever you decide” he kisses my lips and disappear back to the dressing room, so much for doing things together. I wrap myself with a robe and make my way to the living room to go have a conversation with Mme, I guess giving someone a job won’t kill me.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 35

THANDO'S CHOICE

DIMPHO

I'm slowly but surely finding my way in this lecturing thing, yesterday I was warmly introduced to my short time colleagues and class, so today I'm heading for my first class alone. I intent to be classy but approachable with my students, I don't want to be one of those caged lecturers that students find it hard to interact with. The minute I enter the lecturing hall everything stills, only the sound of my heels clicking the floor is audible as I pace to the podium. All eyes are on me, I take a much needed breath before I reciprocate their stare back.

"Good morning class" I say with so much enthusiasm

"Mooorning" students, so much for my enthusiasm they drag that morning like they are exhausted already or greeting for tomorrow

"My name is Ausi Dimpho Mohapi, I will be teaching you Design theory this semester" silence, what did I expect anyway "So today I would like us to get to know each other and set up few rules"

"I would like to get between those sexy legs" a voice say from the back and I immediately scatter my eyes around looking for it, the class erupt in laughter. My search land on someone I don't want to be teaching, that look in her eyes tells me she doesn't want me to be her lecturer either. God does work in mysterious ways, I have my prey right in my yard.

"I see I have a familiar face in here, Thando would you like to go first, introduce yourself to the rest of the class" everyone runs their eyes around for thando but it seems like they don't know her name either, she also runs her eyes around like everyone else until a skinny girl stands, her name is thando and I wasn't referring to her so I'm not interested in her lousy introductions. "Thando Ndlovu or should I say thando Mohapi" again she looks around like everyone else and this time no one stands, this fat bimbo better not grate me in my class.

“What are we? High school students, can you teach us and leave our names the hell alone” a Nigerian guy who looks like he was forced to be here say and everyone seems to agree with him in low mumble

“Okay, today I’m not going to need much, I just need your structure books to see how far you were with your previous lecturer” everyone looks at the nerdy girl with glasses and tight bun that looks so painful, I bet she can’t even smile. I guess she is the nerd of the class who takes every notes “I’m going to need all your books” there is low grunting going on around “And you, third row with a white shirt please collect the books and follow me to my office” She narrows her eyes at me in range and I couldn’t be happier, I want her exasperated like that. She sits still and look at her classmates with no fear at all

“I’m not going to stand, you all bring your books here” it wouldn’t be thando if she just did as told

“Hei! New girl, you heard the tombstone do as it says” everyone erupt once again, what the hell is a tombstone

“New girl is that big empty head of yours wena black mamba” pupil erupt once again, she smiles her conniving grin staring down at me on the podium “I think our poor lecturer is tired of standing, those heels looks painful as hell so if your books are not with me in the next five minutes I’m leaving them behind” everyone obliges and transfer their books to her in rows, she is a new girl but already bullying other children. I’m going to deal with her so bad she will be an angel from heaven when I’m done with her.

She is right behind me carrying heavy books as we march to my office, I wish my office was up the stairs so she can sweat a bit, maybe she might lose a kilo. I feel her glaring at me as I slowly open my door, she huffs in annoyance when she enters and throws the books on the floor.

“Thando!” I’m appalled

“I’m not your assistant or class rep. Find one to toy with, not me” she raises her eyebrow expectantly, he wants me to respond and she is ready

“Listen, this is my class and.....” She cuts me by scowling and groaning a mocking chuckle at me

“No, you listen and listen well. You maybe my lecturer and my almost cousin but I won’t hesitate ruining your career, come at me in my academics and I will throw the same mean punch. You’re a nice girl to be throwing petty tantrums like you do and you could actually be a role model if you can only stop being such bitch. So please Dimpho act your age maan” a brief chuckle escapes me, I don’t believe my ears.

“Is that you begging me to go easy on you” she is delusional “Bona hee mama, it’s simple I can go quite easy on you if you leave Musa alone and let me handle a man like him” she chuckles heading for the door and say

“You’re pathetic” she shuts the door leaving but immediately comes back peeping in “that stunt you pulled of meddling with my house better be the last you pull on me, I won’t have you running my house, get your own damn house” I bet it’s the maid issue

“That was a start, you’re going to hand Musa right in my hand on silver platter coz if you don’t I might make you repeat a semester couzy, now fuck your fat ass off my office” she bangs the door, bloody cousin nxa! I hope those test come out negative, I can’t afford to be related to her, and damn right I’m pathetic, when Musa wakes next to me she will be the one pathetic by then. I take my chair and swing it around thinking of ways to remove her, Musa was five to being mine before she emerged out of nowhere with her big ass here and I will do just about anything to have that fine specimen next to me.

A notification pop in my phone reminding me that I have a client at the sacred men’s club, at least I will get myself some servicing to release all this stress, maybe after servicing I will be able to think properly.

MUSA

As soon as I finish viewing my offices spaces I made my way to college, she mentioned to only have two classes today which both will be out by 14:00. I dial her after parking outside the gate and she answers immediately

‘Babe’ she sounds down

‘I’m outside my love’

'Okay, I'm coming' she drops the call immediately and I step out of the car just for some air. She must have been close because I see her approach as soon as I balance a bit on the bonnet, she is walking with a guy who immediately waves her bye when he sees me. Her eyes are red, has she been crying? Worry immediately hovers me

"Thandolwami" she throws herself on my chest and I wrap her "What's wrong baby" she doesn't reply, instead she sniffs buried in my chest "Okay let's get in the car so we can talk" I walk her to her side now buried in my shoulder. I turn to my side after making sure she is settled in "Talk to me my baby" I urge as soon as I shut the door

"Dimpho is my lecturer" she says looking out the window, the hurt in her voice cannot be missed "She is making my class a living hell and she promised to make sure that I repeat a semester" the way I hate men who put hands on woman but I'm five to losing my cool with that girl

"Hey look at me" she obliges but doesn't match my gaze "That will not happen, I will deal with her myself"

"How Dalas? She is my lecturer and she can do exactly that" it breaks my heart seeing her so broken, she looks like she has given up already

"Have I ever let you down before" she shakes her head no "And I won't start now, from now on I will be the one dealing with her" she smiles but it still doesn't spread wide enough "Come here" I pat my lap, she looks at me as if I have lost my marbles

"Dalas we are in the car and parked at the school gate" she doesn't know me this one, I unstrap my belt and lean on her doing the same, I incline her sit down causing her to also lay down as I lean on her "Babe we are....." my lips meets hers, she is giggling through the kiss as I smooch on her "Babe.....No.....Okay okay" I allow her to break the kiss "Can we go" she whispers looking around and I oblige getting off her "You're going to block my channels" I look at her confused as I start the car "My potential baes won't come because of you"

"Potential baes my foot, I will kill anyone who dares even breath I like you" she laughs "Who was that fool you were walking with anyway"

"He is my friend and his gay please leave him alone" I throw her a warning look and she quivers and that's all the assurance I need to cement my warning. I hope

he is as gay as they come, I don't want no funny business around my girl "I'm hungry" she must have seen the food paper bag when I laid her chair down and she is not hungry, she is thando, she eats when she sees food

"That was dinner by the way, I thought we'll warm it up later on" she ignores me already unwrapping food containers and I just shake my head driving off, this woman can eat until Jesus comes back.

Upon our arrival at the hospital we find ntate Mohapi already waiting for us in the parking lot. He is the only one who looks excited and lively as we walk down the corridor to draw their blood, my girl is a bit unease and I'm grabbing her hand tight just to ease her nerves. He knocks on white metallic door once and heads us all in, a young man approaches us with a smile from his seat behind the desk

"Ntate Mohapi" he shakes his hand and comes to me "My brother" I'm not his brother but I do take his hand too then lastly he also shakes my girl's hand "My sister" well I guess his family

"Eric this is my daughter, the one I told you about, you'll be taking her blood and mine" he nods with a polite smile

"Well understood sir, I'm going to need you and her to follow me, we'll only be five minutes long" I let go of her hand before kissing her cheek and they follow him out. I take this time to call Vuyani, he needs to know about this

'Grootmaan I'm busy, zikhiphani?' (What's up?) I can't help but laugh 'Yeah wena! Come scrap this oil' he shouts who ever still on the call

'Thatha supervisor' I exclaim and he laughs

'This people are exhausting, they are like four year olds. Oh yah! Since you called, I was going to call later, the money came through, it clicked in our account this morning, did you see it?'

'No I didn't because I have nothing to do with that account, that's your business account Vuyani' he groans a bit 'Listen I didn't call about your project, I want.....' He cuts me

'Grootmaan when do I pay this people, month end or fortnight?' this one doesn't listen

'How did you draft their contracts if you don't know when you're going to pay your employees?'

'They haven't signed contracts as yet, I wanted to be sure of the duration eskom is going to give us before I hand them any contracts' this one is going to add on my stress levels

'I'll call them and find out, but Vuyani listen. That project is your baby, the money, everything. Use it to build your name, I will only step in when I'm needed. Make something of yourself, extend my brother's home, get married, do you maan' he laughs

'I might take the last one, tell Mondli to fix his suit, his going to be the best man' that hurts

'You're hurting my feelings' he laughs hard 'listen when you get home call me, there is something I have to tell you'

'Yoh yoh! Dalas, don't tell me my sister is already pregnant, I'm going to charge you penalty for impregnating her without my permission' He sound so happy, like the Vuyani I know

'Fotsek wena. You sound so happy, did you knock someone up' his breath hitches over the phone, he suddenly sounds uncomfortable

'Aaaaa eish, how do I say this.....' Thando and Mohapi both walks in and I cut him

'Vuyi let's talk later' my attention shifts to my woman, I gaze at her just to make sure she is okay. I pat my lap and she knows what it means, she reluctantly seats her rightful place "You okay?" she is uncomfortable and I enjoy making her feel this way

"Yeah, it stung a bit"

"Let me kiss it better" she rolls her eyes and look aware from my gaze

"My daughters don't come cheap Nkosi" Mohapi remarks with an amused grin on his face

“Let’s wait until the results come back before we get ahead of ourselves” he chuckles shaking his head “When will that be?” I enquire

“Now. We waiting for them” holy moses! Now? I’m confused I thought this kind of things take time “I own some shares here so.....the boss plea is jumped at with both hands” of course he does, he is everywhere “Just a matter of 30-60 minutes I’ll be certain of the amount I’m going to charge you for cohabiting with my daughter” Thando gaze at me trying to musk her grin she fails and pokes her tongue out at me forcing my lips to quirk up. The doctor walks back in and confirms Mohapi’s news that we should be patient for at least an hour then will know if they are related. Thando excuses herself saying she will be in the car, I know she is not friendly with hospitals. Mohapi and I are left alone as the doctor attends his rounds, he leans closer to me as soon as the door is shut

“Nkosi, that guy, kana what’s his name?” confusion immediately wears me

“Who?” I mutter

“The one we sanitized, kana what’s his name again?”

“Lawrence.....Pula” I trail off and he snaps his fingers

“Yah maan! I knew I had heard his name somewhere. What was your beef with him? His name keeps popping everywhere” I give him a look to go on “My brother, Lesekgo, the one I told you passed on” I nod to emphasise that I’m on speed “he was somehow involved in a heist with that Lawrence guy and I’m trying to figure out why would Lesekgo involve himself with law class criminals. If he had money problems, he could have just came straight to me” I wish to glorify him with an answer but I’m as clueless as he is

“I wish I knew” everything about that night is as haze to me because I lost my friend that particular night so I buried every moment of that night with him

“Heist?.....Lesekgo?” he trails off, he is in his mind “My brother was..... He was a good citizen, he had a stable job and I can attest he wasn’t in any debts I don’t know off, why would he be involved in a heist? And what baffles me is that the police seems to think he hit his stash of cash somewhere because they say they cannot account where one stash of cash went, apparently he had that missing bag, which was the biggest as they say” I swallow my nerves down my throat collecting my obvious tension, luckily he is looking down as he narrate this so he is oblivious to my reaction

“So Lawrence, what was his involvement in this?” of course I know, I just want to know how much he knows

“Apparently as my informant from the police say, he was working with my brother, this was their mission. Lawrence was supposed to be my brother’s look out guy from the cops but he ended up being the one inviting the cops to the scene, he snitched on my brother and I want to know why? What did he want because I’m told he got his share of money, along with two other guys, why did they kill my brother?” fuck now it makes sense, Lawrence is the one that shot this Lesekgo guy and Dalas, I’m sure Dalas was just a mistake while his main aim was Lesekgo. He wanted Lesekgo’s money hence he urged me to take the bag with, he knew what was in there and he was going to come for it once things settled down as he said “What was your beef with him again?” his question brings me back, I have to lie, this man cannot know what happened that night

“He hit Thando putting her in the hospital for 2 weeks” that dangerous tycoon frown of his spreads across his face

“Thando my Lerato” I nod

“They were dating so when she broke things off he took it like an animal” that’s all I’m going to say, I have to look out for how much he knows so I stay safe

He hisses “Fuck his dead ass, he kills my brother and hit my niece” he bangs the table with clenched jaws, I exhale that I dodged the bullet this time “Everyone who had a part in my brother’s death are going to pay dearly” he promises himself popping his knuckles.

I’m in deep shit, I need a backup. If he puts two and two together, he will know that I have his brother’s money, he will know the real reason I killed that moron was because he killed my friend. If this informant gives him the right information, he is going to know that the money he helped me clean was his brother’s. I have to think of a plan fast to cover my tracks, maybe I should find this informant and bribe him to lead him astray.

“Are you still leaving?” I feel compelled to ask, this man was supposed to be out of this country by now, he was selling everything moving overseas

He sighs heavily and shakes his head “You know after my son died I was so sure of my move but now with everything going on, I think I’ll stay a while longer” now I’m sure I really do need a cover up. Thando walks in putting a halt to our

conversation, I look at her thinking im living big on my father in law's money, how do I tell her that this is her father's money we are chowing. My second inner voice comes to play 'It wasn't his either, they stole it' that still doesn't console me

"Babe" she pats my shoulder like she is been calling me for a while, I pull her to my lap and she sits still a bit uncomfortable because of her almost uncle "You okay" she whispers

"I'm perfect now that you're here" nate Mohapi rolls his eyes and we both die in laughter. The doctor walks back in with an envelope in his hand, he goes and takes his sit while we all look at him

"Your results are here Mr. Mohapi, do you want me to read them for you or you....." Mohapi exasperatedly cuts him, only now he looks nervous

"Read the damn thing, and go to the conclusion" I want to laugh but I hold myself

The doctor sighs first reaping the envelop "This are the results of the DNA test done between Lereko John Mohapi and Thando Ndlovu, the probability of you being an uncle to Thando Ndlovu is 99.99% therefore it is concluded that your Miss Ndlovu's uncle" Mohapi beams in joy

"KaBafokeng ke tsebile" (clan name) he takes thando from my hold and embrace her in a tight hug, he kisses the laughing thando on both her cheeks "I'm taking you home this weekend, we burying your father and I'm introducing you to the rest of the family" a.a Mohapi hold your horses

"We have plans this weekend, you can do all that next week" I stand taking my girl in my hold

"She has to bury her father, what do you mean?" he gives me a warning look but I don't cringe

"He is already buried, what the big deal?" thando is bouncing her eyes between us as we argue

"He was buried by the state, my brother collected his spirit and his body will land Friday afternoon, we burying him again" Jesus! "She has to be there" he emphasise with a stern voice leaving no room for discussions and I feel thando squirm in my hold, this is my cue to leave before I lose my cool

“Ntate Mohapi thanks, will call you” I pull thando with leaving him stunned, this man is going to be my night mare. One day uncle and his already in my ass.

“Babe you need to slow down, I cannot walk fast in this shoes” I slow my steps to her pace and we walk in silence until we are in the car, she keeps stealing glances at me as I drive us out of the hospital and it’s getting under my skin

“What?” I exasperatedly asks

“I do have to bury my father you know” I scowl at her and look ahead saving my energy for the about to burst fight “Babe say something please”

“Thando you know we are supposed to be driving ekhaya this weekend, we made plans to meet the rest of my family, my siblings and uncle are eagerly waiting to meet you and my dying father, remember him? He wants you there, he asked to see you before he dies and wena you want to change our plans to go bury a gangster man you didn’t even know”

“Don’t dare call my father gangster” she chides “He was my father and I only have this chance to bury him”

“Well you only have this chance to meet my family, my father might die at any given day so I’m going to see my father, you’ll let me know which father your attending this weekend, it’s your choice” she looks out of the window and I drive us home in silence.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 36

SOMETIMES EVEN FAMILY WILL BITE YOU WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT

THANDO

Days take time to fade off when we are going through rough patches, it's like the universe conspires with our emotions to feel that we going through trying times to drag time. The past two days have been nothing but hell. It's raining in storms between Dalas and I, and what hurts the most is that now I'm no longer sure what I did to put him off like that. Sure it started with me choosing to go bury my father but I don't think that's where his anger emanate from. I feel like his hiding something and it's eating him.

"Lerato, you okay?" I nod to assure him I'm fine. We have been on the road for more than two hours now, I keep downing small sips of water for my nauseous feeling. I don't really get along with long roads. It's my uncle, the driver, Dimpho and I in the car. He took the front seat with the driver while peacock and I occupied the back sit. I don't know why she didn't take her car if she was going to be this moody all the way. Even with blood certified that we are related we still hostile and I don't intend on putting my armour down either, she is always ready for war and it's what she gets back from me.

Another two hours later we are in Bloemfontein. I'm the one who slowed them down with my breaks to vomit, Dimpho was the most annoyed but she couldn't breathe a word because my uncle doesn't take her shit. Upon our arrival we enter a big house that is buzzing with people going about, it's clear that it's a funeral with the way women are dressed with shawls around their shoulders and doeks covering their heads, with men you can't really tell because they are still in their norm attire. Dimpho is the first to burst out of the car like a venomous snake searching for it's victim, maybe breathing next to me for hours in the same car as me was horror she couldn't wait to escape.

The driver takes our bags and walk ahead of us while I walk next to my uncle. He keeps making stops to greet and some he tells that he wants a meeting at

15:00 before the body arrives, I take those are family. I don't know if people already know who I am but the way most are staring at me it's a bit surprising.

We finally make it inside, and I feel my nerves getting the best of me. We walk to the living room full of people who stop to look at me, everyone stills and burn me with their stares. For some reason I feel my hair stands all over my skin. An older man who looks just like my uncle smiles and stands approaching me, his aura calms my uneasiness.

"Thando, or should I say Lerato" I give him my most sincere smile, there is just something tender about him "I'm your oldest uncle, you can call me ntate Maseko" I nod but he pulls me to his embrace, there is this aura I can't make around him but it's not bad, it's something welcoming and pure. He let's go of me and frown, the look his giving me is now a bit unsettling

"Maseko don't scare the child with your useless gift" uncle Mohapi comes to my rescue pulling out of his gaze. He makes me sit next to him and start with the introduction "Bafokeng, how are you doing in this trying times?" everyone replies the way they see befitting, my other uncle takes back his sit and he keeps looking at me like his digging my soul "I asked teboho and theko to gather everyone around at 15:00, I want to introduce her to everyone" he informs

"Lereko that's not how things are done" ntate Maseko argues

"Maseko I will do this the way I want, I'm the one who found her so I will do it anyhow I like" I sense unpleasant vibes between brothers

"That's why you are cursed, you never do things ka tsela" (the right way) it's not even an hour later but there is already drama brewing. Black funerals!

"Cursed my foot!....." his cut off by a guy and girl happily walking in to hug him

"Malome!" (Uncle) they both say in unison, the heavily pregnant girl throws herself at him and the guy spanks his head

"Tieho your father's useless hand, don't put your hands on me" he admonishes laughing. He pulls the girl off him and scan her "Tshepo, that zulu boy did a number on you, what are you carrying? Twins?" the girl shyly laughs looking away, she looks so cute

“Malome leave my husband alone” she looks at me and smiles “Is this her?” uncle Mohapi nods, she pulls me up and embrace me in a hug “Welcome to the family” she whispers in my ear

“Thando this are my beautiful niece and nephew, Tieho” he points the guy “And Tshepo” he points the girl smiling at me “I wish I could be this excited about seeing their father” Ntate Maseko just look at him shaking his head, I get that he is Tieho and Tshepo’s father

“Can I get a hug too?” the guy shyly asks and I nod, I see he is more reserved unlike his sister “Welcome” he whispers holding me

“Tshepo go fix us something to eat and show thando around but by 15:00 come back with the others, there is a family meeting” Tshepo quickly takes my hand walking out of the living room. I exhale heavily when I feel we are off the stares, she laughs

“You were scared?” I nod “Don’t worry, those oldies are harmless, you should worry about your stepmom” I feel weak at the mention of step mom

“Is she bad?” she smiles again, I see she is ever smile

“I don’t want to scare you but I’m preparing you, bad is too sweet to describe her” Yoh! That’s all that leaves my mouth “But don’t worry I got you” I hope so “What do you want to eat? Everything is a bit.....” I cut her

“No I’m fine, a glass of cold water will do” she nods reaching for a glass in the upper cupboards, she rinses it and refill it with water from the fridge

“Let’s go sit by the tree where will be able to see everyone and gossip” and I can’t help but laugh following her out of the house “Oh there is mama, let’s go meet her” she drags me to a group of woman peeling outside, she calls a fat curvy woman aside and she comes wiping her hands with a cloth

“Dumela ausi” (Greetings) she nicely greet looking at me

“Ahee mama” Tshepo laughs

“Mama this is thando” the woman pops her eyes “Thando this is my beautiful mother MaTieho” I give her my hand but she pulls me in a hug, I see they are a family of huggers “Mama she doesn’t know sotho, she speaks zulu” the woman laughs letting me go, I see where she gets her forever smile from

“Welcome my baby, I’m pleased to meet you” she is so humble

“Same here mama” Tshepo pulls me away leaving her mother still stunned “She is beautiful” I compliment

“I know, and I’m happy I look like her” I just smile because I don’t want to lie to her, she is beautiful but her mother takes the cup, Tshepo is a mix of both her parents.

We are seated under the tree on the slope, where we are seated we can see everything happening down the yard. She shows me the who is who, gossiping as promised and for a minute I forget my troubles and enjoy her company. She is a nice girl, 24 years of age and married to her Zulu hunk as she say.

It’s just after three o’clock and the whole family is gathered in the living room as scheduled, they are so many some are standing by the wall while some are seated on the bare floor. The couches and chairs could only occupy old people, the young people seated is Tshepo and I, well I’m the guest of honour so I was bound to be seated, Tshepo on the other hand mentioned that her condition doesn’t allow her to sit down the floor so she was offered a chair. There is a woman covered in a blanket, I take she is my step mother, she keeps throwing daggers at me along with those who look like her sitting by her side. I hope they are not planning my murder, they look dangerous and that fear I had earlier keeps rising again.

“Bafokeng as we gather here today under the dark cloud, we have pleasant news to rejoice. We may have lost one of our own but we gained someone in return. My little brother’s death was not in vain, he went to.....” Uncle Mohapi cuts nate Maseko’s speech shot

“People I found Lesekgo’s daughter” gasps “my brother was a man, don’t gasp like you all are perfect” people clear their throat looking down “Thando stand my baby” seriously? I feel weak just by his statement, I don’t know if I can stand

“Her feet hurts she doesn’t have to stand” Thank you Tshepo, I feel like kissing her right now “And everyone in here I’m sure they are very much aware of an unfamiliar face”

“Tshepo” MaTieho chides

“Wena I see you’re adapting Zulu behaviour, I will make that husband of yours pay penalty for corrupting you” everyone laughs, most ask where he is? They claim to have missed him

“So my husband died out there chasing after this trash?” the covered woman with red eyes asks causing the house to come to a still

“MaThabiso wait, no one died chasing after anyone” ntate Maseko jumps in defusing her ire, I can see from afar that she is about to explode on me “Lerato baby that’s MaThabiso, your late father’s wife and behind you is your brother thabiso” I turn to find a guy with a not so friendly face behind me, I’m afraid to even smile at him, so my smile comes cold. He receives it with a cold expression

“With all due respect ntate Maseko my husband would still be alive if he didn’t go looking for this thing, why would you bring this thing to my husband’s funeral” she burst into tears, the woman who looks like her sisters calm her down burying me with their look “I don’t want her here” she informs in between sobs

“MaThabiso please don’t blame the poor child, I’m the one who sent Lesekgo to Mpumalanga because I was shown he had a daughter there. All he had to do was find his daughter and do right by her, no one asked him to involve himself in heist that took his life”

“My father wasn’t a crook” a deep voice remarks behind me not pleased at all

“Well I guess I’m the only angel of the family” uncle Mohapi gives him dead look before he speaks

“MaThabiso bona mona mme, o ngwetsi mona, o tlile ka nku. Harere ngwana enwa kewa bafokeng sa hao ke hore oya bontate, haretlo qekisana le wena mme” (Mathabiso let’s be clear, your our daughter in law, you were brought here by a sheep. When we say this is our child all you have to do is yes my elders, no one is here to nurse your feelings) I wish I knew what he said but whatever uncle Mohapi said was not pleasant, her family is fuming but they are trying so hard to control their anger “Moving on, after the funeral we have to go pay the damages to her maternal family so she can have her rightful names which will be Lerato Mohapi, are we clear”

“For once I agree with the criminal of the family, this is what Lesekgo would have wanted” ntate Maseko agrees with his brother

“She is not getting a dime from my father’s money” right now I’m trying to be respectful so I will keep my anger to myself, I just want this funeral over and done with. It’s clear I’m not wanted here and I don’t intend on coming back. My man was right.

“Don’t worry your unemployed behind about that Thabiso she will get a dime from me” uncle Mohapi jabs

“And I will gladly top it up with what I have” ntate Maseko adds

“With what? Your visions and prayers?” this brothers are at each other’s throats, people silently laugh looking down “That’s all good people, lets please bury my brother with the dignity he deserves tomorrow, I don’t want no drama” everyone scatter out of the room and I find myself being dragged by Tshepo

The day of the funeral is finally here, I feel guilty that I did all this without telling Vuyani. Dalas begged me to tell him about finding this family but I couldn’t do it. Vuyani is a cry baby, I will tell him face to face so I can assure him that he is still my only family, and my uncles who have welcomed me with open arms. Including my two cousins Tshepo and Tieho, they are the only humans here, the rest are just aliens. Dalas keeps flooding my phone with calls and text, I know he is feeling guilty and he wants to apologise. I won’t return them, I’m still very much mad that he wasn’t by my side. His last message pops up my screen and I read it

Baby I have a very bad unsettling feeling, please just let me know you’re okay my love a smile curve on my lips as I read this, his feeling guilty and I will fry him for a while so his guilt could engulf him

We just came from the cemetery and now we are cuing for food. Well the funeral wasn’t emotional for me because I didn’t know my father but I don’t regret coming at all. Tshepo has been a life saver, somehow she turned this unpleasant time into the funniest time I haven’t had in a while. She is a cute ball of fun herself and the fact that we both share a common enemy cousin is a bonus, Ms goody shoes was high in heels the entire time claiming that the place is too congested for her.

“Ausi Tshepo?!” a teenage girl calls her while we still in line “Mama hao are kele jwetse she already dished for both of you inside” (Your mother said to tell you...) Tshepo sighs happily

“Thanks baby, let’s go” she say to me and I follow “that line was long yoh!” she complains and I laugh, she complains about almost everything. The teenage girl hands us our food and we both take them going to our spot, the sloppy tree.

“How far are you?” I ask when we both settle down, she looks really tired and her bump is as huge as hell

“Eight months, one more to go. My husband didn’t want me to come, he want me at home under his care” typical husband “Can I eat with you?” I look at my plate and hers, we are eating the same food so I’m confused “I’m used to eating with my husband, we always share our plate and now eating alone is.....” I shake my head and give her the go ahead

“Why didn’t he come with you, he sounds like a guy who doesn’t want you out of his sight” she laughs hard

“He is afraid of funerals”

“Is he a man?” the words escape my mouth in shock

“He is as manly as they come, next week we moving to Joburg I’ll visit you with him so you can judge for yourself” a man afraid of funerals, that’s strange

“Really?” she nods with a mouthful “You’ll also meet my boyfriend” she nods back as we continue with my plate.

“Look at your sister” she points me Dimpho fanning herself by the car, we both explode at the sight of her

“She is your sister too”

“Sister from hell if you ask me” she touches the left side of her bump “My stomach” she groans touching it

“What’s wrong? Are you in labour?” she slightly laughs trying to contain her mild pain

“No don’t be silly, I just have mild pain on the side”

“Maybe you should go lie down, you have been on your feet the entire day” I suggest

“No, maybe. Please get me a glass of water, maybe it’s the food, you know funeral food has a way of telling that it’s funeral food” I nod in agreement trying to stand but an excruciating pain cuts in my stomach and I hold on to the tree

“What?” she asks down in pain, she is even sweating “Aaaaaah thando something is wrong” she cries holding her stomach

“Aaaaaaaa” my response comes with my own cry for help, I try to stand but something cuts deep in my stomach refraining me. I feel an excruciating pain tearing me inside. As weak as I am, I see Tshepo is starting to hyperventilate next to me “Dimphooooo?!” I call her loud enough and she sees us, I wave her over but she looks at us and turn on her steps “Heeeeeeeeeeeelp” with the little energy I have left I scream loud enough before I feel myself succumbing to painful stomach-ache sleep that already engulfed Tshepo “Lord please help us” that’s the last words I whisper before my eyes painfully shut.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 37

POISON-TWO LIVES

MUSA

From dawn of this morning I haven't been myself. From polishing my sleep away in the morning something in me is a bit shifty, I can't quite put my hand around it. I texted my girl to make sure she is alright but she blue ticked me just like yesterday and I don't blame her at all, I was an ass and I still am. My head is all over the place, I don't know how I'm going to make the mess I'm in right. Even arriving here I haven't been as jolly as everyone but seeing my father does put a smile on my face. I thought I had seen my dad at his happiest, but boy was I wrong! Now this old man is over the moon, with his sickness his ecstatic and I couldn't be more content.

I'm enjoying my lunch alone in the kitchen because I'm avoiding being around everyone, my mood today is not in its best and I'm afraid I might snap at everyone. I feel a pair of eyes on me and I turn to find Sindi standing by the door staring intently at me. She came with my sisters, my father believes she is carrying my child and somehow I'm starting to believe it too, yes I'm not sure but there is that inner voice that makes me see that there is a possibility that she is carrying my child

"Staring is rude" she chuckles and I hear her steps getting near to me

"Your fine but your my ex/baby daddy, so don't flatter yourself. I don't vomit and turn around and eat my own vomit" she jabs

"Auch!" she laughs hard looking at me pretending to be broken

"Uright?" she sincerely asks taking a chair opposite mine

"Yeah! Ngi'right, wena?" she gives me two thumbs up

"Where is thando?" this is what I'm avoiding from everyone, since yesterday. Where is thando? Where is thando is all I'm asked

“She had lots of assignments she needed to get done this weekend” I blatantly lie

“I see” she says hesitantly trying to read my expression, Sindi and I dated for years. Somehow she is one of the people who can see right through me “Are you two fighting?” she sees that I’m lying but I’m not about to discuss my relationship with my baby mama

“Sindi don’t” I shake my head for emphasis, I don’t need her in my business. She raises her hands in surrender

“I’m sorry I don’t mean to pry, I just.....” She trails off and heavily sighs “Forget it, I need to talk to you about something” I give her the go ahead expression, she exhales loudly and clasp her hands together then gaze at me “I know your still doubtful about this baby” she brushes her bump adoringly staring at it, I wish to do that but something in me is afraid of attaching to the child and it turns out not to be mine “And you have every right to be but I want you to know that I didn’t refuse DNA test because of any ulterior motives, I just” she sighs deeply “I just want us to wait until she is born then you can have all the test you want, I was advice by the doctor that it’s very dangerous to do those test while still pregnant”

“Sindi we past that, we’ll wait” I assure

“Thank you but that’s not my ask for today” she gaze at me one more time “I..... I need you to help me with something”

“Am all ears” although I’m hoping it’s not something troubling, I have enough stress

“I want to stand on my own, in fact I need to stand on my feet before my baby arrives. I can’t live between your home and thando’s home when the baby comes, I’m going to need a stable home” I nod although still confused “I need you to help me pay all my debts so I can have a fresh start and maybe.....” She trails off and clear her throat “And maybe buy me a house, even a two roomed house” now that’s quite an ask

“Are you listening to yourself?” I enquire

“Musa this baby is yours and I know you, you won’t let your child grow in between places, I just need a stable house for our baby please” she doesn’t get me

“And the debt?” she shifts uncomfortably wincing

“I....I have debts that amount to R5500 at least” haibo!

“At least?”

“The past two months I spent at your home I paid some off from my salary because I don’t use it as much, now I’m only left with that amount”

“Who or how.....” she cuts me

“You know the life I lived Musa, it was an expensive life and I couldn’t afford it with just pick’n pay salary and a broke boyfriend” I can’t help but laugh

“You ate my money wena, don’t go around calling my hustle broke” she laughs nodding

“True, I just..... I bought two weaves which were straight imported from brazil when we were still together, and I knew you would make a plan to pay for them so when you broke up with me, it was my own debt and I’m trying to pay them but it’s taking forever because now I only have my salary to bounce on and I have to save for the baby” I don’t like kicking the horse when it’s down but I have to ask

“If I was the money maker as well, what was the sugar daddies for?”

“They were for the exclusive parties and influence” wow! Woman never cease to amaze me

“I’ll talk to thando and we’ll get back to you with the house issue, the debts forget it. Pay it from your salary, don’t worry about saving for my child, if the child is mine she will be well taken care of” she nods with slight smile

“That’s better than a no, thank you” she pushes the chair standing off but immediately balance by the table holding the left side of her bump “She is kicking, don’t you want to feel” something sparks in me, I just stare. She comes closer and take my hand putting it on her bump, this involuntarily brings a smile to my face, I don’t know how to describe this, it’s like a heartbeat “This one is going to dance like mama” we both laugh hard

“Don’t corrupt my child please” Someone clears their throat by the door, Sindi immediately pushes my hands off her bump when we find my fathers’ staring. She scurries out of the kitchen like lightning “I was just feeling my baby kick, nothing major” I explain because their looks say other wise

“Finally, you admit the child is yours” my father goes to the fridge and pours himself a glass of cold water “What’s wrong with you?” he questions sitting before me

“Nothing” he laughs

“Nothing doesn’t make you moody the whole weekend and it definitely doesn’t make you isolate yourself from your family. Khuluma, kwenzajani thando dumped you?” (Talk, what happened.....) it feels like it, the fact that she is not taking my calls or replying my texts is frustrating me worse

“Bhuti wami please excuse us” his brother asks next to me and my father immediately stands. It’s funny how he still respects his brother, even today in their old days he still refers to his brother as ‘bhuti wami’

“Talk Musa, talk to your father” my father advises first before leaving the room. Now I’m sited with my biological father awkwardly

“You’re too old to be calling him like that and it’s odd” he laughs but it doesn’t reach his ears, he collects himself and pierce me with his stare

“Let’s go sit outside” that comes as command, so because I have nothing to do anyway I follow him out where we sit at the balcony watching everyone play pool volley ball “I know I don’t know you that well but from what I have seen and what I have been told, your just me. You’re an introvert and because you don’t have many friends you don’t know how to channel your emotions sometimes. From my sons I know you and langa are similar while sihle and mondli are.....” he fails to find the right word and we both laugh

“Extroverts” he shakes his head still laughing

“Those are extra-ordinary, they live in their own world” I couldn’t agree more “Khuluma nami Gama” (Talk to me name)

I release a heavy sigh first before I can unfasten my knot “I had a fight with my girl” he stays silent for me to continue “She...I..... I feel guilty?”

“This is a good start, I know it’s not easy channelling your feeling as an introvert but you’re doing great, go on” he encourages and I laugh because he sounds like a therapist fishing information

“I have something that belongs to her and I don’t know how to give it without losing her” he frowns

“Now I’m lost” how do I tell him without incriminating myself “Gama talk” he sternly encourages

“I did something.....i.....” you know what? Let me be honest, if he hates me it’s up to him. I take a much needed deep breath before I narrate the whole incident, from the heist to finding out that the man whose money I have been using is thando’s father. The only part I left out is the Lawrence killing part. Mondli begged me never to mention it to our father no matter how happy I get.

“So you feel guilty because you started your businesses with your father in law’s money” precisely

“And worse part is I took my frustrations on her, she doesn’t even know about all this, it’s my guilt eating me up as a man” he laughs patting my shoulder “It’s not funny Gama, I left my girl to go bury her father alone while I should have been by her side” he still laughs

“I understand son, you felt your ability as man questioned when thought everything you have technically belongs to her because you started everything with her money” I nod “Okay to make you feel better, how about you write down the amount you used so far and I give it to you then you can give it to her in full amount” eish, he thinks I’m talking peanuts

“It’s a lot of money” I warn, he raises an eyebrow

“Talk, we talking K’s or M’s”

“2M in total” I expect him to cringe but he nods understandably

“Give me two weeks maximum and I will organise the money for you. But how are you going to give it to her without making her suspicious” that’s one of the things that was troubling me, I thought of giving her the rest of the money left but how? “Let me think on it, I will see how I help you out of this one. Now stop being grumpy, go join your brothers and sisters and please apologize to your woman, you wronged her” that goes without saying, I know I was an ass

“I’m going there to apologize, I’ll ask her uncle to send me location. I need to fix.....” Mondli walks in looking empty. His holding his phone with his hands shaking, I have never seen him like this “What’s wrong?” I’m immediately on my feet to him

“It’s.....I.....” he stutters with his chest expanding and contracting hard in fear “Tshepo..... she.....my baby..... oh lord!” He looks down and tears freely fall his cheeks, Gama takes his phone from his hand and gently push him to the chair

“He won’t talk when he is like this, let’s call Tshepo” he dials her immediately putting it on speaker but it goes unanswered while I pat my sudden mute brother “Let’s see the last call he received or dialled” he says going through his phone and he dials the number, it rings couple of times before he asks “Hello, I’m Mondli’s father. My son is in shock, I would like to know what.....” the caller cuts him

“Oh Nkosi, it’s me Maseko, I just wanted to let him know that Tshepo is in hospital. She and her cousin ate poison and.....”

“WHAT!” Gama exclaims shocked

“It’s not looking good, the baby didn’t make it and her cousin cannot be found she.....”

“Maseko how does this happen under your care, don’t touch my grandchild I’m on my way” he shouts before he drops the call “Get him in the car and I will get Nkosi, we have to go” he immediately orders before I can ask questions. Mondli is a mess, tears are freely falling his cheeks

“Come, let’s go bafo” I help him up and we baby walk to the car

“My little girl bafo” it breaks my heart seeing him so torn like this, he doesn’t even have any strength

“I know m’fwetho, I know” I don’t even know I’m just trying to console, I myself I’m confused. I was told Tshepo attended a funeral at her home when I arrived here, how did she come in contact with poison? “Qina bafo, cry all you want, I will be your strength and you’ll be your wife strength. Take it all out until we make it to her” (be strong....) we approach the car to find our fathers sadly waiting for us, Mondli keeps sniffing his tears away. My father calls Langa and

Buhle aside, from the expression on their faces I see his breaking the news. Buhle quickly marches to us and embrace Mondli in hug rubbing his back, langa pats his shoulder with nothing but sadness

“If you need anything bafo, anything I’m here” Mondli nods sniffing, we help him in the car and my phone disturbs me. It reports ntate Mohapi calling, first instinct is to ignore him but I quickly remember he is with thando, I need to talk to her. So I pick the phone.

‘Nkosi’ I feel something, that fear that hits once and disappears

‘Ntate Mohapi’ he sighs heavily

‘I’m going to need you to sit down, I have something to tell you’ I can already hear my heart beating out of my chest ‘Nkosi?!’ he calls out

‘I am’ I’m standing, the people in the car are hooting for me to get in

‘Thando, thando’ he sniffs, and I make that he is crying ‘thando is no more, she was feed poison during.....’ I can’t hear the rest, my knees instantly fails me, I hit the ground with my knees and try to breath holding my aching heart, I’m running out of breathe..... I don’t know how and when but I feel cold water splashed all over my body, only now tears silently flow down my cheeks. Everyone is standing on top of me, I’m on the ground.

“Bafo what’s wrong?” Mondli worriedly asks kneeling next to my head, his the one with the bucket

“Thando.....thando.....they said thando is dead” I fail to contain myself, I explode right in front of my family. The girls follow my explosion, they all wail out loud

“No no no, Vuyani no bhuti say your lying” Lindiwe shatters to the ground but Buhle is quick to catch her. Buhle holds her to the ground as they both cry the pain away. Gama helps me off the ground and tightly holds me

“Ngiyaxolisa mtanami, I’m so sorry Ndlangamandla” (Clan names) I feel my hands shaking, his hugging me but im not returning the hug, everything is just foggy. This has to be a lie.

“Bafo?!” both Langa and Mondli calls out behind me, they pithily group hug me. My father and Sihle are sadly staring at us, I see a lone tear escape my father’s eye. Thando was a daughter to him. I try to contain myself even though im

failing dismally, I refuse to believe this sh*t. My girl is still alive and I'm going to get her.

"Bafo i...I have to go, I'm sorry I can't come with you to....." Gama cuts me as I try to reason to Mondli

"This is what is going to happen, we are going to Free State to fetch our granddaughter, then we are all going to see your girl and pay our respects. Is that clear?" everyone agrees "Langa, Sihle. Handle things here, keep the girls safe and let you mother know as soon as she arrives, she is not picking up her phone" they both nod as we all climb the car, now I'm the shattered one. My brother is broken but he is trying so hard to console me in his pain

"Bhuti" Lindiwe knocks on the door while we still waiting for Gama who is giving orders to his security "Vuyani" she cries more when I open the window

"Don't cry baby girl, you shouldn't be crying in you condition" I wipe her tears with my thumbs "I'll tell him myself when I arrive home, he just lost his brother I can't tell him over the phone" she nods sniffing "Now be strong for my tomato okay" she chuckles still sniffing "Go take a nap" she nods and leaves with Buhle holding her. Gama gets in and starts the car

"This is pure bad luck, two funerals to my boys at the same time" his talking to my father at the front sit next to him, only when he doesn't get an answer he turns to inspect his brother worriedly

"She was my daughter, she may have not been my blood but those are my children. I raised her and her brothers. It's not even a year since we buried her older brother and now we are going to bury her? You see why I don't believe in ancestors, those being are selfish and useless. If MaNdlovu and Sipho are now ancestors how could they allow this to happen? Couldn't they protect their child? How do they expect Vuyani to survive this" we all fall into deep silence taking in what he just said "I swear when I die, I'm going to be a useful ancestor. No one in my family is going to suffer under my watch. I swear I'm going to be a pantsula ancestor if it's what it takes to keep you all safe" in the midst of our sorrow both Mondli and I slightly laugh at the back while Gama throws my father a dagger and say

“Stop talking about death, you’re not going anywhere” I smile looking at the two
“Gama where is your girl’s home? Was she in Mpumalanga?” yes this reminds me

“No let me ask her uncle to send me location, I just know it’s also in Free State”
Mondli gives me my phone when I try to search my pockets, I must have dropped it when I shattered.

“Perfect, I’m sure it won’t be that far if she is also in Free State. What did they say happened?” only now it comes back

“Poison....” I trail off thinking, thando is not dead, I refuse to believe.

“This can’t be a coincidence” Mondli remarks. Exactly my thoughts but then I shut down, I drift in lonely world thinking how could God do this to me. My girl left like that? I didn’t even had the time to apologise. No I know I’m not in God’s good books but I refuse to believe that my girl is dead, not when I still have to give her the world, not when I still have to make an honest woman out of her, not when.....If she is, I’m taking my life as well, thando is my reason for breathing and without her I’m nothing.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 38

IT'S ALWAYS THOSE CLOSEST TO US WHO SINKS THEIR TEETH DEEPER

The Nkosis arrived at the Mohapis as dusk befell the skies, but they were further ushered to the hospital where the rest of the family is still sadly searching for answers. Upon their arrival at the hospital Musa's phone beeps showing a notification that he has arrived at the destination nate Mohapi sent him, this means that thando is also here. Mondli sees his father in law in the parking lot sitting in his car with the driver sit door widely opened, he scurrilously let his feet carry him towards him. His feet kisses the ground while his body is seated in the car with his heard buried in his hands. He sprang to him like lightning and Ntate Maseko sees him when he approaches, he embraces him in his arms for comfort as soon as they meet and pat his back while his eyes study the three men behind him. Nkosi Mondli's father he knows but there other two are new faces although he doesn't need to be told they are related, the is clear family resemblance amongst them

"Where is she?" Mondli whispers still buried in his hold

"I'll take you to her son, I'm so sorry" he lets him go and pitifully scan him "She kicked everyone out, she doesn't want to see all of us. Maybe you being here....."
Gama cuts him

"What happened to my daughter and granddaughter Maseko" he exasperatedly asks, this doesn't make sense to him. Who would feeds their own daughter poison? She was at her own home, with her people for crying out loud

"Nkosi....." the old man sighs sitting back in the car "Everything is just..... I don't even know how to explain it, we were alerted by the noise outside and when we got there, both of them were just lying there with foam....with foam....." he breaks, he can't finish what he saw, it mortifies him that something like this happened in his own family. He himself he blame it on him, he tried to read thando when he first saw her but that stupid brother of his interrupted him and he let go. There was something dark hovering her spirit, he saw the darkness but before he could read any further Lereko interrupted him

“My condolences Mohapi, this shall pass too” Bab Nkosi squeezes Ntate Maseko’s shoulder causing him to come back to them. He is been lost in his own world for a moment.

“Please take me to my wife” Ntate Maseko heavily nod and closes his car. He leads them to the floor where most of his family is gathering. Musa sees Ntate Mohapi amongst a group of people seated in sorrow, he marches straight to him while Mondli enters the room that Ntate Maseko shows him

“Ntate Mohapi?!” Mohapi raises his head from his hands to find what he didn’t expect, he doesn’t need to ask, Mondli his son in law looks just like Musa, even their surnames. How did he miss this?

“Nkosis” he acknowledges the two old ones first and then deeply sigh “I’m sorry son” he delivers the words shaking his head for emphasis

“Sorry for what? I want to see her” he snaps. Both his fathers’ comes close to contain him “Where is thando?” he enquires once more, every one raises their heads when he asks of thando

“Musa she didn’t make it, im so sorry son” Musa denies with his head

“NO, WHERE IS SHE?” his trembling body alerts Gama that his son is about to fall, he quickly catches him before he hits the ground and gently pull him to his chest as they sit down the tiled floor “Where is she” his voice painfully keeps asking with his head buried in his father’s chest “Baba where is my wife?” Gama hisses, the first time his son acknowledges him is through something like this

“Qina Ndlangamandla” (Be strong) Gama consoles his son. His heart is aching as well but he is trying so hard to be strong for him and Mondli “Nkosi help me here” he directs to his brother. They both seat him on the bench and bab Nkosi takes over consoling his nephew while Gama fishes for answers. He stands before Ntate Mohapi and pierce him with his stare “How do you know thando?” he calmly asks

“She was my niece, Lekgotla’s daughter” Gama nod slowly trying to understand

“So she is the cousin that ate poison with Tshepo” Mohapi agrees with his head

“And him?” he points Musa “How is he related to you?”

“His my son and that’s my brother” his eyes leaves the sockets, he pops them like a frog punched on the stomach “Are you okay?” Gama calmly asks him, he just slightly smiles blinking his nerves away

“Yeah....yes...I’m fine” he wipes his sweat and takes small breaths to calm down. Gama is looking at him the whole time, something is fishy with this man.

“Aren’t you going to introduce me” Ntate Maseko asks his brother who just instantly went cold

“Oh....oh....that is Musa, thando’s boyfriend and you heard the man that’s his brother” ntate Maseko chuckles and goes to bab Nkosi and Musa

“So thando and tshepo both took the Nkosi men” he extends his hand to Bab Nkosi who also welcome it with a smile

“I guess so, even though we were not aware” they all nod.

Musa is a bit calm, tears are still falling his eyes but he is now seated on the chair with his hands clasp together watching his tears meet the cold tiled floor “What happened?” his questions stills the whole room. Ntate Mohapi swallows hard and moves away from Gama’s piercing stare

“Son someone fed them poison, that’s all we know for now” ntate Maseko replies taking a sit next to him. Musa is between Bab Nkosi and ntate Maseko on the bench with his head still buried on the floor

“Details” he enquires

“The details are not important Musa what.....” ntate Mohapi tries to cover up but Gama cuts him, he moved away from him but his eyes refuse to leave Mohapi, something is up

“We demand to know the entire truth” ntate Mohapi shifts uncomfortably when Gama requests with his eyes on him

Ntate Maseko sighs heavily first “I don’t know when it happened but the people outside said they heard a painful cry for help by the tree, so they ran there and found Thando and Tshepo lying there with foam coming out of their mouths. That’s when we were alerted by the commotion outside that something is wrong. We went to see what was happening by the tree and our eyes fell on the same scene they described. Lereko called the ambulances but we thought they

would take time, so he suggested that I take Tshepo with my car and he took Thando with his. We weren't that far out of the village when the ambulances met us along the way. I got in the same ambulance with Tshepo and he also climbed with thando, both of them were still breathing then because the paramedics announced them still alive when we swapped from cars to ambulances" he pauses and swallows a lump forming in his throat "Then when we arrived here, tshepo was immediately rushed in. I waited for the second ambulance by the entrance and when it arrived..... Her..... her....." his voice trembles, his doesn't believe it

"Her body was covered because we lost her along the way, I was in the ambulance when she died" ntate Mohapi continues

"I want to see her" Musa demands still watching his tears fall the tiled floor

"That's the thing we can't find...." ntate Mohapi coughs dramatically causing everyone's eyes to follow him "Are you alright?" Ntate Maseko asks him confused

He breathes hard "Yah, yes, can we step outside and talk, just a minute abuti waka" (my brother) Ntate Maseko frowns looking at him 'my brother?' this boy disrespects him every chance he gets, why would he suddenly call him my brother unless..... it clicks, the only time he knows him as a brother is when he did something, when he needs his help

"Lereko what did you do?" he enquires staring at him

"Nothing, is it a crime to want to talk to you?" Maseko just shakes his head and continues

"As I was saying the reason we are all still gathered here is....." Mohapi cuts him

"Anyone who wants food?"

"We sent Dimpho for that" Matieho exasperatedly reminds him, what is wrong with him suddenly

"I will go get coffee" he flies out of the room like his running from something, Maseko shakes his head and continues

“We can’t find thando’s body” Musa’s blood shot red eyes leaves the ground, he glares at ntate Maseko next to him to continue “I wanted to see her so I could pray and make sense of all this but her body cannot be found”

“HOW?” Musa shouts

“We searched the whole hospital, she cannot be found even the paramedics that brought her here the hospital denies knowing any of those men” Gama laughs, he shakes his head and keep laughing

“Let’s go back to the ambulance, she was with your brother and the two paramedics who can’t also be found in the ambulance?” ntate Maseko nods to Gama, he laughs more “And when they arrived, you said her body was already covered from the ambulance” ntate Maseko nods once again “Did you check if it’s really her?” Maseko frowns and shakes his head

“My brother was crying, I saw the covered body ushered by two paramedics and he told me she didn’t make it so I believed him and wallowed in my own sorrows. He suggested we go tell the rest of the family who shortly arrived after us in our cars, so I followed him and we did just that”

“So no one saw her dead body, you just took your brother’s word?” his suspicions are getting on ntate Maseko, his brother is everything bad but he protects his family

“Lereko is a criminal but he wouldn’t hurt his own niece” Maseko defends

“Really?” Musa is been silent, he is trying to understand all this

“Did you check the cctv cameras of the hospital?” Musa calmly asks Maseko

“Yes, they show the two paramedics getting in and after that nothing, they just go blank” for the first time he smiles shaking his head and look back on the floor. Dimpho walks in with food paper bags humming a new day has come by Celine Dion, she drops the bags on the floor and run to Musa

She kneels before him “Musa I’m so sorry, may her soul rest in pea.....” She didn’t see it coming, Musa grabs her neck and stands with her choking the life out of her, her legs are suspended in the air as she tries to free Musa off her neck

“Son put her down” bab Nkosi begs next Musa but it falls on deaf ears “MUSA” he shouts but musa’s range is focused on the prey in his hold. Gama comes and stands next to Musa

“Don’t kill her as yet, if we find your girl harmed, she and her father are going to die a slow painful death. I will make sure of it” only then Musa frees Dimpho, she falls on the floor trying to catch her breath with her aching neck. Ntate Maseko squats next to dimpho and look at Musa in displease

“What’s wrong wit.....” he doesn’t finish, Musa squats down to them and points dimpho with his finger while his eyes challenge ntate Maseko

“If I find thando harmed in any way, tell your brother his going to pay with his daughter’s life, an eye for an eye” the woman whose been silent, who looks like a widow in her attire interrupts

“Are you threating us?” Musa smiles deceitfully

“No sweetheart, I’m making you all a promise” he turns to his fathers “Baba go find your granddaughter, you’ll find me in the car. I can’t stand this corrupt family” with that he leaves the room. Ntate Maseko helps Dimpho up and just stare at her

“Dimpho did you father do anything to thando? Did you have anything to do with all this?” Maseko asks Dimpho staring at her

“Malome I don’t know anything, my father loves thando he wouldn’t do anything to her” (Uncle) Maseko shakes his head

“For your sake and his, I hope your right ngwanaka” (my child)

IN TSHEPO’S ROOM

She is facing the wall asking her inner god why would she do her like that, she was one month away from meeting the queen of her heart but like lighting just struck and her tummy feels empty. That soul that made her eat thing she never thought she would eat is no longer here, that connection she felt with the little unknown person in her is broken. Her heart is aching and the sight of her family disgust her more. She hates them all at this moment.

The door swings open and she doesn't turn thinking it's her mom or dad, both they have been annoying her pleading their cases

"My hope?!" his voice comes gentle in a whisper, she turns with her lips trembling trying to contain her cries. He opens his arms to catch her and she falls right in his arms "Oh my hope, let it all out mamakhe" she is crying silently in her husband's arms "I'm so sorry mamakhe" he continues brushing her back

"She..... is..... gone" she remarks in between sobs still in her husband's embrace

"I know my baby, I know. She is our little angel looking down on us, don't cry sthandwa sami you'll make her journey back to heaven unpleasant"

"I.....Babakhe.....i.....i don't want.....her to go"

"Mamakhe stop crying you're breaking my heart, she is not leaving us, she will forever stay in our hearts" he kisses her forehead and cups her face wiping tears "Our angel was too perfect for this cruel world, who feeds a pregnant woman poison?" her lips trembles more

"Please hold me babakhe, hold me to sleep" she snuggles on his chest and he allows her "Promise not to leave me, if death approaches you first please deny it, I can't take any more heart break, I should die before you" Mondli silently laughs but agrees

"I'll show death flames, it won't take me away from you" she sniffs allowing sleep to finally take over

"I love you babakhe"

"I love you too mamakhe"

An hour later the couple is woken by a doctor who informs them that he has the results. Tshepo instructs her husband to call the rest of the family so they can hear that her mom fed them poison, Mondli is confused but he does as told. Everyone is here except his brother.

"Where is he?" he whispers to his father

"He is in the car, his taking a nap. I checked him. Turns out the cousin that ate poison with Tshepo was his woman"

“It was thando” his father nods

“Looks like you both went for the Mohapi girls” he just smiles and goes to take his place by his wife

“You can go on doc” he gives the doctor the go ahead. The doctor steals a glance at the file in his hand and sighs

“The poison found in your system is what we call Strychnine poison, it can be fatal to human if large doses is exposed to you but with the amount found in your system. It’s not a highly contagious, I would say someone was trying to knock you up for some time. Usually it last for at least 2 hours in adults systems before they regain consciousness. But to infants it’s another story, the body of an infant cannot stand any amount of poison especially with the time the poison was in your system, if you were rushed to the hospital maybe we would have performed an immediate c section to save the baby but when you arrived here it was already too late. The poison will cleanse it’s self from your system because it’s just something that acts like a poison while it’s just something used to knock people down for some time”

“So someone was trying to knock them up” the doctor nods to Gama’s question

“Yes I would say someone wanted her to fall in deep sleep” he looks back at the file “And the food you brought, only one half eaten plate have this substance, the other plate is perfectly fine” Tshepo cries loud

“So mama you really wanted to kill thando, my plate had no poison but hers” the Nkosis frown looking at Matieho

“Tshepo ngwanaka I told you I don’t know anything about those food, baby is didn’t.....”

“I don’t believe you” she wails out loud “what did she do to you? You didn’t even know her but you killed her Maa, you killed an innocent soul Maa” Matieho is in tears, she really doesn’t know why her daughter thinks she is the one that poisoned thando

“Sthandwa sami why do you think your mom had anything to do with the poison?” Mondli asks

“The girl that gave us food said mama is the one who dished for us” he kisses her forehead

“Baby I didn’t dish you any food, I swear I know nothing about the food” she looks at her father

“And you? Why didn’t you see this? You see everything, you could have prevented all this from happening” ntate Maseko is exhausted, her daughter is blaming him and his wife

“Tshepo you know how ancestors work, they show me what they want me to see when they want me to see it. My little brother died months back but I only saw it couple of weeks ago. I know your hurting my baby but please don’t punish your mother and I, we had nothing to do with all this” it’s true, he really is as clueless as everyone

“Then if it’s not you then who? Someone has to pay for my child and thando” her eyes turn to Dimpho and Mathabiso “You devils, you did this”

“Watch that stinky mouth of yours, I’m everything but not a killer” Dimpho exasperatedly warns “Attention seeker! You always liked attention. Get over yourself, you lost a child, it’s just a baby you didn’t even know, stop try.....” she doesn’t finish

“FUCK OUT OF HERE” Mondli shouts “I SAID GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE, A BABY SHE DIDN’T EVEN KNOW? ARE YOU LISTENING TO YOURSELF? ARE YOU EVEN HUMAN? FUCKEN HOSEPIPE” Dimpho rolls her eyes and stands

“With pleasure” she bangs the door behind her

IN THE CAR

He just needed a moment to collect his thoughts, he felt his range bursting out of the pores of his skin and he was afraid he might hurt someone. So he went to the car just to sit alone and think of his way forward, thando is not dead he can feel it. Mohapi did something to her, his very suspicious and why did he flee the scene? Yes his car is no longer in the parking lot, he left when he went for coffee and didn’t come back. Just still lost in his thoughts heavy sleep visit him out of nowhere and he succumb to it

~Somewhere in a bare land stands a figure before him. The place looks naked, like a dessert but the lush of green pastures says otherwise. He tries to walk closer to the figure that looks like a human being but he feels glued to the

ground. The person is not facing him but he takes his time to inspect him, even from a distance he swear this is Dalas, this is Siph

“Dalas?!” he calls out hesitantly

“Dalas where is my sister?” his voice sounds closer than his body “Where is she Musa?” Siph

“Dalas I don’t know what happened”

“You know Musa, you let her go dine with those wolves and now they want to bite her, you let her go there” his still not facing him

“You know how stubborn thando is, I tried to.....”

“Dalas you asked for my sister and I gave her to you because I trust you, I trusted you to protect her but you failed” Musa feels like he is out of words to justify himself “Don’t you know how to tame your woman? Is she too much for you? Should I send someone else who will be able to protect her?”

“I apologize Dalas” that’s all that manage to escape his mouth

“Trust your instinct, thando is your heart, if your heart denies then so be it. Don’t doubt your heart” there is silence, Musa wants to speak but he feels like his tongue is tied “To find her, find him” the person he saw as Siph

“Dalas?!” Musa calls out, his voice is back

“Dalas” his best friend now responds next to him. He looks different, not bad different, good “Don’t kill Vuyani” now this is his friend, the one he used to talk to about anything

“Why would I kill Vuyani” his friend laughs and gives him his hand

“Come with me, I want to show you something” he puts his hand in Siph

Vuyani that's MaNdlovu, little Thandeka Ndlovu" he points the girl child "And here you have Siphos, Siphos Nkosi" Musa is stunned, but wait

"Vuyani impregnated someone?" Siphos laughs hard.

"It was nice seeing you again m'hlobo wami, I'll look out for all of you" he waves him bye and his image starts fading away

"Wait....." he is no longer next to him, he is running his eyes around hoping to see him but nothing. It feels like he is in sleep so he opens his eyes ~ damn he slept in the car. A chuckle escapes his lips, now he has to go hunting.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 39

ESCAPE PLAN

THANDO

My body feels numb, it's like I was hit by two trucks at once as for my stomach I can't say, I feel like I'm going to fart something that is going to pollute the whole continent. Fart pollution. Even my sight is vague, I can't exactly make clear images of where I'm at but the smooth ride feeling tells me that I'm in a moving vehicle. I momentarily shut my eyes once again hoping to gain my sight and memory back. My cerebrum goes to work first, it slowly lights up. Tshepo, we were eating by the tree and then she started hyperventilating and shortly I joined after her, my God! The food we were eating someone must have poisoned it. Now that my memory is back I open my eyes breathing heavily, it looks like I'm in an ambulance but there is no one next to me. My stomach aches but I don't allow the pain to consume me, I make my way to the window for the paramedics to see I'm awake but isn't one of them supposed to be next to me.

I knock once and the one not driving opens the small window

"How can I help you?" I don't know if it's the poison or what but, how can he help me? What kind of paramedic is he?

"My.....My....." What's wrong with my throat, it feels itchy and scratchy. I clear my throat to sweep the itchiness away "My cousin, how is she?" they both frown looking at each other "The one that was fed poison with me"

"Ooooh!" Jesus they are so slow "She is fine get back to bed, we are almost here"

"Aren't you supposed to be by my side?" my loud mouth fails me, I'm asking the one who is not driving

"Why?" Tell me again how did this person pass and became a qualified paramedic?

"To check me and staff" the other one driving laughs and turn to look at me, he had been looking ahead the whole time

“DAMN!” he exclaims “I’m going to have so much fun with this one” he looks at his colleague “This one is mine, hands off” I don’t like the look his giving me, I quickly close the window and go sit on the bed. Something is odd, the way they keep turning from the window checking on me. My impulsive self-grabs the small scissor I see and I try to hide it in my cleavage but the gap between my breasts shows it, tell me again why God didn’t give me large boobs, he offered me the huge behind but became stingy with the front, in my next life I should have a conversation with him before he start creating me. Tell him exactly what I want. The back of my waist is my only option, I’m certain it won’t fall. Dala always mocks me that when we have children I won’t need a towel to tie them tight on my back, the back of my waist where my behind starts is a perfect sit as he says. Thank God for the tight under this skirt, my weapon sit perfectly waiting to attack, if anyone tries anything with me, I’m going to cut his balls and throw them out of this ambulance. I make a mini prayer that we safely make it to the hospital and for Tshepo to be fine.

I know I have nowhere to confirm but my natural brain clock reports that we have been on the road for way too long. Where is this hospital? In hell perhaps? Nxa! My now exasperated emotions carry me to the window once again, I roughly open it causing the both of them to steal a glance at me

“Where is this hospital? In Britain maybe?” they both sink in fits of laughter, I’m so annoyed right now their laughter sounds like a call from hell “I want to make a phone call”

“Fotsek, go sit down” the one driving barks but he doesn’t scare me

“I demand to make a call, I have a right to make a phone call” they both look at each other and die in laughter once again

“Why?” the one not driving asks trying to contain his laughter

“Because every patient has a right to make a phone call” I hope somewhere in our constitutional book of law there is something like this, if a prisoner has a right to make a phone call so is a patient. This makes sense in my head.

“Chill nana, you’re not in prison” the one not driving

“It feels like it”

“No one asked you to express your feelings, sit the fuck down” the one driving pulls a gun under his chair and points it at me. I feel my insides freeze instantly, my jaws drop to the floor staring at the mental steel before my eyes “I said go sit damn down” as shocked and terrified as I am I do as told but I forget to close the window. What in God’s name is this? I let my imagination run loose as I sit the bed, am I kidnapped? Who would kidnap a nobody like me?

A cell phone rings from one of them and I see it’s the one not driving, I tiptoe to the window but I hide my face before he answers the phone

“Hello” as soon as he press the phone I pop my head through the window and scream

“Heeeeeeeeelp” the one driving takes the gun in his hand and hits my forehead hard with the back of it. My head falls back from the window causing me to stumble on the floor and I feel something liquid oozing from my head, I touch my forehead to only come with my blood, I painfully grunt on the floor and hold on to the bed to gain my strength as I stand

“No Boss she is awake” he continues with his conversation, the window is still widely opened so I can hear just about anything as I lie back on bed “She looks fine” “No we took the Senekal short cut” “We’ll change cars before we reach Heilbron he is already on the way” “No touching?” he sounds like his repeating what his told for his accomplice to hear “Yes boss no one should touch her” “Sure boss, we’ll let you know” there is a of moment silence, it sounds like he is off the phone

“He said no one should touch her” he informs his colleague

“I heard” the one driving replies annoyed.

The name Heilbron is familiar, I’m trying to think where I have heard it or saw it. It’s something I have come across recently but where? Heilbron, Heilbron, Heilbron, I call it multiple times in my head, then it clicks, we past that town when we came to Free State. That’s where we bought food.

If we going to pass there it means we are going back to Joburg. I have to arm up before we get there, when we change cars I’m escaping. No one is kidnapping me. With the pain in my head I put every sharp objects around me, someone is going to bleed before they put their filthy hands on me.

I managed stay put thinking of my escape plan. When the car stops and I hear both of them stepping off, I check my weapons to make sure they ready for use. Scissor at the back of my waist. "God help me kill someone today" that's how my short prayer goes at this moment. The door opens, the driver is standing a bit of a distance with someone I haven't seen, the one who was with the driver is holding the door wide open for me

"Come" he waves with his hand that I should step down but I stay put "STOP WASTING OUR TIME MAAN, STEP DOWN" he shouts causing the other two to turn on us. The driver picks his shirt and I see a gun, he doesn't need to say anything. I voluntarily step down the ambulance. His accomplice grabs my arm and leads us at the front of the ambulance where there is a dark dimmed dodge. The two are still at the back smoking and I take this as my chance, it's only three of them "Get in" he opens the back door

"What if I don't want to?" his face transforms to range, he steps inches to mine breathing fire. Before he opens his mouth I stab him with the scissor in his eye when he least expect it and run for my life, by the time he screams im running towards corn field. The fact that this maize is so tall works in my favour, I can feel and hear breaking branches that I'm being chased but I don't dare stop, I will only stop if my body fails me.

The loud sound of a gun short fired stops me, I firstly inspect my body and check if I'm not shot at then I quietly inspect my surroundings, no one sees me. They fired that bullet so I can stop in order for them to listen where I will start making movement. I may have not been clever in school but in life, I will show them flames. My knees meet the ground, I gently crawl still going forward.

"Tebza?! Tebza?!" a voice calls out, it sounds like driver's voice

"Stop screaming she will hear us, she has to be close" the other voice comes closer to me and I stop. I scatter my eyes around and I see his feet going through rows. I stop dead looking at his feet, when I see his a bit further, I continue to crawl further in to the field.

"HAI TEBZA WHERE THE FUCK IS THIS CHICK" the driver exasperatedly shouts, his not a patient man I see.

"I think we lost her" the other one replies, they both sound far behind me

“Don’t say that, Mohapi is going to kill us” Mohapi? I freeze, Mohapi? Which Mohapi? My own family Mohapi?

“We not leaving this field until we find her” I go on crawling for my life but now I’m fuming. Dimpho? That bxtch hates me so much to kidnap me? Is she that desperate for Dalas dick to want me dead? Or is it that evil stepmother? Or the evil brother who never said anything to me? But that one just gave me hate vibes he doesn’t have any reason to kill me even his mom but as for Dimpho, she has told me multiple times that I cannot handle a man like Dalas and she wants him to herself so it makes sense for her to be behind all of this. If I, no when I get out of this situation Dimpho is going to be the first person I kill. ‘If you didn’t kill the scissor guy already’ my subconscious reminds me and I throw her a look, she sheepishly goes back to being useless.

How enormous is this field? I have been crawling for far too long and I can’t seem to reach the end where somehow I hope there will be help. My knees are aching, I wish I had some pants on but I’m still in my black pencil skirt from the funeral. No matter the amount of pain I feel, forward I go and somehow I feel that I’m still followed.

Finally, there is hope. From the corn rows I can see a two roomed shack not so far from my eyes. My problem is getting out of this corn field. I pray the two chasing me will not see me run to the shack. I make a mini prayer before I beg my feet to fly me one last time and indeed I fly, I don’t dare look back. My focus is getting in the shack, I forget to knock. My whole body roughly pushes the shack and I fall inside. Two men are eating on the table, they both stare at me with their mouths dropped to the floor. My voice is in my throat, I’m trying to catch it but it fails to come until I catch my breath first.

“AUSI” the old man with grey beard gains his composure first, the young one is still gazing at me in shock

“Hooooo.....Hooooo” that’s me holding on to my chest, it burns more “Sir....please.....help.... someone is..... chasing.....kidnapping me” I hope I make sense, my voice comes out but I have to take breathing breaks between words

“Why don’t you take this” the old man squats before me and helps me drink water, I gulp it down not forgetting to watch at the back for my kidnappers

“Now tell me young lady, what’s wrong?” now I can feel the burning sensation in my chest subside

“There are two men chasing me, I think they were kidnapping me but I managed to escape. Please help me”

“Where did you lose them?” he asks throwing his eyes out where I keep glaring at

“Somewhere in the maize please help, please help sir” I clasp my hands with tears flowing down my skin “Please” he looks at the young man, he grunts before walking out of the door. The old man helps me off the floor to the chair “Sir do you have a cell phone? Can I make a call” he shakes his head with a smile on his face

“The person who has a cell phone is my son, he will borrow you when he gets back” oh thank heavens

“Thank you so so much” he leans back at his chair and stare at me

“Who are you and where do you come from?”

“My name is tha.....” The son burst back in the house interrupting us, he goes straight to the window behind us and open it wide open

“RUN TO THE TOILET NOW” his voice come in a whisper but stern and firm, I don’t wait to be told twice. I quickly climb the window and run to the toilet at the back. I hope I didn’t break the shack when climbing its window. As soon as I get in I shut it and throw my eyes through the wholes so I can see and hear what’s going on in the house, I don’t dare look behind me because I know I’m a neat freak, I might end up vomiting just by looking at what’s behind me. A gun shot startles me.

“SFEBE, IF YOU DON’T COME OUT. I’M KILLING THIS OLD MAN IN FRONT OF HIS SON” the driver’s voice shouts enough for me to hear “I’M GOING TO COUNT TO THREE, IF YOU DON’T COME OUT. THIS OLD MAN’S LIFE WILL BE YOUR FAULT” Jesus! What have I got this innocent people in? “THREE” hau! It’s three already, I burst out

“I’M HERE” I shout with both my hands in the air. They both come to the back, the driver’s got the old man in his grip with a gun on his head while the other one also has a gun pointed at the son. The driver throws the old man on the

ground and gestures for me to come to him, I nicely do as told, I don't want this innocent people losing their lives because of me. I'm welcomed with a back slap that sends me to the ground. That slap brings the Lawrence scene back to me and I instantly shutdown, I lose the will to fight.

"SFEBE, YOU THINK YOU CAN OUT RUN ME?" he squats down on me. Instead of pulling me up he kneels before my legs spreading them

"NO NO NO, O ETSANG?" (What are you doing?) The old man is terrified on my behalf "Please don't do this" the old man begs when he rip my undies. Right now I'm just staring at the sky, whatever he does I don't fight anymore, I feel numb. I never realised that heaven is this clear, I always thought it's blue every time I look at it but now having nowhere to look but heaven I see it's clear, so clear like crystal water "NOOOO!" someone is pulling both my hands from the ground, it's the old man trying to run with me but a gunshot goes once and he falls beside me. His son run to him

"NTATEEE!" he squats next to his father, his lips is trembling as tears fall his cheeks "Ntate NO NO" he begs holding his father to his chest

"ICE! Eish are vaye maan, wabo masepa ontso a etsa" (Let's go man, you see the shit you've done) now I know the driver's name is Ice and his opponent is tebza. His ice cold, even his heart is cold

"I will rape this big ass if you try anything again, LET'S GO" Ice hisses in my ear and turn. I look at the mess I made next to me, how am I going to live with myself knowing someone was killed because of me?

"I'm sorry" I whisper to the son holding his father before I stand to follow ice but the son drips me and I fall back down on him. He puts something cold in my breast, I bend to see and find small mobicel between my almost cleavage. He pushes it under the bra and just stare at me.

"SFEBE" Ice breaks our silent communication, I stand and lead the way back to the cars as they both point their guns at me following

As soon as we arrived to the vehicle, we found the one I stabbed with the scissor in the eye still hissing. He knocked me up with couple of punches before his friends stopped him then they threw me at the back sit with him while Ice and

Tebza took the front sit. Somewhere along our way to Joburg brother 'scissor' injected me with a needle on my thigh and felt dizzy before I give in to sleep.

I only wake to find myself in a clean room, everything is just clean and fresh but me, I'm still in my funeral attire. What in heaven's name is going on here? I scan my surroundings for a while but I can't make out anything. An old woman comes in just as I'm still lost in my thoughts trying to crack this equation, she looks at me with pity but doesn't say anything. She puts a tablet on the bed and leaves the room without saying anything. Before I can think of anything the tablet beeps and I immediately grab it. There is a bold text displayed on the screen.

ALL I WANT IS THE MONEY, THE SOONER YOU TELL ME WHERE IT IS, THE SOONER YOU'LL BE OUT OF HERE AND DON'T TRY TO MAKE A CALL, THIS DEVICE ONLY RECEIVES for the first few minutes I'm just staring at the text, what money? Another one comes through just as I'm still wondering

YOU CAN TYPE, THIS WILL BE OUR COMMUNICATION METHOD UNTIL YOU DECIDE TO GO WHEN YOU TELL ME WHERE THE MONEY IS the money in my bank? Would someone go through all this trouble for R5000 and the few cents in my account. I type my honest reply when an idea pops in my head

I have R5000 in my account but I can top it if you allow me to call my uncle and boyfriend, they can give you more I anxiously wait for his reply

LERATO I WANT THE MONEY YOUR FATHER LEFT YOU the money my father left me? Wait....Lerato? Only one person calls me Lerato, could my uncle be behind all this? Nah! Not him maybe I need a rest. Another text comes just as I'm thinking ***THE OTHER DOOR IS THE BATHROOM, YOU CAN CLEAN UP IN THERE BUT NOTE THIS NICE TREATMENT WILL END IF YOU DON'T GIVE ME WHAT I WANT*** because I feel sticky I quickly rush in there for a bath. As soon as I strip my clothes something falls, the mobicel. My first instinct is to scan around the bathroom to see if there are not any cameras and I see none, I pick the cell and dial Dalas..... 'You have insufficient airtime to make a call, please load airtime' Really! Today of all days. Can someone shoot this white woman now?

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 40

.....LIKE ANY FOOL IN LOVE, HE'S PREPARED TO DIE FOR THE ONE WHO HOLDS THE KEY TO HIS HEART.

MUSA

Now that he know the devil his dealing with, it's time to put on his boxing gloves. Win or lose, thando has to wake up in their home tomorrow morning. With or without him. Going against the man he once had the outmost respect for doesn't exactly give the guarantee that he might win, his just a small fish in this man's existence but like any fool in love, he's prepared to die for the one who holds the key to his heart.

He sits in his hotel room analysing and evaluating the whole incident, there is still this persistent question at the back of his head that's weighing him down. Why? Why would Mohapi kidnap his own niece? The man is as wealthy as the likes of Patrice Motsepe if his screws are still tightly fastened. What would he gain from abducting thando? He have dived in his thoughts for hours but he can't seem to come up with a tangible reason why. But with or without knowing his motive behind kidnapping his girl, he is still coming for him with everything his got. Now the respect is spat on, he don't care that he is the man he once looked up to and respected so much, no matter the respect there are some lines that should not be crossed. For him the boundary line is his family, touch them you poke his venomous side and with his woman, that's not just poking him, it's pure disrespect. All his morals tends to fly out of the room when thando is concerned, hence his first kill was Lawrence and even today he doesn't regret taking his life. According to him he was doing God a favour by removing his useless life from existence. The likes of women abusers like him deserve hell.

A beeping sound of his cell phone drags his scatters thoughts in one place. An sms pops on his screen and he opens it to find a please call me, a guttural sound pass through his breath before he reads the automated message. *Please call now* this is written Zinhle in every aspect, she is the only one who loses phones and changes numbers like weather and he knows for a fact that 'please call me' are her way of communication. Not that she doesn't have airtime but she is not

the type to call employed people, her airtime is for her unemployed friends only. He's tempted to just let it off but another one comes through when he's still battling with his thoughts so he dials her before all her 'please call me' starts attacking his phone. It rings once and she receives it.....

'Babeeee' she is weeping. It's thando, not Zinhle. Her voice comes soft in a whisper but he can hear from its deliverance that she is crying. His heart shatters into more fragments of ache just by the sound of her voice 'Dalas?!' the grip on his phone is so tight you would swear his choking the poor phone to death

'Qhawekazi lami' (My heroine) she weeps a bit louder, even though she is weeping, the sound of her voice still warms him although he hates hearing her cries 'Shhhh don't cry sthandwa sami, don't cry please mama, your breaking me' It's true, his chest is tightening and compressing his valves to help him exhale

'Babe I'm so sorry I didn't listen to you, I shouldn't have gone to that.....' as much as he would like to dwell on that, now he needs to know her exact whereabouts and whether she is safe

'It's okay sthandwa sami, tell daddy ukuphi ngizok'landa manje' (Where are you so I can come fetch you now?) he's already on his feet pacing around eagerly waiting for her location

'Baby they kidnapped me'

'I know mama, I know. Ukuphi' his running out of patience

'I don't know baby but I think in Joburg, we past Heilbron when coming here' fuck! He can't help it but punch the poor table like it's the one that kidnapped his woman. Joburg? They are in free-state for fuck sakes

'But are you okay sthandwa sami? No one touched you?' he asks lowly taking in his breath to calm down, there is silence, she doesn't respond immediately 'Thando?'

'Yes, yes' she sounds like she was thinking about her response

'YES WHAT?' He didn't mean to shout but he can't handle another torment with thando, she has been through so much already

'Yes baby I'm fine' He is not convinced but for now he needs to find her first

'Whose phone is this?' he asks

'Some guy who helped me, baby.....' he cuts her

'Listen sthandwa sami, I'm going to drop the call. I want to trace this number so I can know your exact location' Spider walks in looking through his tablet, he gesture for him to sit while he talks with his girl

'Babe no I want to talk to you, I can't go back in that bedroom. I want to stay in this bathroom and talk to you'

'You're in the bathroom?'

'Yes baby there are cameras in the bedroom so I can only use this phone in the bathroom' shit!

'Listen, you've been gone for far too long. Drop the call and hide the phone so I can track it. Go back to the bedroom sthandwa sami and keep it on silence, I'll send it airtime just now so you can call me every time you take bathroom breaks' there is sniffing 'Please sthandwa sami, I know it's hard but just hang in there for your man" there is a low 'okay' covered with sniffs "I promise if you do this tomorrow morning you'll wake up in my arms'

'You promise?' her voice is trembling again

'With everything in me, just hold on for tonight. Tomorrow morning your man is going to sex you nice and slow' Spider clears his throat to remind him of his presence but it doesn't look like Musa cares.

'Okay baby, don't forget to send the airtime so I can call you when I pee during the night'

'Okay mommy, daddy loves you yezwa' she sniffs to agree 'Stop crying, daddy is coming to get you. Don't you love daddy?' the sound of a giggle leaves her lips it's enough to warm him up

'I love you too baby, but I have more to offer if you keep your end of the bargain'

'Tell me baby' he encourages

'If I wake up in your arms like you promise, I'm going to throat that cock, phela my cousin taught me somethings' now she is gossiping, you don't interrupt his

woman when she gossip. You gossip with her and encourage her. She taught him well.

'Haibo mkhozi! Spill' (Friend) Spider drops his mouths when he encourages his woman, he mustn't dare look at him like that, this is a conversation between lovers. It's not his fault that his Cerebos levels are reaching the roof. Her soft laugh warms him more

'We had ice-cream and cucumber for lessons' he explodes in fits of laughter 'She taught me how to run my hand through the length and deep throat it' something twitches in his pants, luckily he has a knee length coat on, hopefully this moron didn't see his instant bulge but with that stupid green on his face, his not so sure 'She recommended that I smear Nkosi with honey first, put black halls under my tongue. Firstly I have to blow Nkosi with halls air and.....' okay that's enough, he cannot take the torture anymore, the gossip is going down his member.

'Okay mommy, I get it. Please go back to the bedroom' she laughs his frustration

'Okay my baby, I love you to the moon and back. Mcwa!' she drops the call happily and he just grin at the phone like he can see her through it until spider clears his throat for his attention. Such a cock blocker.

"This is why I will never marry" he remarks throwing the tablet in his face

"Never say never spider, what am I looking at?"

"That's traffic cam confirmation. Looks like your man Mohapi skipped the province, traffic cameras picked his car somewhere in Sandton" music to his ears

"Let's checkout man, what are we still doing here? Let's go" he is already back on his feet. Spider follows him out of the room. They had booked the three of them in a hotel here in bloem because they thought Thando was still somewhere there "Where is Croc?" Croc is short for crocodile, it's better calling him Croc or else people would wonder why he's walking around with two puff guys with weird names

"He was already checking out" perfect "You have everything on you right?" Spiders asks

"Yeah, I only came with my phone" he and Croc are Gama's security detail. What his father do with guys like this he don't know and he doesn't give a damn, he

is just glad they skipped the province to come help him per his father's request. Gama, Nkosi, Mondli and Tshepo all followed the baby's hearse back home. Gama was torn thinking he would take it differently that he had to leave with the body but he totally understand and he is fine, he just wish he would stop calling every hour. He called this two to come help him and instructed them to kill anything they come across he will clean up. Mondli said he is just a phone call away but he doesn't want to burden him more, he is going through a lot "Croc can your contact also trace a number for me?" he asks as soon as they all settle in the car, they both took the front sit while his in the back glued to his phone as he sends thando airtime

"Yeah he can" Mondli would do it now but he wants him to grieve in peace with no worries

"Here" he hands him his phone displaying the numbers on the screen "My girl called me few minutes ago using this number, I think knowing her exact location will help us diverse. While you both go get Mohapi for me, I go get my girl where ever he put her" he nods sending the number to his contact, Spider is behind the wheel speeding just the way he needs him to.

"You know I wanted to ask that we are busy chasing your woman kanti uyafeba" he laughs hard

"Spider im not the cheating type, im a one woman man. That was my woman on the phone" he brags

"Never say never, I'll ask you one day when you need our help to hide your side chick from your wife" this one is crazy, he would never cheat on his woman

"Don't mind him, they showed him flames and now he is scared of pussy" Croc intervenes "He is starting the trace, we'll have her exact location in less than 15 minute" Fantastic, he relaxes his neck back on the seat, his shoulders have been heavy but now he can feel some of the weight wearing off.

Croc's contact came through for them. The navigator pinpoint Thando at the sacred men's club in Sandton. Her location corresponds with that of Mohapi. He felt range bursting through his veins when he saw the pin point but every time she called calmed him down, at least she was safe for the time being. Why

would this fucker bring his woman to a fucken sacred men's club? Was he going to pin those fuckers on her? Nxa!

Good thing about the club is that it's small and intimate and he happen to know his way around it, how he knows the club is a story that thando cannot know no matter what. They stood a bit of distance to arm up. He has two pistol tucked on his waist and one inside his coat jacket. Croc and Spider are armed, more like war armed, one would swear they are going for world warIII. Even the black attire with black bullet proofs.

He is the one going inside because he already has access, they agreed for the others to wait for his flame signal before they make their way in.

At the door he acknowledges the entrance security with a nod, he smiles because he knows him but he doesn't forget to bring his finger for a scan. It's standard procedure for the entrance guard to scan the members. When the device agrees that he is a member he gives him his temporary entrance card for all doors. He doesn't search him though, he looks harmless, and he is not a new member although he hasn't seen him in a while but nonetheless he looks like he is just here for pleasure. If only he knew that the man is armed with three heavy pistols.

He makes sure to keep his head down as he makes his way to the bar, he is avoiding being noticed at all costs. He opens a tab and order himself Irish whisky for the night. He takes his bottle and glass and make his way out of the club to the sacred rooms' receptionist. It's the ever beautiful lady behind the desk, the one he always wonder how she works at a place like this or she is one of the 'girls'.

"Hello" He is trying in every way to keep his cool

"Hi Nkosi, still handsome I see" she acknowledges with a smile that reaches behind her ears, he wasn't aware she knows his name "You looking for pleasure?" he nods his head with the same smile "Your request?" he hands her the entrance card

"Just a single lady in vip section" she nods going through her computer

"If I wasn't on duty tonight, maybe I might offer my exquisite services to you" oh there it is, she is one of the girls. He just smiles to her offer to throw her off "Black or white?" she is back to working

“Intrigue me” she smiles at him once and goes back to her device

“I’ll give you a black lady, we can’t have a fine brother like you tasting white pussy. They say once you taste vanilla, you never go back to chocolate” myths. Nonetheless they both laugh.

“I guess black it is” she nods giving him his entrance card now added with room number. She staring at him until he slide in the elevator, he turns after getting in and stare at her back until the doors closes.

A few minutes slide through the elevator then he is walking down the corridor to his room. The girl is already inside sitting with her legs wide spread on the table pole, she is wearing a face mask like all the others but he can see with the way her lips just dropped that she is shocked. He first check his navigator and it tells him that his woman is in the upper floor, the VVIP, SHIT!

“Beautiful” He acknowledges taking a seat as he unbutton his coat

“Hey handsome, what do I call you?” her voice, is it the seduction in it or his hearing things.....why is it so familiar?

“Call me daddy” she steps off the table and sits on his lap “And what do I call a sexy number like you” she melts even behind the mask this man still makes her blush just by being himself

“Call me Lady Dee” her voice is laced with seduction that could charm even the likes of Desmond Dudu, but unfortunately for her not today. Today his on a mission, the magnitude of his desires is just to hold his woman to sleep the night away.

“I’m a whisky man, I’m hoping it drives you too” her lips curve before she plants a peck on his lips. He doesn’t reciprocate the kiss with the same effort it’s delivered, instead he caresses her thighs to make her think they are both parallel, heading the same way.

“I’ll be anything you want” He pours her a glass and she holds it for a toast, he kisses his class to hers and let her make the toast “to the best night of our life” he watches her carefully as she gulps.

“Before we start, why don’t you be a darling and go upgrade our package. This is too standard to dine a lady like you, go change it to VVIP” the curve of her lips as he hands her his card. She smooches his lips before standing and he has no

choice but to reciprocate the kiss so it doesn't raise any suspicions but he still doesn't give it his all, when she moans in his mouth he lets her go. She is panting.

"Just as I imagined" he is lost

"Huh?" he enquires

"I just imagined that you're a great kisser when you walked in here" he just offer her his devious smile to ease her away and she finally sways out of the room, he watches her carefully as she catwalks out. Those legs..... that voice..... Jesus is this Dimpho? Nah! Nxa maybe his imagining things, dimpho is a beautiful, educated girl, she wouldn't associate herself with things like this. His phone rings and he quickly answers it because he knows it's Thando

"Mommy" the way she huffs he picks that she is out of patience

"Baby ukuphi, you said you're here an hour ago?" (Where are you?)

"I am mommy, in less than 30 minutes I'll be with you" she huffs "Please my love trust me, now go back to the room"

"Oookay" that 'okay' has no hope at all but she does listen and drop the call

Lady Dee comes back in less than five minutes and they both make their way to the upper floor. When they walk out of the door he makes sure to be all over her sexy body because there are cameras throughout all the passages, but rooms are private so he knows for a fact that inside the rooms there are no cameras. The elevator deliver them to the upper floor where they head to their booth still touchy all over one another.

As soon as they enter the room, he yanks the mask off her face. Everything about her was just screaming Dimpho and he couldn't let it slide. Indeed he was right, it is her in flesh.

"You're not supposed to do that" her voice comes in a whisper

"Are you delusional mara?" she swallows "You know how much I despise you yet you still let me touch you, what if I harm you Dimpho?" she can't maintain the range in his eyes, she looks nowhere but him

"Musa you don't despise me, this is our night. I want you, you want me, let's just....." he really doesn't have time for this, he pushes her off his way and

make his way to the drawers “Musa let’s have this one night to ourselves, thando will never know and I promise to leave you alone”

“How are you here?” he ignores her inappropriate statement, she is definitely throwing herself and because it’s what she always do he is not even surprised. What surprises him is how is she here because last he checked she was in Free State and he was choking the life out of her.

“I left straight after leaving the hospital” he is not paying attention to her as he opens drawers looking for a lighter. He knows they always cater for all gentlemen’s needs, there should be a lighter for those who smoke cigars. Indeed he finds it and turn to the curtains but his sight is destructed, his eyes fall on her naked body. She was wearing a lingerie but now she stuck naked in her birthday suit, she bites on her lower lip and seductively look at him “Make love to me Musa, just once it will end here. Let me please you for once, please” If there is ever one person who is going to die from dick thirst is her, this girl is hungry to be piped by this man “please” she pleads cat walking to him, she is mistaking his shock as temptation, his not even tempted at all. He is just shocked of how her mind works. He was choking her few hours ago and now she wants him to fuck her. Some bitches are crazy!

He ignores her mentally disturbed self and continues with his plan, leaving her touching on her breast behind him.

“What are you doing?” she asks when he lights the curtain

“Burning the club” he says it to calm, like it’s a normal thing to do

“Musa what are you doing” now that the curtain is in orange flame, she pops her eyes rooted on the same position

“I guess my God works in mysterious ways” he grabs her arm waiting for the flame to impregnate the entire room before he pulls her out of the room. He drags her naked down the passage as she screams, powerful gentlemen starts coming out of the rooms with gowns on “there is a bomb in our room” he explains before they ask and indeed they see smoke impregnating the whole passage. Chaos erupt. People fly out of their rooms scream ‘bomb’, some are in gowns, some are bare naked like the woman in his arm. His eyes stay to the last door far at the back, the two guard on the door are distracted. They are on the phones probably reporting the fire.

“Sir the exit is that way” one tries to explain but he receives a bullet on both his knees as response causing him to groan in pain hitting the floor, the other one quickly grabs his own gun too but he was slow one bullet went to his hand and another one to his knee also. Dimpho is still grabbed by the arm naked in all this, she is appalled. She watches him as he kicks the guards’ guns far from them. If she still crushes on this man after this, I will definitely announce her mentally disturbed.

Musa tries to push the door open but it’s hard metallic and locked, he squats to the two gents groaning on the floor “Where is the key?” his asking the one with bullets in both knees, he pinches his nose in pain and sweating. He doesn’t reply and he doesn’t look like he is going to anytime soon. The shooter edge is forced in his open wounds drilling it more, he cries in agony.

“My back, my back” good boy! There is a card pegged on his belt, Musa grabs it and runs it on the scanner. The door widely opens without any hustle. He let’s go of Dimpho, the small passage leads him to the bedroom, he opens gently and the door gives him in. Someone is curled under the covers, even their head is covered.

“Thandolwami?” the sheets and blanket flies open, she jumps from the bed to him. He catches her and hold her tight in his arms “Shhhhh” she is crying buried in his shoulder, her legs are wrapped around him “Don’t cry mommy, let’s get out of here” he tries to turn but she stops him

“My phone” she untangles herself from him and picks the phone under the pillow, only now when she raises her eyes she sees the naked Dimpho behind Dalas “The fuck!” Dalas laughs and pull her closer to him. He pecks her nose first and inhale her closing his eyes, her scent eases him but now he has to get her out of here.

“I’ll explain, let’s get out of here” she wants to explode, hit this bitch but getting out of here now is the main priority “I didn’t sleep with her” he can tell from how she keeps looking at her and him that she is suspicious, so for clarity he explains as they walk down the passage that is now quiet. There is still a haze of smoke down the passage but it looks like the fire was put off. Two floors to the club he is met with the furious Mohapi and two guys besides him. He lets go of Thando and grabs Dimpho aiming his gun at her

“I knew you were stupid but burning my club, my club Nkosi” Mohapi bursts, his enraged. Anger cannot describe his emotions right now.

“I knew you were clever Mohapi but kidnapping my woman, my woman Mohapi” Both Dimpho and Thando exclaim in shock

“WHAT?” they are appalled

“Malume?” (Uncle) thando’s voice comes in a whisper, yes she suspected but she was still hoping it was her mind being crazy.

“It’s nothing personal my baby, I told you what I want” he can’t look her in the eyes

“What do you want?” Musa asks

“Money” thando replies “he wants money”

“My brother left a stash of cash with her, it’s my brother’s money and I want it. If she tells me where the money is, you both going to walk out of here in peace” wow, Musa laughs in disbelief

“All this for fucken cash, your unbelievable” he huffs looking up “You’ll have your money in a two weeks” he says staring him in the eyes, Mohapi frown, from his eyes he reads something.

“Bastard, you have the money” Mohapi reiterates “the money was with you all along?” he is more enraged that he kidnapped his niece only to find out she knows nothing about the money.

“Listen Mohapi, you’re going to let us go and I’ll make sure you have your money in two weeks’ time” Musa replies still calm

“No. My children are going to get out of here and wena your staying and you’re going give me my money or your meeting your maker” Musa laughs “And why is my daughter naked Nkosi” he even forgot that Dimpho was naked

“Papa he fucked me” Haibo! Musa feels Thando’s range even though his not touching her, from the contraction and expansion on her chest he feels that she is about to burst “He had his way with me and.....” Musa disturbs

“I see we are going to do this the hard way. CROC!” he shouts the last part and guns shots fly across the room. He jumps on thando and they both crawl under

the tables. Spider and Croc attacked Mohapi's guys from behind, Mohapi jumped on his daughter as well and grabbed her. He hid behind the bar while Musa is under the table with Thando.

"NKOSI!" spider calls for him to come out when the coast is clear. He takes thando's hand and they both emerge under the table "Your prey is behind the bar" spider tells. Before Musa can go finish him, Mohapi screams

"GET OUT OF MY CLUB NKOSI AND DON'T DARE COME ANYWHERE NEAR ME, IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO ME JUST KNOW THAT TOMORROW MORNING YOU'LL ALSO WAKE UP IN JAIL. A CERTAIN LAWRENCE'S BODY WILL BE DISCOVERED AND ALL THE EVIDENCE IS GOING TO POINT OUT AT YOU" Musa stays rooted. He doesn't have a comeback for that because he knows that he was the last person with Lawrence's body "FUCK OUT OF MY CLUB OR KILL ME AND SEE YOUR ASS ROT IN JAIL FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE" he heavily breathes to calm down, how can he be so stupid. Mohapi promised to clean the mess and dispose the body not keep it to blackmail him. Now he has no choice but to let him live.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 41

ANSWERS

THANDO

Last night I needed comfort and consolation from the grief of a day I had and my man gave me exactly that. From burying the father I never knew – being poisoned to being kidnapped. But the last nail to the coffin was finding out that my own family was behind all my misfortunes. I know I may have expected a lot from them but my main expectation was contentment. I needed to feel content, like I belong and having a huge family like that was the contentment I have been longing for although it was short lived, I'm glad I met them. Now I know my search is over, my family is Vuyani, and this man whose snoring like an alien dog. I'm glad that last night he gave me what I needed most, he gave me his chest to lie and with every beat of his heart I found comfort. I was raging fire but he gave me comfort that subsided my ample ire to sleep.

After seeing what I saw last night I thought I would have trouble falling asleep, but like a baby well fed and cleaned I slept in the arms of the man I love. I'm staring at him, just looking at this man who is shimmering in haze. Last night proved that this man is shady. We didn't talk, the two puff men drove us here and by the look of things they also slept here.

What did nate Mohapi mean when he said Musa has the money? And lastly the one that I can't put my finger around what did he mean again when he said Lawrence's body might be discovered and all the evidence will point to Dalas.....

"Speak or forever hold your peace" I almost jumps, I was staring at him lost in train of thoughts, not aware that he is now awake

"Hey" I murmur

"Is that a way to greet a man that almost died for you" my lips curve, and I shake my head leaning down to his lips, the kiss is gentle and welcoming. Just the way I needed it to be "Welcome home" he pushes my hand to his bulge still tenderly 'welcoming me' and the feeling of the fist forming down there almost infect me

but I sharply jerk away from him. I exhale sitting properly by the headboard, sex can wait, I need answers “Sthandwa sami I kept my promise, it’s time for you to keep your end of the bargain” he is trying to soften me up but it’s not working. I throw a dagger at him and he immediately loses all his horny thoughts, guess there will be no sucking after all.

“Dalas we need to talk” he is sits up straight to my position. By the expression on his face I see that somehow by luck he thought I will let everything that happened slide “Did you sleep with her?” that’s the first thing I ask, that bitch cannot have what’s mine, her sexy body was in my mind the entire night.

“NO” the response comes stern but sure and I believe him with the first attempt.

“Why was she naked with you?” he deeply sighs first, this is the part he was hoping to keep a secret

“That place you were hid at is a brothel, in order to get in there I had to buy a girl first so I can gain access. Miraculously or it was on purpose by her, she happened to be the girl I was given” he keeps silent and study me to see if I believe him, he can’t tell with the way I just blankly stare at him “You know Dimpho sthandwa sami, she stripped naked wanting me to fuck her but I didn’t, I wouldn’t touch that girl you know. I held her captive as a hostage to get in your room and for her father to release you”

“There were two guards on the floor bleeding, did you shoot them?” my heart is beating out of my chest, somehow I’m not sure if I’m ready for the whole truth. I prefer him as innocent as I think he is, I don’t know if I can handle him tainted.

“Of course not thando” he huffs

“What about Lawrence?”

“What about him?” he scoffs, the Lawrence topic has a way of bursting his ire and I don’t blame him at all but I need to know

“Obviously he is dead and you knew hence you two were discussing his ‘body’, did you kill him?” he burns me with that look of his that he knows I can’t maintain, because he intimidates me when he is like this I swallow chills of my nerves looking away from his glare

“Careful of that loose mouth thando” he warns with a stern voice and I feels it, I need to find a softer approach when it comes to Lawrence topic “Do you care about that boyfriend of yours that much? Does it matter who killed him” he is losing his patience as well

“No he is not my boyfriend and No I care about the man I love, hence I’m asking this questions. I want to know who I fell in love with” he momentarily closes his eyes to calm down and I rub on his firm arm to calm him down “I just need to know Musawami, nothing more I swear my love” he heaves a sigh

“Yes the guy is dead but I had nothing to do with it” Looking in his eyes I don’t believe him. I close my eyes and sharply exhale pushing it at the back of my head, it doesn’t matter, he did it for me and I hope God forgives him.

“What about the money? What money was he talking about?” he bites on his lower lip first and plants a peck on both my hands

“You deserve the truth, and I’m going to tell you all of it, just listen carefully and don’t judge me” I nod preparing myself. He tells me everything from how my brother died to the man that fell next to them with a bag full of cash and he happened to be my father, I cannot believe my ears but funnily I’m not mad, I’m just stunned.

“So you saw my father?”

“I didn’t know he was your father then so I didn’t pay much attention on him, my best friend was my priority” it makes sense

“And the money? Where is it?”

“I used some of it but I’m going to replace it this week, you’ll have all of it” I shake my head, I know I love money but that one I don’t want it and it is definitely not my money. It was stolen money and I want nothing to do with it.

“I don’t want it, that money has brought you nothing but headache. I don’t want to have that and I definitely don’t want to have anything that will interact me with that cruel uncle of mine” he slightly laughs

“Well I’m going to give you the money, it’s the right thing to do. You’ll decide what to do with it” he informs rolling out of bed to attend his ringing phone on the pedestal

“I don’t want it” I’m insistent

“You’ll give it to charity or something” he halts staring at his phone “It’s your medication time” I roll my eyes, I don’t know why he set an alarm on his phone as well “Where are they?” he annoys me but deep down I’m grateful, he knows how to love me so well.

“Where I always put them” he goes to the closet and fishes the container in my bag

“So you didn’t take you medication yesterday thando” his statement comes reprimanding

“I only left with one that I drank yesterday, I wasn’t going to travel with that noisy container” He laughs handing me one with a glass of water, I gulp it down with ease, my throat is now used to them

“Now that I’m out of the interrogation, can I get what I was promised” he is squeezing his manhood next to me. The blowjob promise.

“Dalas your impossible yazi, I was almost molested and wena.....”

“WHAT?” he is mad, itching mad with the way his blinking “You were what?” I didn’t mean to blunt that out like that, I grin pulling him back to bed and sit astride his thighs. I tell him all about my almost escape plan and it remind me

“Please promise we’ll go look for that guy who borrowed me his phone, baby I feel bad, his father died because he was helping me” he pecks my nose

“I promise we’ll find him and I will make sure we do right by him” I smile hugging him and whisper thank you in his ears, he pulls me back to his face and asks “So the name of the moron that tried to force himself on you is Ice?” I nod, he looks aside as if thinking, I wrap my hands around his neck with one hand brushing the back of his head, and I tenderly kisses him to destruct his fury

“Don’t. Worry. About. Him. He. Will. Never. See. Me. Again” I say in between the pecks as to soften him up and it works

“Your right, let me go check on the guys” he gently puts me off him and reach for his pants

“Why are their names so weird? Who names their children spider and crocodile” he laughs pecking my lips one more time before dashing out

“KZN mothers”

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We headed straight to KZN after breakfast with the two weird guys driving us. Dalas asked me to miss just Monday off school so I can accompany him to be by his brother’s side when they put their little angel to rest. I gladly agreed without any hesitations and learning that Tshepo is Mondli’s wife, I also wanted to be there for her. She and her family are the only people I can proudly say im related to as for the rest, nah!

Upon our arrival, MaCele (Gama’s wife) sees our car first. There are pair of eyes around the yard but it’s not full, it shows that there is something small and intimate going on. MaCele deserts the chopping she was doing and heads to Dalas, we already gossiped about her before she even arrives to us. She engulfs him in a hug rubbing on his back, this is all new for my man, he has a mother but he is never known the love of a mother except recently when he started being a somebody. That’s the only time his mother has ever loved him and I can see he is overwhelmed but grateful.

“I’m so sorry son” Dalas is way taller than her, he is the one squashing her but she doesn’t seem to mind because she doesn’t let go “Did you find her?” she asks still buried in Dalas’s chest but she swallows her question when her eyes fall on me besides them, she beams letting go of Dalas “God your beautiful, you must be thando” she squashes me in a hug as well, I can’t help but laugh returning the hug

“Your very beautiful yourself Maa” I compliment back

“Come let me show you off” she takes my hand walking away with me

“What about me?” Dalas complains from a distance watching us walk away from him

“You’re not beautiful Musa, I don’t show off ugly people” MaCele waves him off disappearing with me.

When she said showing me off I took it just as a statement but she meant it, she is showing everyone and introducing me as her eldest daughter in law. I’m keeping to herself even though the information given about me is false.

Finally after long introductions to almost everyone, we walk to the balcony where I notice Bab Nkosi first, the other oldies don't matter to me right now, I didn't realise I missed this soul this much until my eyes lands on him. I untangle myself from MaCele's grip and fly to him, he catches me with the same effort. God I missed this old man and I have a very crucial message for him.

"Oh my baby, Mankosi wami" I giggle tightly holding on to him

"Not so loud Bab Nkosi" he joins in my giggles "I only use that one to mark my territory" he pulls me to his bench and sits with me

"We should thank God you're okay my baby, they didn't hurt you?" I shake my head no "I was cursing MaNdlovu and....." Gama disturbs us clearing his throat, I know it's him because the resemblance cannot be missed and I have seen his pictures in my man's phone

"What? I need to be introduced" I laugh as MaCele spanks his head, only now I notice ntate Maseko, he is covered in shame. Bab Nkosi grunts before introducing Gama.

"Thando this is my annoying little brother Musa" everyone burst "and there next to him is your uncle, I believe you have already met" I nod staring at ntate Maseko, he is ashamed of what his brother did I can tell but I don't want him to feel bad, he had nothing to do with all that.

"I'm so sorry my child" ntate Maseko apologises, his apology is received with a genuine smile

"And I'm your father in law" Gama melts the ice, he offers his hand for shake "Nice finally meeting the woman that owns my name's heart but I don't blame him, quite a beauty" his wife spanks him once more "Sorry sthandwa sami, no woman measures to your beauty"

"Can we talk?" I whisper lowly to bab Nkosi but seems I wasn't as gentle as I thought, or the atmosphere quietened to listen on us

"What's wrong? You okay?" there is instant panic in his eyes, I love how he regards me as a daughter. I may have not known my father but through him I knew how it felt to have a father, he was always there to transport us to school with a wheelbarrow covered in sail during rainy days. He was always there to

belt us whenever corporal punishment was needed to straighten us. I'm grateful I have a father in him.

"I have a message for you that is very sensitive" there is still a frown on his face, MaCele asks Gama and Ntate Maseko to follow her for tea and scones. Ntate Maseko follows her but Gama remains seated, he even moves closer to listen carefully

"Don't mind him, he's always in my business" I slightly laugh, they have quite a sibling bond

I hold both his hands before I start because I know how sensitive this is for him, I'm sure Dalas didn't bother telling him this because everything that has to do with his brother he buries it like he buried him in his life. I heave a sigh first "Baba I saw bhuti bongani" his mouth open agape in shock, Gama puts his hands on both ours too

"Where?" Gama asks staring in my eyes

"He actually came to see Dalas but because Dalas doesn't want anything to do with him, he let it slide" they are both continue staring at me stunned "he said to tell you that, he didn't fail, he's sorry he disappointed you but he wants you to know that he loves you and he appreciate all you did for him and you should rest in peace knowing that soon he'll do what you always asked him to do. Take care of his siblings" the old man is just numb staring at me

"When was this?" Gama asks

"I'm not sure maybe a month to two ago" he nods coupled times looking at his stunned brother

"Nkosi?!" he slaps his hand, bab Nkosi heaves a sigh

"Ngiyabonga mtanami for telling me this, please make me tea, they will show you my room, I'll be there" I nod watching Gama help him up, I feel guilty looking at how torn he just became, I hope I didn't make a mistake by telling him. Gama comes back to take his phone from the table

"MaNkosi" I just smile "You did great, he needed to hear that" thank God, I release the air I wasn't even aware I was holding in "Go make him tea and me too" I nod and watch him disappear before I follow him to find the kitchen in this gigantic house. Somewhere through my search I pass a lounge full of

people, the first scream I know so well. It's Lee followed by Zinhle, Buhle and Sindi are both shocked while the two jump on me.

"Yoh! chomie, you're alive" I roll my eyes, Dalas told me all about my 'death' Zinhle pulls me to a couch and they all surround me, I guess they want a tale.

"I died, slow painful death, I felt my soul leave through all the pores on my skin" Buhle's eyebrow furrow, she better shush "I felt my heart beat stop and I closed my eyes and allowed my soul to immerse in deep sleep, I saw light from a distance I slow motioned towards it, everything was just blank, my focus was towards the white light until I came across my mother" there is a guy biting on his lower lip to hold his laughter, I don't know if it's langa or sihle but I know he is somewhere there "My mother told me to return it's not yet my time, she accompanied me back to darkness and when I opened my eyes I was in the morgue" he can't, he just died in fits of laughter

"Bhuti Sihle it's not funny" Mandisa reprimands, I wasn't aware of her

"There was a guy with a huge knife who was about to take my organs out, and I was just lying there helplessly with no voice, until I saw Jesus"

"You saw Jesus?" both Mandisa and Zihle ask in unison

"I swear to god, he was....." my man's laugh interrupts me from behind

"Stop scaring my sisters wena, come Tshepo wants to see you" his arms wrap around my chest from behind, only now everyone curses me deeply

"Fuck you chomie" I poke my tongue at her and brush on her tummy before standing "We need to talk" she whispers in my ear, I know we haven't talked in a while

"We'll sleep together....."

"Over my dead body" Dalas say dragging me up the stairs "Sihle, Mandisa, this is thando" what a way to introduce, we already climbing up the stairs

"I know, I love her" Sihle screams

"Fuck you" he screams back "You saw Jesus" I wink and he dies in laughter

I expected to walk into a room of sorrow, lit candles and Tshepo on the mattress but no, she is on top of the bed binging on chocolates and strawberries with Mondli behind her. But what surprises me the most is the white doek fastened on both their heads and the blankets wrapped on both their shoulders. Dear Lord!

“Tshepo?” I hug her but my eyes fail me, I’m looking at the man behind her, why is he wearing a doek and wrapped in a blanket? Isn’t it supposed to be only a woman who wears like this?

“Thank God you’re okay” she scans me “Why you staring at my Zulu man, I believe you two have met” I nod still staring at the figure before me

“Why is he wearing a doek and blanket?” My loose tongue fails me, both her and Dalas laugh

“My wife and I are mourning thando, we both lost our baby and we will mourn her together, if she has to wear like this for three months I’m joining her, she can’t be burned in this blankets alone while we were both warm in blankets together creating her” he pulls Tshepo from me and grip her with his arm, he pecks her cheek “You remember that night when we created her? it was so cold but because of our bodies colliding and sweating.....” Tshepo spans his arms laughing

“I have your phone and clothes, check the first drawer” she points me her chest of drawers, I’m thankful she took them. I ask for a charger and quickly turn on my phone. 5 missed calls from Vuyani, he is going to have my head for a while. My WhatsApp reports 100 something messages from the groups but one from Dimpho catches me, it’s actually a video when I open it. The minute I open it I feel sour, like I just bathed in lemon water, it’s a video of her and Dalas walking down the passage with him all over her naked ass. My palms are twitching, they disappear inside a room and it stops. I’m going to murder this man. I can’t believe he was squeezing that small ass, he said he didn’t touch her and I actually believed his ass.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 42

MOHAPI'S SON

MUSA

This past weekend was quite a roller coaster, it was full of thorns and horn but I'm grateful it has expired, well except Mohapi. He has me exactly where he wants and he knows it. Yesterday we laid little Angel to rest and I can safely say everything went well except for her 'fragile parents'. They are both so fragile they decided to take what they call a 'mourni-cation' – a vacation of two parents who lost their angel, it's what they called it if I still remember it clearly. It's Tuesday morning, thando and I we are supposed to be leaving. Zinhle and Mandisa are both on September holidays, they demanded to come spent the holidays with us and Buhle being the mother she is she insisted on coming too just to look after them. The person who couldn't wait to leave was Lindi, Croc was asked to drive her and Sindi back because she didn't want herself here anymore. I wonder what that it's all about? I hope she is not back together with that no good for nothing baby daddy of hers.

Gama asked to see me before we leave. I thought he was just going to say his goodbyes in private but little did I know I will be driven to the unknown. He didn't say anything, he just told me to hop in the car and Spider drove us in silence, my mind is not here. I'm thinking of the raging fire thando is, from Sunday night and the entire yesterday she is been moody as fuck, she is like a ball of fire waiting to explode. She is not on speaking terms with me and I'm quite not sure what I did. Yesterday she slept with Lindi, I tried to put my foot down but she grabbed her sleep wear and walked out on me.....

"Name?" he pat my shoulder to snap me back "We are here?" where the hell is here? My eyes scan around and I just see an old two roomed house that looks like it was long deserted. I bet even ghosts wouldn't live in a house like this. It's in the middle of nowhere and because I was lost in my shit I didn't even grasp the way here, even deserted places have life, that thing that assures that people once lived here but this one..... it's just so hollow

“What’s this place?” he laughs climbing off the car with a sport bag in hand, I follow while spider remains in the car “Isn’t he coming?” he shakes his head No “This place holds your future son, follow me” I wonder what future I would have in a place like this. He heads us to the house, he unlocks the door with a key from his pockets and puts it back. The inside is just as I thought, there is one table in the middle with chairs that looks like they were stolen from hell, it has no life and with the smell inside everything is just unpleasant. Dust and cobwebs haze everything making it hard to even notice everything “Watch carefully” unintended laugh escapes my lips, he gives me one of his intimidating looks before he chuckles too and open what I think it’s a fridge, with the rust covering it, I wonder how old it is.

He turns the fridge temperature bar to 7 and the fridge shifts to the side, now my laugh is replaced with astonishment. Behind the fridge is one metallic door that looks like an elevator and indeed it slides open showing the elevator.

“Where is that laugh now son?” mxm! Fathers we keep. He steps in and I follow. He presses the one button in the elevator and it closes taking us down. When it opens I’m instantly covered in utter bewilderment. What’s this place? “This is where you and all your sibling’s future is at” now everything is squeaky clean down here, only black and grey is covering this huge one roomed house that looks like an office “Take a sit” he orders pointing me at the one sit behind the desk, I’m hesitant but my feet slowly carry me there “Open the shelf under the table” another order but I oblige nonetheless, there is only one key in this shelf “Take it and go open that door” only now I recognise the other door, with curiosity I waste no time.

The door agrees the key and when it shift, my jaw hit the floor. I have never seen so much money in my entire life, I thought a bag full of cash was a lot of money until now.

“You needed 2M right?” I don’t respond because I’m appalled by what lies before me “Let’s get busy” he throws the sport bag on the floor “Musa we don’t have all day, MaNkosi is waiting for you” sigh! He doesn’t count, he is throwing money in the bag

“What’s this place and where does this money come from?”

“I told you this is your future but I can’t answer the latter question. Don’t asks questions you won’t like the answers to” Hmmm! “I thought I could organise the money straight from my banker but you know accountants, we hire them to keep our money safe but when we want what’s rightfully ours, they start asking questions that doesn’t concern them. So I had no choice but to come to my own ATM” he is the one busy throwing money in the bag, I’m still shocked

“What do you do again?” he laughs standing

“By my retired profession I was just a teacher, that’s what my brother’s hard work and sweat from mines could afford but by my current profession I’m an Agent”

“And what does an agent do?” he smirks

“Eliminate problems for people in high powers”

“What problems?”

“That’s for me and my employers to know, wena here is your key” he places the entrance key in my palm and lock the door “this one remains here” he puts it back in the shelve “Let’s go name, pick your money. I can’t give you money and carry it out myself” male drama! We slide back in the elevator which delivers us to the wrinkled house. Spider is now outside the car smoking as we head to the car.

“Musa” he calls out my name after we settle in the car as spider drives us out, I offer him my look “That key I gave you keep it safe, if anything happens to me Spider and Crocodile will drive you here, make sure it’s them, no one else. And if I die, share this place with one of your siblings, you’ll choose yourself the one more capable to take care of the family if you die. We only come to this place if it’s urgent and the bank is giving us problems, we don’t just come here” I nod “For now you’re the only one who knows about this place and please keep it that way until I die, then you’ll choose yourself from your siblings who you trust with the Nkosi ATM” Spider cracks up in laughter

“I can’t believe I have a gangster father” they both laugh

“I’m an Agent, not a gangster” he defends “Oh before I forget, Nkosi and I we are going to China tomorrow. There is a doctor there who thinks he can help us”
wow

“Okay, when will you be back?” he shrug

“For as long as he can help my brother, I’m not losing that man” he looks outside the window for while, my father’s sickness isn’t sitting well with him “Another thing, I’m told Bongani reached out to you” thando! I told her to let that man be, he deserted us and he should be just like that “If he reaches out again, make sure he contacts me. I think he is in trouble” I frown

“Why would you think that?”

“I don’t know but the message MaNkosi gave my brother, it gives me vibes that he has no choice but to desert the family” I have never thought of it that way. I’m just so angry with him.

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As soon as we arrived back home in Joburg, Thando insisted that we go look for a guy that helped her when she tried to escape. She has school on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays. Since today it’s Tuesday, she insisted that we come here. We left the girls at home and drove straight here. Right now I’m more than fucked up, I need my handsome sleep.

“Here” she points a huge maize field for me to stop the car, I’m thankful this mini trip made her talk to me

“I have to leave my car here?” she gives me a look “Sthandwa sami I don’t think it’s safe leaving my car here”

“Yet you squeeze 50 cents small fat cakes ass but you have the nerve to call me ‘sthandwa sami’ she narrows her eyes at me “The funeral I’m planning for you Musa Christopher Nkosi” hai! No one mentions that name, what did I do so bad to this woman? She bangs my door climbing off. I have no choice but to follow her. At least I’m still her hero, she is holding my hand so tight leading me through the maize field in silence. We have been walking for more than thirty minutes in silence and now I’m thirsty as hell, I should have taken my bottled water from the car. Finally there stand a two roomed shack, the door is widely opened.

Thando’s hand sweat in mine, my baby is feeling guilty I can feel it. I squeeze her back and she smiles at me. I swiftly knock the wide open door and within a

second a tall guy emerges from the door with pooped eyes, when his eyes lands to thando he heaves a sigh.

“Sawubona” I’m extending my hand for a shake, he welcomes it politely

“Dumelang” he looks at thando with a smile “I’m glad to see that your fine”
thando smiles back

“Can we come in” he nods stepping out of the way, thando offers herself a sit before he even gives her one, there is just two chairs. I don’t know if I should take the other one or stand.

“You can have a sit, I will take the crate” I nod sitting, he pulls a crate and sit

Thando sighs “I didn’t catch your name the other day” the guy laughs

“It was a busy day” they both laugh “I’m Thabo, Thabo Mohapi” Silence..... For a moment we both are shocked and the humble guy sees right through us “What’s wrong did I say something wrong?” he seems lost

“Can I have some water?” I need to down this properly, he gives me water in a mug and I gulp it at one go “Mami uright?” she nods still glaring at Thabo “I’m Musa Nkosi and this is my wife Thando Nkosi” I earn myself that murderous look of hers

“Thando Ndlovu, but my real surname is Mohapi as well” now it’s the guy’s turn to frown “The old man, was he your father?” he shakes his head

“He was my uncle, my mother’s brother” thando nods

“I’m really sorry about him, I didn’t mean to cause you that kind of pain. Please allow me to help you with the funeral” Thabo shakes his head smiling

“I have already buried him and please don’t feel guilty, you’ll make his path unpleasant” thando nods with tears flowing her cheeks

“What can I do, I feel so bad” the guy smiles again

“You can give me my phone back if you have it and stop crying” she chuckles

“It’s in the car, I will give it you” he nods “I’m so sorry” the guy nods

“Before he died, he did say you’ll come back” my girl smiles “His grave is the fresh one behind the toilet”

“Can I say my thank you and goodbye” the guy nods smiling, she dashes out but quickly pops back in “What’s his name?” he shakes his head smiling

“Teboho Mohau” she nods and dashes out again

“You don’t use your mother’s surname?” he shakes his head

“Apparently as my uncle used to say, my mother was married to a wealthy man by the surname Mohapi, she stayed with the guy five years only and came back with me. In fact she was hiding here until death took her when I turned 8 and I stayed with my uncle since then, he became my father in every way and for a while it was just he and I” I hope my mind is wrong

“How old are you?”

“30” my age

“Can you recognise your father?” he laughs

“I was young but I do have my mother’s album with his photos”

“Can I see it” he is hesitant “I just want to see if your blood related to my wife” he shakes his head laughing and disappears to the bedroom

“Your girlfriend you mean” he give me the photo book and with the first picture I’m met with Mohapi “That’s him” what is God trying to do mara? I fold the book and look at him, I don’t need to go any further

“How do you survive here?” he shrug

“Farming, my uncle’s pension”

“With him gone, you going to survive with just farming?” he nods hesitantly. I hope he doesn’t take this the wrong way “Come with me” he stares at me “I own a logistic trading company, although it’s still small but I’m sure I can squeeze you somewhere” he looks like his thinking “It will make thando happy, I see you’re a prideful man. At least allow me to give you a job”

“What kind of a job will it be, I don’t want anything dodgy” we both laugh

“Can you drive?” he nods

“I have a vacant truck, it needs a driver”

“Are for real?” I nod “I don’t have code 14 though”

“I’m sure we’ll figure it out. Please man, come with me, you can always come back here whenever you’re off” he stands up and offer me his hand for shake

“Thank you” I just nod with a smile “When do you expect me?”

“I expect you to pack up, we are leaving with you now. Time is money man, I can’t have a truck sitting doing nothing when there is a certain driver I know” he laughs just as Thando walks back in, her eyes are red, I can tell she is been crying “Thabo is coming with us baby” she lights up

“Really?” I nod “Thank you so much, you won’t regret it” Thabo laughs

“We’ll give you space, you’ll find us in the car parked by the road” he nods “take all the time you need” he nods again as I take my girl out

“Thank you baby” she says under my arm as we walk back to the car

“Anything for you my baby” I peck her head

“You think I’m blood related with him?”

“He is Mohapi’s son” she halts with her mouth dropped and glares at me “I know love, let’s go”

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 43

HOW TO DEAL WITH A CHEATING MAN

THABO

As the sun comes back to life the day, it finds me sitting from the gigantic bed gazing at the direction the light is shimmering through the window. Naturally I'm an early bird. Not by choice though but because I had to wake up early to herd cows, wash DeVillars' pigs, feed his chickens and sometimes plough and water his fields in order to put food on the table for just R1500 per month. But today I couldn't find comfort in my sleep because I'm awe struck, I have been up for almost the entire morning in disbelief. It's not every day I guy like me meet kind hearted people like Musa, I don't know what to do to show him my gratitude.

Farm life is hard, matric is all there is to it. You don't dream beyond that because it's impossible to achieve anything with that kind of background. My uncle did push for me to finish school, as far as I had to walk to get to school I did it and I passed well enough to qualify for varsity but who was I kidding, DeVillars made me an offer after matric 'I will take you to driving school so you can drive my wife and children to town, I will increase your pay' for someone who was just earning R1500 back then it was enough. I buried the varsity dream and did what I had to do but little did I know that after going to driving school I had to pay him back by driving his wife and children for free for the next 5 years. 5 years turned into another five and a decade later I was still earning the same peanuts. If you want to keep your job in farms, you don't ask your employer about your pay. That's how you last, even if he skips some months without pay you soldier on.

I'm overwhelmed with what Musa is doing for me, I was ashamed holding my worn out bag with just my three trousers, two shirts and one pair of shoes that I consider still in good shape as compared to the others. But he seemed to not look down on me, he gave this gigantic room and showed me the door to my bathroom and toilet inside the room. As for thando she made sure that I slept with a full stomach. Both of them made me feel so welcomed I don't know what

to do to thank them, maybe I should go check his garden, he looks and smells money. I doubt a busy guy like him has time to look after gardens. Doing his garden is the least I could do to show my appreciation.

My survey for a garden was a waste of time, the outside is spotless clean. The lawn is nicely trimmed and there seems to be nothing I can do outside. I must say his house is more beautiful and presentable as compared to DeVillars, whom I used to think has the most beautiful house. I weigh the couch in the lounge in defeat, I really wanted to do something for them..... A young beautiful thing and I mean the kind of beautiful that wouldn't even look a guy like me passes me swaying her tiny waist, humming to a song. She has head set on and she is unaware of me as she goes about in the kitchen. From where I'm seated I can see everything in the kitchen, the lounge and kitchen are open space. She is wearing a black short silk night dress revealing all her smooth yellow thighs to play. I hope she doesn't catch me ogling her. The slow movements she is doing has my machine reacting in response, I'm thankful it still works. There were time when I thought my machine can no longer plough, I mean it's been a very long time since I had a woman in my sheets. No woman looks at a guy like me and I have made peace that I will use hand services to release for the rest of my life. God she is gorgeous. Tonight my machine and I will have something to think of to release fast. I hope she is not related to Musa in anyway, if she is, I'm taking this secret to the grave that I was ogling his relative. Maybe I should ask for a cup of tea, she made herself one.

"Hey" she jumps and stares at me as I sit on the chair taking her headset off "Hello" I have to even wave my hand because she is just frozen, now looking at her closer, the urge to rip that tiny thing apart overpowers me "Hi" she strides to the counter to hide her thighs, but it's too late I have already seen everything. I can see she is uncomfortable as she keeps trying to stretch the night dress down, I wish I can tell her that it's silk, it doesn't stretch. Unintended smile curve on my lips due to her nervous nature "Can I have a cup of tea too?" she closes her big eyes for a moment and slowly exhale, Gosh! She is beautiful. I would like to bite those lips in my dreams.

"May I ask who you are" her voice, I wish I could hear it everyday

“I’m Thabo” she is still staring at me with her beautiful eyes to elaborate “Aaahm..... Musa..... the owner of this house is my boss” I explain and only now she heaves a heavy sigh

“Oh! okay..... I’m Buhle, Musa is my brother” fuck! I curse inwardly

“Your very beautiful” I immediately bite my tongue, how can it embarrass me like that? I didn’t mean to say it out loud

“Thank you” it comes in a whisper and a hidden smile, is that a blush I’m seeing there. She bites on her lower lip trying to look at me but failing “Can you please turn around or close your eyes” I can’t help but smile, it’s too late I already saw her silk smooth thighs “I will make you tea when I come back” she explains still hiding by the counter. I oblige closing my eyes but my smile fails me, I giggle with closed eyes and when I hear her steps fade away I can help but laugh

Couple of minutes later she comes back now fully clothed, she looks beautiful in everything. She switches the kettle on and takes a mug for me

“How many spoons?”

“Three” she nods. Seconds later she hands me my tea, I don’t know if it’s because she is the one who made it or she added love in it, it taste heavenly.

“Hello hello good people” thando’s energetic voice startles us from behind “Buhleza, Thiza” buhle narrow her eyes at her while I just laugh, when did I become ‘thiza’

“No one in this room is your mate thando, I’m sis Buhle and he is Bhuti Thabo to you” Thando rolls her eyes checking the pot on the stove

“I see you too have met, thiza how did you sleep?” she ignores buhle’s piercing stares on her

“Great thank you, where is Musa?”

“Right here” he replies behind me fully clothed in suit ready for work. I envy him. He looks well collected “Let’s talk” he leads me to the lounge leaving the two ladies in the kitchen, we both weigh the couches down facing each other “I forgot to ask you yesterday, do you have a bank account?” I shake my head no “Eishhhhh” he seems to be thinking

“Is that going to be a problem” he smiles

“No, I just... I wanted to send you some money to buy yourself some things but don't worry I'll ask Thando to accompany you to open one, she doesn't have school today” I nod

“Thank you but I can't take more of your kindness, you've done so much.....” he cuts me

“What if I make it a loan, once you start working I will deduct it from your pay every month with the amount you're comfortable with” that sounds better

“That I can take” he laughs shaking his head

“And another thing, I organised you a one month duration to get your code 14 in a friend of mine's driving school. So you won't be driving trucks until then but every day in the morning I will drop you at school and then afterward you can come to the office to drive company cars so you can start working immediately”

“Thank you, I'm fine with anything” he nods

“Good” he leans closer popping his knuckles “I also have something personal to inform you” nervousness hovers me “I happen to know your father” I frown “I used to work with him but not anymore, so I just want to let you know that your father is here and if or when you're ready to meet him just let me know, I'll lead you to him” my father? That one is one of the people I buried, he is alive but I buried him because he buried me. He knew I existed, if he wanted me in his life he could have found me regardless of what happened between him and my mother “Your related to Thando, your father is her uncle” I can't help but be suspicious

“Did you bring me here for him?” he shakes his head

“Like I said we don't get along, even with Thando they don't get along so you won't see him unless you yourself ask us to take you to him” I'm hesitant “I have no ulterior motives man, I just saw you as a young black man who helped my woman and I just wanted to thank you, although you turned out to be the son of the man I hate so much, I could have turned a blind eye when I discovered who you are but my name wouldn't let me, I'm kindness after all” we both laugh

“Thank you for your honesty” he nods “I’ll let you know if I ever want to meet him but for now I’m fine”

“Breakfast is ready” thando screams for us, we both head back to the dining table “Where are the girls?” she asks as we all settle on the table, there is more?

“Those ones wake up at ten to eleven, they spend the whole night watching movies” buhle responds as we all start digging in

“Sthandwa sami can you please accompany Thabo to the bank and shops tod.....” He is cut off

“I can’t, I have places to be. Buhle will accompany him”

“I’m not very good with Joburg thando” buhle argues

“Where you going” Musa questions thando

“Gosh, you people will ruin my death mission” she closes her eyes “I’ll leave you both at the mall and come fetch you when I’m done” she points at Buhle and I

“I asked where you’re going” Musa asks once again

“To the store that sells tools to straighten men” buhle burst in laughter while Musa and I are lost. We all finish breakfast with thando and Buhle sharing looks and giggling, girls can be really strange.

“Bye Mrs. Nkosi” he kisses thando’s cheek “Help thabo open an account and let me know as soon as it’s active, I’m sure your men store can wait for an hour” he exits without waiting for a reply

“Be ready by ten good people, I have a really busy day today” thando informs pushing the chair as she stands

“Who is going to clean the kitchen?” Buhle asks her as she disappear down the passage

“Buhle I feed your brother my sweet cake every night, the least you could do for me is cleaning my house” Buhle laughs rolling her eyes, I wish I can stare at her the entire day.

“The food was delicious, thank you” she nods with a smile as I also excuse myself, my machine and I need a cold shower and hand services.

THANDO

How does one deal with a cheating man? I don't know but I have few ideas in my head. He thinks yesterday's trip earned him my forgiveness but little does he know he has an actress for a girlfriend, I'm going to bite him when he least expect it. In front his siblings I will smile and show even my small tongue at the back of my throat but tonight, he will feel my anticipated wrath. He thought I was just tired yesterday when we arrived, after serving him and Thabo I left them in the lounge and retired. He is going to know what I'm made off tonight and I cannot wait.

Its midday, the day is right at its peak. I left Buhle and Thiza at the bank and made my way to this store. I once saw it in passing when we were window shopping with Krazy, my gay friend from school. Now getting in hear I don't think it was a good idea to come alone, I hope God is watching something else, he can't see me walk in such indecent place it will increment my sins. I heave a sigh and soldier on walking further into the store, why does it have to be so red inside? The first thing I see is different packages of vibrators, some even have balls? The things Chines people do, this is all their work. Everything is made in china, I wonder if women works at the factories that manufactures vibrators and.....

"Hello mam" I'm a bit startled, I have been staring at various vibrators stunned "I'm Miranda, how may I help you today" Miranda whose child are you? To be working in such a store, I'm sure your never horny girl "Mam?"

"Oh sorry..... I'm just..... I'm stunned" she laughs

"Is it your first time in here" I nod "There is always the first time for everything, anyway are you looking for anything in particular or you just hear to learn?"

"You teach too?" she laughs

"Yes if you know nothing about this kind of pleasure we are always happy to enlighten our customers" hmk!

"I'm looking for handcuffs and whips" she click her heals leading the way

“What did he do?”

“He lied, his hand has been touchy touchy where it shouldn’t touch” she laughs

“Naughty man, for naughty man I recommend chains, padlocks and of course whips and maybe a vibrator for you” I’m confused, what’s this? 12 years of slavery. Am I chaining him? “Don’t worry I’ll make sure you leave here well informed”

After lengthy discussions and teachings from the store assistant we finally decide in my form of punishment. She wrote a list of things I needed to buy at regular store to make my punishment more severe. When I was done with my lone private shopping I went to join my companions who were now busy shopping. I don’t know if it’s me and my vivid imagination but I sense tension between thiza and buhle, the kind of tension that urges you to rip each other’s clothes apart. And what surprises me further is Buhle, buhle is the dullest woman I know on earth but not today, my girl is on point. Shopping wasn’t successful for thiza, he didn’t want to buy anything with us around, he is such a man! We ended up being the ones shopping, after shopping we head to food court for lunch then we went straight home. I need some hours to catch up with my school work, tomorrow its school day and I have Dimpho’s annoying class.

With Buhle here I’m happy because it means less house duties for me not that I have many anyway, Mme Mpho comes on Saturdays to wash clothes and tidy the house clean. But I’m still glad with Buhle’s presence, she outdid herself with dinner. Her brother walks in the middle of dinner. He looks exhausted, just the way I want him. He did text in the afternoon telling me he is going to be home late. His cheek kisses starts with Mandisa and Zihle, then Buhle and lastly me, then he retires right next to me

“Thiza” thabo laughs

“I hope this name doesn’t stick”

“The name fits you perfectly” he turns to me “Baby feed me” I roll my eyes fetching his plate from the warmer

“Aren’t you going to freshen up first?” he shakes his head receiving his plate

“I’m very hungry, I will shower when we sleep” I let him be, he is making things easier for me “Thiza tomorrow don’t forget your ID and certificates for me, be ready by 07:30” the rest of dinner we listen to them talking trucks and their day tomorrow.

As promised, he headed straight to the shower after dinner and that was my cue to prepare. Everyone is in the lounge watching tv, I make sure to prepare in the garage. It’s spacious and it’s far from the house, no one will hear his screams. I make sure that his chair is tightly chained to his car wheels. Mr two minutes shower, he texts me just as im doing final touch ups.

I want to sleep sulking man, apparently he can’t sleep when I’m not next to him

Come fetch me in the garage I fly the text back

What are you doing there I know he is already on his way

Preparing you the night you’ll never forget like lightning he struck the poor door open, he looks as delicious as I want him. He has nothing on top, just his silk long pj pants beneath. His jaw is sweeping the floor in shock. I flush in pleasure at the look on his face but I quickly reprimand by whoring bean, ‘this is punishment not pleasure’ I remind myself

“Come take your sit my king” I seductively invite him in standing from his punishment chair. His punishment chair is outside the car just by the opened driver sit door, tight to the wheel. Inside the car is all I’m going to need to punish him. Slowly with baby steps he marches in still bewildered I think. Before he reach his chair I stand before him “It’s very hot in hear, don’t you want to help me out of this coat” he bites on his lower lip unbuckling my coat, like he expected his tongue wet his lips staring what’s beneath, I have nothing on, just my birthday suit

“I love what I see” I he tries to touch me but I push him to the chair

“Not so fast Mr, this is my show” he smirks drinking me in as he settles on his chair. My knees meet the wooden floor, I hook my fingers at the waist of his pj helping him off it. His length frees staring right in my face, I peek up at him and find his staring down at me horny and amused. Horny men are the best, they

agree to just about anything “Babe, my show requires that I chain you on the chair and ride you like a porn star” I inform biting on my lips as I peek up at him, like giving a child candy he gives me the go ahead with a pleased head nod. I gross chain his shoulders and waist with the longest chain to the chair and lock it, small chains are for his hands and feet “Hands at the back” with horny grin he obliges and I chain his hands at the back of the chair and lock them

“What are you doing to me?” he voice comes deep but soft, pleased of being chained to the chair

“Legs apart” I whisper in his ear biting his earlobe, back to the floor I chain his legs on both side of the chair front legs “Now let’s play daddy” maintaining eye contact I lick from his bare thigh slowly to his crotch

“Sssssssss” he hisses when my hands grasp both his balls slowly rubbing on them “Your show is missing music” his voice comes husky, laced with deep desires

“Spoke too soon Mr” I press play on the remote behind him and seductively stand balancing with his thighs as Dsvn ft snoh between us comes to play from his car

“Fuck” he curses when I bend in front of him touching my toes, showing him what he has but can’t touch. I sit on his member giving him my back as grind in circles “Tha.....ssss.....aaaahh mami” the sound of his voice in my ear wakes sleeping dogs in me, I feel him fighting chains to touch me but because he is chained to the chair, his movement is restricted. His wet tongue lick my spinal column from below up to my neck, I feel pool of shivers traveling down my lady part as I’m still rotating on his member with the rhythm of the song, he sinks his teeth at the side on my neck sending sensations down my sex “Free my hand mami, let me explore you” his tongue sweeps behind my ear, I moan in pleasure

“Hmmm” fuck I need to control myself. The evidence of my wetness and his is smeared all over his thighs. His hungry veined length pops up firmly standing for actions when I weigh him off, I kneel between his thighs once again still staring in his dreamy eyes. From behind I reach for my treats, plain yoghurt and honey.

“Mami.....ahhhhh” he moans when I scoop a hand full of yoghurt and slipper it all over his length. Smoothly and slowly I stroke his length staring in his eyes, I

pour honey right on his length's head and slowly keep licking it and teasing his head with my teeth a bit. His mouth forms an O shape before he closes his eyes and throw his head up "Just fuck me mami please" his voice is needy, full of lust. From below my tongue cleans the yoghurt off his length "fuck" he curses, almost jumping but good thing that the chair is chained to the car wheels "Mami" he begs

"Shhhhhhh" still looking at him, I take him in, although he doesn't fit all in my mouth but I try my best. one, two, three his length taste my throat then I stand

"Baby uyenzani, don't stop" I grin reaching for a leather whip behind him, there is panic in his horny eyes but he swallows and tries to fight the chains. I run the whip through my palms first still seductively staring at him

"To get yourself a fuck, you need to be honest" he quickly nods with clenched jaws "Did you touch anyone this past weekend" he shakes his head no "Bad answer" I swing the whip once and land it right on his hungry length, he jumps standing with the chair. The car shakes too "sit down"

"Baby don't.....don't" he shakes his head for emphasis, but who is he talking to, I'm a mad woman not his 'baby' another perfect swing on his veined length "Thando noooooo"

"Your touchy wena angisho? You go around touching 50 cent fat cakes while you have doughnuts waiting for you at home" his head denies rapidly, he is covered in sweat

"Mfazi'wami I swear I didn't....." (My wife) he doesn't finish, one last strong one strike him. I felt that one too. I gave it my all. His head hang down looking at his thighs as he takes in the pain.

"Uyacheat Musa?" (Are you cheating) he finally looks back at me, I don't like that look, his expression is dark

"Baby I swear, I would never look at any woman the way I look at you" I put my leg on his shoulder revealing my wet sex to him, his eyes land right there, exactly where I want. Slowly I put the whip on my wet folds, I make sure it opens my folds and grind it with him staring "Babyyyy noooooo"

"You want to do this"

"Yes.....yes mami.....please" a single tear down his left eye

“But my love you lied” he shakes his head rapidly, I take my leg down and sit on him staring at his weak ass, men are so weak! I see relief all over his face as I start grinding him, he thinks his getting some at last.

“I’m sorry mami, I swear I will never lie, lifake mkami” (Put it in my wife) he begs, trying to score me from below

“Don’t be sorry just be careful, baby

You know my heart is fragile

Don’t say shit that you don’t really mean” I whisper Snoh’s words in his ear as I slowly ease him in, the feeling of his length in my sex makes me shiver, my walls clasp around him and I grip on it

“Babyy.....aaaaaah” God it feels so nice but I can’t..... I can’t get lost. I stand and swiftly take him out “Sthandwa sami what did I do, please mami I will do anything” his fighting with chains trying to free. Now I pull my own chair for him to watch, it’s time for me to release. Before him I sit on my own pleasure chair and separate my legs wide apart, my finger rotates on my moist clit “thando don’t do this please mami” his voice is trembling, I almost feel sorry for him but nah. I slip the vibrator in, God it feels so nice, I don’t have to fuck myself with this one, I switch it on and throw my head up and let it take me to ecstasy. One, two, three vibrations I squirm on my sit in pleasure, the release is as sweet and earth shattering as I imagined. I open my eyes after my power trip to find him crying. His a mess, crying real tears. There is even sniffs.

I turn his chair back to the car and switch on my tablet playing his video with dimpho. In his ear I whisper biting it

“Next time you touch that mortuary, you’ll know what I’m made off” I take his pants from the floor and wipe myself. My coat gets back on my shoulder

“Thando Noooo, you can’t leave me like this” I peck his cheek

“Enjoy the show baby, you have the entire night to cum from it, it’s on repeat”

“THANDO00000” I close the door proud of myself regardless of his cries, gosh I should have taken that vibrator, my well is aching for more pleasure. That’s how you deal with a cheating man.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 44

DIMPHO'S FIRE

THANDO

Content sleep is the best one can ever have. The kind of sleep you get after you've achieved something you've been longing for a while. I feel so peaceful in my sleep, like I made it to heaven, but something is..... I don't know if it's my dreams but I feel so nice, so warm, so tender, so "Aaaaaaaah" I wake from my sleep with a moan, God this feels so good "Baby yes.....yes right there" his finger is deliciously slowly circulating in me. This really does feel like heaven. I want to ask how he broke free from my night of slavery but the pleasure I'm feeling traps my voice. The details can wait, his fingering me so delicious. He looks so sexy right now, bare chested with a chain crossed over his shoulders and waist. He managed to break free from my other chains except that one. My hands find his muscles, I try to pull him down for a kiss but he seizes both my hand and tuck them on top of my head.

"I'm going to fuck you till you beg for forgiveness" his dark voice earns him my gaze, only now I realise I unleashed the sexual monster in him

"Baby I'm so sorry.....I didn't.....hmmm" I moan again when he presses my clit between his thumb and index finger. He squeezes it for a minute and slip his two fingers back in my cunt "oh, baby" I cannot recognise my voice due to pleasure, I'm wet as hell.

"Thandolwami you did that to me" I don't know if his asking or he wants me to confirm what I did. He's stops fingering me and just stare at me beneath his warm body, I can see sparkle in his eyes. It hurts me too, I didn't mean to take it that far

"I'm so sorry daddy" I want to break free and hold him but he is holding me so tight above my head, he is doing it on purpose. He wants me to see the pain I inflicted on him "Idla ikhekhe lakho my baby, any how you like" (Eat your pussy....)

“Angilufuni ucansi” (I don’t want sex) Jesus! Can he just pipe me, now I have to beg him to do it

“What do you want” my voice is even horny

“Ngifuna inhliziyo yakho” (I want your heart) I whisper in his ear biting it

“You have it, now make love to your heart”

“I think you broke it baby” I wrap my legs around his waist pushing him down on me, his now sulking.

“Lifake baba so I can heal it” he frees my hands and I find his length between us. I direct his strong veined shaft in my opening. Slowly he eases himself into me, sliding slowly filling my cunt up, I groan in pleasure “Babyyyyyy”

“Yes mami” he whispers in my ear, back and forth as he slowly makes love to me, it’ the slowest his ever been, the coldness of the chain around his chest infuriates our pleasure when our skin collide “thandolwami I love you, only you sthandwa sami” I’m shattering beneath him, my voice is lost somewhere in pleasure. I want to reply but.....but God I feel so delicious. His hands travel beneath by butt, he takes both by butt cheeks in his hands and separate them wide opening up my cunt more for his length

“Oh, daddyyyy” my voice emerges, dressed with desire. Nice and slow he is pounding me so gentle

“I love you baby” the way his professing his love makes me melt more, my legs wrap around him once more. My hips mirror his slow pace and in slow motion we make love “Thando marry me” Gosh this man is giving it to me so nice, I’m lost in pleasure. Everything he is saying sound sweet but I can’t hear it, I can’t make sense. I need more.

“Baby fuck me” he stills, for a moment he just looks at me

“Please” his eyes are glistening once again, his begging for something. I nod. I don’t even know what I’m agreeing, I just don’t want to see that hurt expression on his face and I want him to fuck me. He sighs and pecks my forehead before he swiftly pulls out of me. I feel like screaming, I haven’t cum as yet.

“Baby please don’t stop” he laughs

“Turn around” quickly I oblige and give him my ass, ready for his assault. My chest touch on the sheets while my ass is just up there for him to do as he pleases. He caresses my butt for a while, I know no other man who worships my ass like he does “You have a beautiful ass sthandwa sami” I know, right now I just want him to.....

“Aaaaaaah Dalasss” he just slammed into me hard. Both pain and pleasure weather me “Babyyyy nooo” pleasure sensation kick the stinging feeling out as he nicely stars to rotate deep in my sex

“Take the fuck like a woman thando, I took the beatings like a man” he pulls out and slams into me again, I try to run but he wraps my braids around his hand pulling me back to his cock, I’m trapped but it feels so delicious being under his trap “You want me to be slow” I could nod but his holding my braids so tight, any movement I do is going to hurt my scalp. I tap the sheets for him to see that I want him slow because his dick feels deep in my throat, I can’t speak because he is way too deep “Did you think about that when you chained me and left me like that” of course I didn’t..... a hard spank lands on my butt cheeks, I shiver under his fuck. I feel something creamy from me greasing his cock, the feeling is sensational and mind blowing. I grasp the sheets for dear life enjoying my triumph “Fuckkkk baby, give it to me” he groans and stills for a moment lost in pleasure hissing. I think whatever that was, he enjoys it too. Before my body could give in he slams into me once again, both pain and pleasure takes over me, I can feel my walls clasp around him, one minute to orgasm land, this one I know and I’m familiar with it. I can feel that I’m about to release but he stills. I feel tears burning my eyes.

“Baby don’t” my voice is dressed in need, I need to release

“I could leave you horny like you left me you know that”

“I know baby and I’m sorry my love” Gosh I’m begging for sex

“Because I’m not cruel like you I’ll give it to you” he pulls me back by pulling my braids and give me couple of deep thrust, his moaning and groaning as he roughly pounds me. I feel my walls gathering around him once again, my end is near but he suddenly stills, giving me last deep thrust that sends me over the edge. We both spiral in sensation, releasing sweet, sweet juices inside each other. My stomach hit the sheets as I become utterly and completely numb in

pleasure. I feel his heavy weight over me but I fail to argue, I give in to sweet sleep. His warm juices is still offloading in me

“Sthandwa sami did you see the doctor about prevention?” His voice comes in my ear as he stills over me but whatever he is saying is for him, it sounds like a lullaby. I can’t make sense of whatever he saying. I’m dead in sleep “Maybe I should let this one stay”

When sleep shakes off me, I wake to find myself trapped in his embrace. I feel a bit sore down there but I’m sure it’ nothing a bath of salts can’t fix. I’m lying in my favourite position, on top of him. He looks so innocent in his sleep, my own grown baby. Unintended smile curve on my lips when I think of what I did to him last night, I peck his lips and he wakes up tightening his grip around me.

“You weren’t sleeping, were you?” he shakes his head no

“I was just watching you sleep” lazily his voice comes, but dressed with something beneath. Hurt. He is hurt. I feel a need to apologise.

“I’m sorry baby” he brushes my bare back with me still on top of him

“All you had to do was show me the video so I can defend myself, not hurt me and humiliate me like that” man’s ego! The amount of sadness in his voice cannot go unnoticed. I really did hurt him.

“I’m sorry my love, it just hurts me that you touched Dimpho and lied to me when I questioned you” he nods

“And I was wrong for lying but thando you’re my woman, there is no way in hell I was going to admit touching another woman. And if you had asked me, you would know that I touched her for you, I did that to save you” frown shapes on my face, how does touching that almost ass saves me “I knew there were cameras down that passage, so I had to act the part to get to you so that they don’t pick on my odd behaviour. I’m sorry I touched her and kiss her.....”

“You what?” he holds me tighter, I guess his tongue slipped “You kissed her?”

“Baby it didn’t mean anything, I did all that for you” I don’t believe this

“Next time you going to fuck her for me, right?”

“Now you’re being crazy and jealous over nothing, you know how I feel about dimpho, I would never.....” He stops because he already did what he always swears not to do

“Touch her?” I raise my eyebrow in question and he mouths ‘I’m sorry’ briefly closing his eyes “Let me go get ready, I don’t want to be late” I untangle myself from his grip and climb off him

“Baby don’t do this, don’t let that girl come between us, she is not a factor in our lives”

“I’m not letting anything come between us, I just want to bath and go to school. Can I do that?” he looks at me in defeat and I turn on my steps to the bathroom, I feel his stare burn me until I disappear to the bathroom. Men are impossible.

Few minutes in my shower the door slides open, I feel his body behind me but I don’t dare turn. His strong arm wrap around my waist from behind pulling me closer to his warm body. Soft lips brush across my temple from behind.

“I’m sorry” he says still wrapping me from behind

With a sigh I apologise too “I’m sorry too my love, I shouldn’t have done that to Nkosi” I squeeze his manhood from behind and he giggles, it sounds nice hearing him laugh like that

“Don’t wake sleeping dogs or else you’ll be in trouble” he threatens, but his tone is mild and full of love

“I love you baby” I turn and wrap my hands around his neck. He leans down my lips and kisses me

“I love you too sthandwa sami, you know last night you agreed to marry me” I frown and try to trace when he proposed but I don’t recall “Nkosi was deep inside you and.....” haaa! This is horror

“Dalas you can’t ask me to marry you when your piping me” he laughs “What am I going to tell my children when they asked how you proposed” he wants to say something but he is dead in laughter “That’s not a proposal, you owe me a real proposal. I hope I denied that sex proposal”

“You actually said yes sthandwa sami but I’ll give you the proposal you want”
now we talking

“How about next month, it’s my birthday. You can throw me the biggest birthday party and propose in front of everyone”

“Seriously” he looks shocked

“Yes Dalas, that’s the only time I’m going to say yes or else you’ll wait for next year when I turn another year older” he pulls my waist closer once again running his slippery hands round my behind

“Though I still have to propose again for our children stories, thank you for agreeing to be mine. My short staff” my short what? He was coming okay until

“The answer is no longer a yes, No. I will not marry a man who calls me.....”
he assaults me with a steamy kiss pushing me against the wall

“Let me fuck you to an agreement then” his voice comes in my mouth, already my leg is raised to his shoulder and I know he is about to score himself a morning glory.

DIMPHO

It’s just after midday from my class with Thando. Her calmness irritates me, I wanted her to burn or bark at me. I expected her to bite my head off with that video so I can report her to the HOD but she didn’t. She is just, I don’t know but she is just too calm for someone who saw her boyfriend all over someone as sexy as me. Her calmness doesn’t sit well with me. I need to think of something and think of it fast. I cannot get Musa’s touch and lips out of my mind. His kiss is just as endearing and hypnotic as I imagined it to be and as for his hands, gosh I’m squeezing on my thighs just thinking about his touch.

Since all my efforts seems not to infuriate her, it’s time for plan B. Come January Musa is going to be mine, I’m going to start my life with him. With or without his knowledge he will be mine. My plan B notion reminds me of the woman who works for them. It’s time for Mme Mpho to pay up. She is been too quiet for someone whom we placed in that house to spy for us. My thumb hurriedly dials on her but like I expected, it rings for a while before she picks and this confirms that she is indeed avoiding us.

'Mme Mpho' she keeps her silence but I know she is listening 'Mme Mpho do I need to remind you what happens to people who betrays my father' a heavy sigh is audible on the other side

'How can I help you madam Dimpho?' mockingly she asks but I don't give a fuck about her

'What have you collected so far?'

'Nothing, there is nothing dodgy about those people. They are actually nice.....' she must spare me her useless speech about how nice they are

'Mme Mpho I don't care if they dine with Jesus himself, my father placed you in there to find something tangible about Musa'

'I haven't found anything' useless old hag

'Okay, since you can't find something, I have a job for you' her silence gives me the key to continue 'I need you to find me a well trusted inyanga that will organise me a little something something to make Musa mine'

'Like a love portion?' she sounds mortified

'Yes Mme Mpho, don't be so shocked, you and I both know you have done far worse than just a love portion'

'Madam Dimpho I can't'

'That's where your memory seems to be shady, do I need to remind my father that his lovely first wife never died in a car accident? That you and my mother conspired to kill the poor woman just so my mommy dearest can have daddy all to himself. Do I need to tell him that he has a son somewhere out there? And it's all thanks to you that he.....'

'You wouldn't do that, you said it yourself that you don't want to share your inheritance with anyone' well that was back then, right now I need a man to start a life with and it happens to be none other than Musa Nkosi

'Well now I kind of want something different, I don't give a damn about money anymore. I want Musa and you're going to help me get him or your dirty little secret with my late mother will land in my father's ears'

'Dimpho I can't believe I raised a cruel girl like you?' ncooow so sweet bathong!

'Survival of the fittest honey, you should have done life sciences at school. Make sure you find someone for my love portion before this day expires. I want that man as in today'

'I don't even cook for them, I just wash and clean only on Saturdays'

'Bona mama, you're quite a clever woman, if you can conspire to make someone leave their own husbands just so your best friend could have the man. I'm sure you'll find a way to feed Musa my love portion. Bye koko I have to go but please don't forget that you work for me before my father. Whatever you find comes to me first, right?'

'Yes madam Dimpho'

'Sho sgriza, say hi to your daughter. I see she is about to graduate, we wouldn't want her scholarship to stop funding her in her final year akere'

'Yes madam'

'Good, I'll wait for your call' I drop the call feeling quite lively once again, it wasn't all a bad day. I'm going to have a Nkosi man, whether it's Musa or that supposed brother of his. Maybe if I knew where to find that one I would go for him but right now Musa is my target because he is within my reach and seeing him almost every day with that dull girl makes me want him more. Dimpho Nkosi, mark my words. Sometimes we just have to fight for what we want no matter what.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 45

THE TURMOIL BEGINS

LINDIWE

Time. I hate the person who came up with time. Time should be managed by an individual according to how fast or slow they want time to pace their lives. I hate that it's Saturday already. I came home early because I wanted to feel this warmth right here, and the fact that our little bubble is ending today makes my mood sombre. I'm whining. This week has been the best. From being thoroughly serviced, to breakfast in bed, being well fed by my baby daddy and of course waking up in his arms is like a dream I don't wanna wake up from.

Buhle and Zinhle are coming home, Mandisa will also be fetched from here tomorrow. This means I also have to go home, my brother thought I was in a rush to go back home but little did he know that I wanted to spend the entire week with my bae. His home being two houses away from my home was a crisis but like a queen he made me sit in the house the entire week. Whatever I needed from outside he made a plan. But what took the cup was him hanging my thongs outside because I couldn't get out. We didn't want to risk lousy neighbours seeing me and blowing the whistle on us.

"What's that smile on your face?" I'm a blushing mess I know. Thinking of the bliss this week has been. He was hanging clothes outside because of our problem, I washed inside and his job was to hang

"You make me happy" he retires next to me and peck my cheek "I was thinking" he raises an eyebrow for me to continue "Since we can't get enough of each other how about we get married?" I expected him to die in shock but he does the opposite. He is laughing his lungs out.

"Did you just propose to me?" he asks in between his laughter. I nod. He composes himself by biting on his lower lip. I find that so sexy that it has me pressing my thighs together "If you're going to propose to me, you need to do it properly" men drama!

"How?" I ask with an eye roll

“Down on one knee, a ring in your hand and some sweet words. You know the drill” Vuyani is got to be kidding me!

“Where am I going to get a ring?” he shrug

“I can borrow you mine, but I’m going to need it back soon” I frown

“You have a ring?” he nods coupled times with a grin “Okay, can you please borrow me your ring?” like lightning he flies back to the bedroom. He comes with a black velvet box that looks very new. My mouth opens in shock. He shoves the box in my hand and sits down.

“Go on, propose” Jesus! He mustn’t rush me okay. I’m still admiring the cover, I hope the inside is as beautiful as the holding box. My fingers trembles opening the box. I’m met with a beautiful pinkish diamond ring in my eyes. God, I’m lost for words, this is just..... “I’m waiting phela” can he die? Okay not die die but just shush for a minute while I admire the ring before me “Malindi there are many girls courting me, you have to propose now before I change my mind” the stupid in him never rest. I heave a sigh and look up containing my smile “Down on your knees sisi” can he be patient. My knees meet the cold tiled floor, I’m in between his spread legs. I reach for his hand and put the opened box in his palms

“Vuyi wami, my love, my bae, my side nigger, my baby daddy” we both explode in laughter “Will you do me the honours of being my husband” the smile on his face, God! He fans his face playfully like a girl

“Oh my gosh, yeeesss” he screams in a girl’s voice. I happily slip the ring on his finger but it doesn’t fit “If you had waited until next week”

“You were going to propose next week?” he nods

“I still am, this was your proposal which is a flop because the ring doesn’t fit”

“I love you baby” he picks me from the floor and make me sit on his lap

“I love you too Mrs. Ndlovu and I’m going to make you mine soon. Although you ruined the surprise” I didn’t ruin any surprise, he didn’t have to show me the ring. A knock from the door disturbs us, we both look at each other because we are not expecting anyone “Maybe it’s Sindi” Yah it’s probably her, she is the only person I know who comes here and do as she pleases “Come in” Vuyani shouts, the door opens and shuts but no one walks in. It seems like they are standing in

the kitchen “In here” Slowly from the dining room entrance emerges his worst night mare. His long lost father. I quickly stand from Vuyani but it’s too late, he already saw us.

“Good morning” his voice is low, almost not audible. I nudge Vuyani with my elbow but he is still just staring at his father like he sees a ghost “Vuyani?!” the old man calls out but Vuyani doesn’t flinch. Next to him I can see his chest expand and contract, I don’t know if his happy, shocked or.....

“What the fxck do you want here?” Well I guess its anger. I cannot recognise the look on his face.

“Vuyani mfana wami.....” (Vuyani my boy) His voice is pleading. Vuyi laughs

“Life neh!” he exclaims still laughing “Mina, as in I Vuyani Ndlovu, your boy?” the old man swallows in shame “Get the fxck out of here” his on his feet showing him the door

“Baby” I try to beg but I know that look he gives me, it’s the butt out of this look.

“Vuyani mtanami I just want to apologise”

“Thank you and bye, apology accepted Lunga” he heads to the kitchen and opens the door for him. The old man and I follow. The disrespect of calling your father by his first name for a black child it’s despicable but in this case.....

“Vuyani mtanami please just lend me your ear, just once.....” I wish I can tell him that it’s pointless trying to reason with Vuyani when he is like this. It’s like talking to a rock.

“Lunga, get out of here and make sure your motion of locomotion never put you in my mother’s house. My mother. You remember her? The one and only Thandeka Ndlovu you left with two boys to go start your perfect family with your new girlfriend, the one you left with two children for that chewing gum you call a wife” eish!

“Son I need to apologise, I made the worst mistake of my life, your brother.....” he is being shoved to the wall, I stand besides vuyani and beg him

“Vuyi wami don’t do this, I’m begging you my love. Just let him go” he sighs and let the old man loose

“Get out” he turns not facing the old man and I, I know him like no one else. I know his crying. The old man sheepishly pace out of the door with his head looking down, before he walks out Vuyi ask “You do know that you first born Siphon Ndlovu died right?” with a sigh the old man bites on his bottom lip, trying to hold himself from breaking down. Now I see where Vuyani got his biting lip habit from

“Yes and that is why am here” he fishes something from his pockets and hand it to me in silence, he signals with a hand gesture that I should call him. It’s his business card. Vuyani is still facing away from us. “Son....”

“Get out Lunga and don’t come back” like that the old man is dismissed. My proposal turned into a turmoil. I expected him to storm to the bedroom but he turns to me with teary eyes after I close the door. He pulls me and grabs me in a tight hug “Baby I don’t want to see him again” he is a crying mess, sometimes I think there are female hormones somewhere in him, the way he cries.

THANDO

Saturdays are the best. For the mere part that I get to be madam of the house. No cleaning, no school and definitely no cooking because my special somebody always takes me out on Saturdays or else we order in. but today’s Saturday is more blissful because I’m going home. Yes Vuyani literally summoned me home. He was like “Thando I want you home this weekend, have you deserted me? Don’t you know you’re the only family I have’ the blackmail in that and my guilt of not telling him the recent happening in my life got me agreeing to going home. I have to break the part about finding my father’s family to him face to face or else my poor brother will cry his lungs out.

I’m a bit clingy to my man this week. After our recent sex drive the entire week, God knows I want to pocket that pipe everywhere I go. I suddenly feel like it’s mine and I should be the one responsible for it.

His sitting on kitchen stool having coffee as he browses through his phone. He said he is going straight to the office after we leave. Thiza is going to drive us and I’m taking advantage of that so I can come back with him tomorrow. Mme Mpho walks in from the laundry as I’m approaching my man, I know she is

about to start her routine cleaning. I hug him from behind. A breathy laughter escapes him.

“It’s just one night you know” one night without him feels like hell, especially that pipe.

“Maybe I should tell Vuyani that.....” he interrupts me before I can even finish. He wraps his arm around my waist and pull me to his lap

“You’re doing no such thing, Vuyani misses you. And he deserves to hear from you the drama you’ve been in lately” with a sigh I agree. He stares at me for while caressing my breast, my stomach, my.....okay Mme Mpho is in the room, she is washing dishes, he needs to stop. I hold his busy hand tight on my thigh “You’ve stopped drinking right?” that’s random of him, but no I haven’t Lindy got pregnant so I didn’t have a drinking partner anymore. I’m the type that drinks with people, I don’t even crave for alcohol when I’m alone

“No I haven’t, my drinking partner decided to get pregnant. That’s the only reason why I have been foreign to savannah” I think he just rolled his eyes at me. It’s gay thing to do for a man.

“Good for me that she is still heavily pregnant” now it’s my time to roll eyes

“I’m not a drunkard Dalas. Let me go get ready, please take care of yourself and my nkosi down here” I whisper the last part grabbing it while at it. He jumps almost spilling the coffee

“How old are you again?” we both giggle. He shakes his head still smiling

“Promise” he sighs

“I promise to take care of myself for one night. When I come back from work later I will buy some takeaways. Happy now?” I pout but nod

“I don’t mind cooking for him, just for tonight” Mme Mpho chirps in but Dalas shakes his head

“No no Mme I’ll be fine, I will.....” she cuts him

“Please sir, it’s the least I could do. You both have been so nice to me. Please” I’m not getting involved, his giving me a look to step in. Mme is so nice and if she wants to feed him for a night, I don’t see anything wrong with it.

“Okay Mme, thank you” she nods and disappears down the passage “You go get ready but giving me one for the road first is compulsory” he carries me like a sack of potatoes on his shoulder and spansks my behind. I couldn’t be happier that my throbbing bean is going to be dealt with.

Home. I swear I didn’t realise I missed home this much until they dropped at the gate. Thiza is going to sleep in Dala’s garage room, I hope Mabongani doesn’t make his stay unpleasant. Everyone knows she can be..... I shouldn’t talk ill about my soon to be mother in law.

“Vuyi, vuyi?!” I don’t even knock, I enthusiastically burst the door open but to my surprise I’m welcomed by Lindi. Barefoot pregnant in my brother’s kitchen, doing only God knows what on the stove. This girl cannot even fry an egg. What the hell is she doing here? “Lindi!” I exclaim shocked “What are you doing here?” that embarrassed smile form on her face

“None of your business thando” Vuyani replies coming from the living room. His eyes are red. He’s been crying, I wonder why but first I need to address this.

“Vuyani you can’t still be sleeping with Lindi, she is pregnant with another man’s child” I feel disgusted even saying it. It’s despicable.

“Babe’wami I’ll give you guys’ space to talk” she kisses his cheek disappearing to the bedrooms. I’m still standing stunned in the kitchen. Vuyani gestures for me to follow him to the living room. I’m just looking at him bored, I know they are both cheaters but what they are doing is now out of hand. Lindi is pregnant with..... Jesus! Some whxres are extreme out there. This is cheating at it’s best “Chommie call me later when you’ve calmed down” now she appears fully dressed leaving the house. I throw Vuyani my disappointed look.

“The child is mine, stop looking at me like that” say what? “This is why I called you home, I want to marry her, I want to pay lobola and bring her here. To me, where she rightfully belongs” my mind is still at ‘the child is mine’ “Neno?” Jesus that stupid name

“Vuyani fotsek” he laughs “The child is yours?” he nods “Dalas is going to kill you” I tell him the obvious

“That’s why you are here my sweet sister” I raise my eyebrow in question

“You are going to tell him for me”

“No” he begs squinting his eyes and clasping his hands

“Please aunty”

“I can’t believe you made me an aunt so young, I going to be a mean one” he laughs

“Believe me all aunts are mean, and you qualify just fine” he looks happy. I’m glad his cheating partner makes him happy.

“You two have my blessings, I was just mad that you both started your relationship with cheating” he frowns

“Thando feed your brother, stop analysing my love life” he puts his feet on the table and lays his head on the couch rest balancing with his hands. I’m a visitor by the way but I’m subjected to this kind of abuse. And then? Why is mother’s kitchen hovered in smoke? Damn it Lindi, she didn’t switch off the stove. Whatever she was cooking has turned to ashes.

My brother and I had a talk during dinner, I told him about the Mohapis. He was horrified but he is glad that I’m okay and all. He also told me about his father emerging out of nowhere, I really don’t know why this people are only showing now in our lives. But like a man in love, he went to fetch Lindi at home with the usual excuse, thando is home and she misses her. I think they are way past that, they should just come out. Even Dalas will be strong, he shouldn’t be a hypocrite about it because his also shagging me. A sister for a sister. I will make sure to remind him when he tries to be strong headed.

Now I’m lying in my bedroom listening to the two love birds giggle the night away. I wish my man was here too. But why hasn’t he reached out? He was stalking me the entire journey with texts and calls. I last spoke to him when he said he was eating dinner. He promised to call before he sleeps but he hasn’t called. Let me call him.

His phone rings to voice mail for the first time, he pick on the second try

“Hey lover” I expected him to laugh but he just went mute “Baby, Dalas”

“Hi” he sounds..... I don’t know funny

“Babe?!”

“Hmm” haibo!

“Are you sleeping already?”

“I was until you woke me up” why is he so rude? “Let’s talk in the morning Thando, I’m sweating and I’m shivering” he sounds like someone who can’t wait to drop the call

“Why? You coming down with flu?” he exhales an exasperated sigh

“I don’t know woman, can I fxcken sleep?” he snaps

“Jeez! Don’t bite my head off. I just wanted to say goodnight and I love you”

“Sho” sho? Oh hell no!

“Listen here Dalas and you listen good. I don’t care if your body is sweating blood but you’re not gonna.....beep..... beep” did this nigger just hang up on me? And did he really say ‘sho’ to me, when I said I love him. SHO and HANG up on me? What the hell is going on?

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 46

SOMETIMES WE JUST HAVE TO LET THINGS BE

THABO

The agony in my heart cannot be described. Few stolen moments of hot chocolate through the night has left me shattered. Every day throughout the entire week, we used to wait for everyone to sleep and then sneak back to the lounge where we would just have chocolate and talk. It started with her inviting me for a cup of hot chocolate at 12 midnight. I thought it was stupid but I still woke up at 12, I found her already seated with 2 brewing mugs. Musa would have woken up and found us but in those moments I pushed him at the back of my head. I was just glad that I'm having sweet hot chocolate with his sister and that I can make her laugh to a point of crying tears. I honestly don't know what she finds funny with my farm boy stories, but she laughs like I'm the next Trevor Noah.

I think this past week was my start in everything. New job, new friends and family being thando and maybe when I gather much strength to confess my love, new girlfriend too. I don't know if thando is a sangoma or what, she refused to take the front sit when we came here. She adamantly insisted on sitting at the back with the girls. I had to sit with Buhle next to me the entire trip.

My complains comes from her shorts..... Torture of watching those smooth thighs just out there had me vile the entire trip. I have to apologize for my vile mood before I leave, I don't want to leave things like this between us.

Though I don't think she is mad because when we arrived we were sitting in the lounge with her and the girls until her mother arrived. That woman has a dark aura, she is unpleasant, unwelcoming and there is just something about her that makes one want to play far from her. I excused myself to Musa's room that I will be using for the night and decided to catch up on my driving school work, I have been buried in this road signs book that I didn't realise it's now dusk outside.

A soft knock comes from the door alerting me of someone outside. I hope it's not the mother. I give permission to whoever it is and in comes Buhle with a plate on the tray and a glass of juice next to it. More reasons why I love her, she cares.

"Hey you've locked yourself in here the entire day, you didn't come to have lunch" she puts the tray on top of me

"Thank you. I was still full from what we had on the way"

She nod sitting next to me "Or maybe you're scared of my mother" we both smile because that is true "Don't worry about her, she won't harm you" we both fall into our usual moments of silence, it's not awkward anymore. It's just silence filled with unspoken words, deep down I want to say something but then I remember my status. What if I embarrass myself and..... a single knock and opening of the door disturbs our silence. It's the one and only mini Buhle. I can't help but smile looking at her. She looks heavily pregnant, she must be Lindiwe.

"Hi" I have to greet first because she is just staring at me, not bad though but she didn't greet. When we arrived she wasn't here, her sister said she is with her baby daddy.

"Hello, you must be Thiza" she finally extends her hand. Her sister widens her eyes.

"How do you know who he is?" Buhle questions

"Thando and I gossip" now we both frown, I want her to say more but she is just smiling "So innocent. Listen Vuyi is coming to fetch me....." She is interrupted

"Lindiwe no, you spent the entire week with the guy already"

"It's not me, it's his baby that wants him" she says brushing on her big bump.

"Mandlovu?!" a hoarse voice calls from the outside, Lindiwe steps from the door and opens it. In comes a guy who looks just like Musa, character wise. He smells of money from a distance. His watch tells that he is loaded, although he looks a bit younger than Musa "Good people" that's his way of greeting. His not even looking at us, his hands are all over Lindiwe's bump.

“Cheaters” they both turn to give Buhle mean looks. She laughs their nasty look “It’s true vele” Lindiwe responds with an annoyed mxm “Thabo this is Vuyani, he is thando’s brother?” Buhle introduces “Vuyi this is thabo, he is Musa’s colleague” the guy happily gives me his hand for a shake

“And my sister’s cousin” there is a bit of thando in him “She told me about you, please come see home before you leave tomorrow. I would take you now but I have a date with my baby mama” we laugh

“Baby let’s go, Siyeza is hungry”

“I haven’t agreed to cover for you Maka’Siyeza” Lindiwe smiles a conniving smile

“I didn’t ask because you will not sell me out, or else I will also tell on you” Buhle frowns

“About what?”

“About you and Thiza” she quickly pulls the laughing Vuyani out of the door before Buhle can respond. But she peeps in again “Thiza I’m watching you, my sister is a virgin make sure.....” my book, the book I was reading flies to the door. Lindiwe shut the door before it hit her. I’m just smiling.

“She is lying” she says still in fury

“About?” she gives me the stupid look. I know what she is talking about, I just want to make her uncomfortable. I find it funny how she is so worked up about something so..... I mean there is no 25 year old who is still a virgin in this day and age “I know she is kidding, listen Buhle I have something to ask if you.....” I trail off, that fear strikes once again but it’s now or never. I have to man up and ask, if she reject me then I will try again when I’m well off. I put the tray aside and take her hands standing. She is looking up at me from the bed, I expel a heavy sigh and squeeze her soft hand tighter “Buhle I know I’m not your ideal guy, I don’t have much to take you on romantic escapes but I need you to know that ever since the past week, I realised that my heart beats for you. You’re the puzzle that’s been missing in my life. Buhle what I’m trying to say is that I love you, I need you in my life. I know I have nothing to give you now but I promise you if.....” Her face is cracking into a smile, she pecks both my hands

“Shhhhh” she says standing up to me, she looks directly in my eyes “I don’t care what you have, I’d very much like to be your girlfriend too” I smile, I smile from within, from the heart

“Thank you” she smiles back

“Can I get a kiss now” Haaa! I don’t believe this tiny thing of mine is making me blush, I guess I got myself a girlfriend. Farm boy is in love.

THANDO

When light chased darkness from the sky, I was already up staring into space. A part of me says I’m overreacting but I know my man. Not to call the entire night and speak to me the way he did is not like him. Something in me tells me that something is up.

I know I might have inconvenienced Thiza’s plans with Buhle but I needed to leave Mp as soon as possible. I woke him up by dawn and told him we need to leave, he was reluctant because I think he needed to spend some time with Buhle. I hope they confess their love for each other soon because even a fool can see that those two fancy each other. As much as he didn’t want to go he agreed, we have been on the road long enough. We just passed Villers and I know in less than an hour will be in Joburg.

I couldn’t sleep a wink because of my sorrows and the two love birds sexing each other the entire night. I had to abandon my room because its closer to Vuyani’s, and sleep in Siphos room. I didn’t even have to nag sleep to come, I was already drowsy when my head hit the pillow in his room. Although I slept immediately in his room, I still had an unsettling dream. I have only dreamed of my brother once since he passed on, he only visited me when I was in the hospital after Law mashed me. He was smiling wiping my blood from that dream. But since then I haven’t dreamed of him until last night.

Last night he was just looking at me, he was staring at me with what I think was pity. He didn’t say anything, he just stared until he disappeared. I find it odd because Dalas say he always talks when he visits him in his dreams, why does he.....

“We are here” here? I look up to find we are here here, here as in the yard “Stop day dreaming come” such a gentleman, he is opening my door

“Thank you Thiza” I immediately make my way to the house with my bag tucked under my arm. The minute I open the door, something shroud my shoulders, I feel a certain presence I cannot describe. I ignore the feeling and march to the bedroom. He had promised that I’ll find him home when we come back but to my surprise the bedroom is empty. My next walk is to his study but it’s also empty. Where could he be? It’s just after 11 and it’s a Sunday morning, I know for a fact that his labour days expires on Fridays unless if he wants to catch up with work, but still he only goes until Saturday if so. I would call but we didn’t have a pleasant conversation last night. Maybe I should freshen up and cook him a Sunday meal. He must be starving wherever he is.

Two hours later there is still no sign of Dalas. I called and he didn’t pick. Now I don’t know if I’m nervous or angry. And it doesn’t help that I’m alone in this house, Thiza left saying he is going to chill with his colleagues. This is what happens when you make a man the centre of your universe. I love Dalas so much that I made him my everything and now I can’t function because I don’t know what is going on with him. I cooked and ate alone, now time is heading to two o’clock in the afternoon. I can’t even pick a book to keep busy with my school work. I’m just staring at this Turkish soapie.

The door opens when I least expect it and in walks my worst night mare, this day is going down the drains I tell you. The ironing board is flatly tucked under Dalas’ arm. She serves her devilicous smile when she sees me. I expect Dalas to move his hand from her but he doesn’t. I feel insulted but more than anything I’m exhausted instantly, I don’t know anymore.

“Hey babe” she says cat walking to me, Dalas disappear to the kitchen without greeting “I did tell you I’ll have him” she informs sitting next to me. I don’t have a reaction, I’m just numb “Don’t make this hard on yourself, he is going to kick you out nicely. Wena just be strong and take the break up like a woman” she lowly advices. Dalas comes back with two plates, he dished the food I cooked for him for his woman. I swear satan is testing my abilities to own hell more than he does. There is this urge in me to burn them both alive, and I know I can

do it but you know what? Sometimes we just have to let things unfold. Watch and let things be.

“Here you go” he says giving her a plate of my hard work, the food I cooked for him “When did you arrive?” he asks weighing down the other couch. I don’t respond, I just blankly stare at him tearing my heart into pieces “Listen thando, I know you must be wondering what is going on, I’m sorry to do this but I love Dimpho” he keeps quite for a while looking at me, I think he needs me to react but I will not give them the satisfaction “I’m sorry” he lowly say. I feel tears at the back of my eyes but I inhale deeply pushing them back.

“I guess I should start packing then” Dimpho looks at me shocked, she thought I was going to fight. He doesn’t respond. He focuses on his plate eating.

“Yes, I can borrow you my flat while you still trying to get on your feet” Dimpho chirps in “Your still my cousin” cousin from hell

“No thank you, I’ll see myself. Just give me an hour to collect my staff and I’ll be out of here” the walk to the bedroom feels like a run from hail, my tears are making their way down town. The minute I shut the bedroom door I make sure to lock, I crumble to the floor and wrap my body in heart pain. My arms find comfort in hugging my legs, my body finds comfort in lightly hitting the hard wooden door as I rock the pain away but my heart. My heart remains wounded as tears freely fall down my cheeks. What did I do so bad to God to deserve all this?

After minutes of breaking down I remember I have to leave. I crawl to the bathroom and have some water from the bathtub tap. I cannot stand. I’m not sure if my legs will be able to carry my burdened body. After several sips I inhale deeply to calm my palpitating heart. Matters of the heart are not for the faint hearted. Now I balance by the bathtub and beg my feet not to fail me, they feel wobbly but they don’t fail. I stand and come to the reflection of my face in the mirror. For a minute I just stare at my face, how unlucky can one be?

“Baby girl you can do this, it’s time to say goodbye. If it’s meant to be he will find his way back to you” for once my subconscious speaks positive, I smile wiping my tears. “It’s time to say goodbye” I repeat as I throw my clothes in his large traveling bag. I hope he doesn’t want it, if he does, I’ll bring it back. My own bag fills my books, hand bags and shoes. I make sure not to even leave a single tooth

brush. When I'm sure I'm done I run my eyes around to make sure nothing is left behind. I request an uber and text Krazy before leaving the room, he is the only friend I have. I'll explain my situation when I get to his place. I hope he doesn't kick me out too.

I find Dimpho on his lap smooching him. I don't know if I should clear my throat to make them aware that I'm in the room or what. The kitchen door opens widely while I'm still watching live porn before my eyes and in walks Mohapi with his two guards. Dimpho jumps from Dalas lap but it's too late, her father already saw them. His eyes starts with me and my luggage, then the two love birds. From his expression I take it he didn't know Dimpho is here.

"Now you f*cking my daughter too?" he hisses towards Dalas "I'm talking to you damn it" Dalas sighs

"What do you want in my house?" he asks still calm seated on the couch

"I want my money" Dalas chuckles before standing, he disappears to his study. Thiza walks in humming to a song looking down his phone. He freezes when he raise his head to full house. His eyes remains on Mohapi for a while, I think he recognizes him but Mohapi on the other hand doesn't seem to know who he is "What are you looking at?" he questions the frozen Thiza who finally sighs and snap out of whatever was on his mind.

"Du... Dumelang" no one responds to him, I just smile looking at him. He comes to me "Who are this people, and what's with the bags?" he asks lowly close enough to me

"Mine, Dalas kicked me out. He is moving in with ironing board there" I point Dimpho, he frowns looking confused. I can see he wants to ask questions but I shake my head to stop him. The last thing I need is him being kicked out too "Don't get involved, just focus on your job please. I'll keep in touch I promise" he sighs looking at me with nothing but pity, I smile to ease the sadness in my heart. Dalas comes back with two huge bags and drop them before Mohapi. One guard opens them and they occupy nothing but filthy cash. Mohapi smirks pleased.

"It was a pleasure doing business with you Nkosi" he gives him his hand but Dalas just stare at him "Oh well, it's never nice to loose, isn't it?" he retract his

hand and signals his boys to pick the bags up “Keep your useless bodyguard here on the leash, he mustn’t look at me like he knows me” he affronts looking at thiza. I don’t know how he thinks thiza is a bodyguard because the guy is not even puffed and he is simply dressed like a normal guy “Areye wena” (Let’s go) he says looking at Dimpho who remains seated like she is glued to the couch “Dimpho Mohapi I’m not going to repeat myself, let’s go”

“Papa I can’t, this is my new home” now Dalas smirks back at the furious Mohapi

“I guess it’s time for you to f*ck off my house Mohapi” he goes to the door and holds it open for Mohapi. Mohapi stares at Dimpho for a while but she doesn’t even flinch. Well I guess it’s time for me to leave too because I’m not sure why I’m still standing in this house. I also manage to push my backs out of the door. He doesn’t even spare me a look once I’m out of the door. He shut his door right after me. I guess that’s how my love story ends.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 47

THE EFFECTS OF FORCING LOVE

THANDO

As morning dew melt to the surface and some evaporate to the atmosphere I stare through the broad glass window. City life. People purposely go about life, car hoods lingers in every room. Johannesburg is a true definition of the city that never sleeps. I don't know how one sleeps in such a noisy place. Well I couldn't sleep because of my sorrows and this damn noise of cars and almost everything buzzing in my ear drums. I find this place frustrating and I know for sure that I wouldn't survive in this place at all.

Krazy offered me a room in his flat. He said I could stay for as long as I want but nah. It's Monday morning and fortunately I have no classes. Vuyani transferred me enough money as soon as last night. He promised to transfer more today so I can safely say I'm sorted cash wise. I have to go apartment searching. Krazy said there is few communes he will take me to check out. I have to find a room and make sure it's habitable by the end of today. Vuyani is livid. He said Dalas is not answering his calls. If it was up to him I would pack up and return home but I can't, I have school, I have to make something of myself with or without Dalas. This taught me a lesson. Never make a man the centre of your universe.

"Knock knock, it's me I come bearing coffee" I retract my face from the window of thoughts and turn to the door. I shout come in and he comes in holding two hot mugs "Hey, how did you sleep?" I smile. It's the only thing I have left. He hands me my coffee and pull me to the bed. Now here is a thing about Krazy, I find him.....too manly for a gay or he is a reserved gay I don't know. The after nine type. Even his clothing, his manners, like everything screams that he is a man but he insist that he is gay.

"Remember you promised to go house hunting with me" I'm changing the topic on purpose, I don't want to start my day with tears

“Yes but you can still take me up on my offer, I mean I live alone in here” not happening. It’s a beautiful place but one night in it was enough. I cannot survive the noise even if I tried.

“No thank you, this place is so damn loud. One night in it felt like trying to sleep in a sheeben” he laughs

“Okay, let’s go have breakfast then we can start our house hunting journey” I nod in agreement following him back to the kitchen

His kitchen skills are surprisingly very good. The table is well set and the smell of fresh bread carry the whole room. Wow I’m impressed. All the man in my life cannot cook. Vuyani is better though compared to Da..... not my man anymore, I need to remind myself.

“Hey what’s wrong?” I guess he just saw the shift in my mood

“Nothing, this looks and smells amazing. Thank you” he just stares settling on his chair opposite to mine

“Thando you do know that closing things in won’t help right? At some point you going to have to talk to someone” I shake my head tightly pressing both my lips. Tears are five seconds away, my sight is being blurry and there is a lump forming in my throat “Hey hey...” he rushes to my side of the table and hold my head to his waist. Heartache liquid freely fall my cheeks “Shhhhh, he doesn’t deserve you. You want us to listen to Adele” I find myself smiling through my tears, he chuckles too now squatting to my face “She is the best with break up song” I laugh with my teary messy face. He cups my face wiping my tears with his thumbs. I hold both his wrist removing his hands on my face. I feel fine now, crying helps.

“Let’s eat so we can leave, I have lots and lots of shopping to do before the end of today” he plants a kiss on my cheek before he goes back to his prior sit “I have never seen your boyfriend” I’m changing the topic on purpose but the response I get is shocking. He chokes and hit his chest

“My...my....boyfriend, I’m gay right” he trails off buried in his coffee mug as he drinks. I burn him with my stare, he smiles nervously “You’ll meet him, one day” he sounds unsure “Come eat up so we can leave” why am I sensing vibes that

makes me question his gender more? I hope I'm wrong. I mean why would he lie? This other gender is so confusing.

Apartment searching wasn't much of a hassle as I had thought it would be. Knowing well known people helps. Krazy made calls and we only checked two places. The third one was it for me, it's a commune. Three bedrooms, kitchen and lounge. We only share the mains which is kitchen and lounge, everyone has their own room and we don't share. It's a bit steep in the pocket but I loved that I will only have three housemates unlike the other ones.

We immediately went furniture buy which was just a bed and table desk which I will use to study and few necessities like kettle, cutlery and grocery. There is a wall wardrobe in this room, so less spending for me. I met one girl when I arrived. She looked shy, the landlady introduced her as Rema. She was asked to introduce the other two to me when they arrive from their classes, the landlady had to leave immediately. Krazy went back to his place to fetch my luggage. I'm busy fixing my room, thorough cleaning and making my new bed with the new bedding.

"Knock knock, can we come in?" it's useless to respond, the white girls has already pushed the door open. She is followed by Rema, the shy one from earlier and the one I don't know "Hi I'm Bee, and this is Kuku....."

"GUGU" the other girl cuts her in frustration, I bite my lips to stop myself from laughing

"One and the same thing, anyway we are your HOUSEMATES" she screams the last part shaking her body. She is too hyper for my liking, the shy one smiles and shakes her head before leaving the room. I guess Bee did the introduction for her.

"Nice meeting you ladies, I'm thando" Gugu smiles still standing while as Bee puts her weight on my bed. This reminds me that I need a couch in this room.

"Beautiful bedding, where did you buy them" I'm not going to reply that, this white girl is too much

"You can have a sit" I tell gugu who is standing tall like a statue. I'm busy packing the few things I bought in the wardrobe while I wait for crazy

“I opened your cupboard in the kitchen” she informs now lying on my new bedding. I packed my grocery earlier after Rema showed me my cupboard. She told me we share fridge, stove and tv which we all pay ourselves “I like what I saw in there, you cook?” gugu throws her a reprimanding look but she doesn’t but off “Anyway we have no rules in here, there only rule is that a newbie cooks the entire week for us oldies” now that’s bull and I’m not doing it all

“Don’t worry about her, you’ll get used to her we call her bipolar” now I laugh out loud

“Bipolar is your mother, don’t you have assignments or something to get to?” gugu rolls her eyes before she leaves my room, I expect bipolar to follow her out but kicks her shoes off and fully climb my bed

“This room smells amazing, wake me up when.....” She says trying to curl herself on my new bed but nah, not thando

“Hei! Bipolar out” I hold my door open for her

“But.....”

“But nothing, out” I hear gugu laughing out loud in the kitchen. She gives me an intimidating look before he buzz out of my room. Hau! Forward people are annoying as hell.

DIMPHO

The arms of the man I love. This moment feels surreal, every breath he takes I feel like he is inhaling for me. When Mme Mpho called me yesterday and said it’s done, I felt like heaven. Finally there is light at the end of the tunnel. I wasted no time, like an early bird I caught the fattest worm. I went to his place very early in the morning and he was pleased to see me. I suggested we go to the park and just chill so he can calm down, he was crying of sweating and of course I was distracting him so he wouldn’t go to the doctor, that was just the side effects of love portion working.

He is been treating me like a queen since then, just like Mme Mpho told me “He will choose you above everyone else, you’re his pearl now” Everything is just as I imagined, his touch, his lips, his everything except one tiny weeny problem that could cost me everything I’ve worked so hard for. I wonder if he always

had this problem. How was thando coping with it? I really don't want to step out of this relationship, I want it to work so hard but if he continues to fail servicing me, I'm going to have to step out to be serviced. A girl's got to be fed in and out. I can't have a man with a huge useless pipe.

I'm busy drawing circles on his bare chest after our failed attempt. This is happening for the second time and I'm frustrated as hell. When it happened last night I thought it was just the love portion still working but today morning again? A.a abuti is got a problem. Huge bedroom problems that needs men's clinic. I sigh before peeking up at him.

"Babe" my voice comes gentle, careful not to come out as aggressive. Phela this other gender doesn't want to be told when they are wrong in bedroom department.

"Hmmm" this moment should be very cosy, he supposed to have wrapped his other hand on my back drawing circles on me too but he is just looking up the ceiling with his hands under his head. Is he always not this loving?

"Maybe we should visit men's clinic" he leaves the ceiling to look at me, I cringe when his stare meet me. I have never seen this look from him ever.

"What are you insinuating?" his furious

"Nothing.....i just" his one arm wrap around my neck, for a moment I thought he is hugging me back but when the grip tightens I try to imprison my neck of his solid grip

"If you fail to perform your duties as a woman, don't insult my manhood" I nod repeatedly, my neck is on fire "Your cold dimpho" he whisper the last part in my ear and storm to the bathroom. My neck feels so hot, I hope he didn't break it. How can one man with everything so fine fail to keep it up? Or is it that thando? It's definitely her, no wonder she gave up so easy. She knew she did something to him. Now how am I going to calm this throbbing clit? It's breathing on it's own and I know when it's like this it needs it's fix. If I was in my apartment my vibrator would get to work immediately but I'm with my dream guy who apparently has a useless d*ck.

Let me go check if I can find a Russian or Cucumber in his fridge, they always do the trick in desperate days. I walk in my birthday suit to the kitchen, what a turn off of a morning, I'm going to have to do myself as soon as he leaves

because there is no way in hell I'm starting my day with a dancing bean..... well well I guess I won't do myself after all. What's his name again? I forgot we have someone in the house. He cleans up okay. Not my exact type but he can do.

"Heyyyy" his jaw hits the floor when he turns from the fridge. I know I'm sexy as hell. I catwalk closer to him but he keeps going back. I love the hold I have on men, they all cannot keep their hands on them when they see my sexy body "Don't be scared" I whisper seductively marching to him. He hits the cupboard with his eyes still popping out.

"You're.....you.....you naked" stutter, I love me some shy man. They are sweet as hell.

"I know, don't you want to touch" I cup my boobs and squeeze them drawing him in. He shakes his head like an errant child caught stealing sugar "It will be our tiny little secret" I bite on my lower lip. His throat moves, he swallows his desire. I have him right where I want him "Please sweetie"

"I.....i....." Musa's angry voice interrupts him

"DIMPHO WERE ARE MY CLOTHES?" Musa screams loud from the bedroom breaking our moment. What clothes now with his crippled d*ck? I'm dealing with a man who can service me.

"WHAT CLOTHES?" I scream back

"MY WORK CLOTHES DAMN IT, THANDO ALWAYS TAKES MY CLOTHES OUT" I swear if he compares me to that fat bimbo one last time I'm going to drop dead. Everything is thando does this, thando touches like this.....f*ck, no wonder his d*ck doesn't stand for the occasion, he kept telling me to touch it like this because thando touches it like that. F*ck.

"Don't lock your room tonight" I inform my sweet boy and turn to dress a grown a*s man with a useless d*ck. Nxa!

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 48

TWO UNITED HEARTS WILL ALWAYS MEET

DIMPHO

It's been a minute, one week to be precise and the drought in me cannot be watered even by thunderous rainfalls. The desert in me is drier than the Kalahari. I swear if this man doesn't deliver I'm going back to the sacred men's club or taking the sweet guy in the house. I thought I give it at least sometime, maybe the portion was still working hence his dead pipe though it still baffles me how can he have everything so perfect but fail to service a woman. I'm slowly losing interest in him but every time I walk down town with him by my side, I see the envy in all my friends' eyes and for that reason I will keep him. At last I finally have a perfect man by my side, a man my father doesn't intimidate. I have to try one last thing before I cheat on him because I'm definitely going that way if this dead pipe charade continues. Mme Mpho has to help, my problems are her problems she need to find us a solution for this mess. Like a servant she is she picks immediately after I dial her.

'Madam Dimpho'

'Mme Mpho we have a problem' she heavily sighs

'I'm listening Madam'

'Musa's d*ck is dead, I need something to wake it. Can you help me with that?'

'No I can't, why don't you take him to the doctor' her immediate answer tells me she is lying

'I tried but he refused meaning I only have one option, you and your witch doctor'

'Madam I don't think he can help you with.....' Lying old hag

'Mme Mpho I don't pay you to think, leave the thinking to me. Wena your job is to do as told. I need something to wake his dead d*ck before the end of today. I don't need to remind you what will happen if you don't deliver right'

'Yes mam'

'Good girl, I'll ewallet you cash for the portion' she heaves a sigh once again

'Madam Dimpho if I may warn you..... Madam majority of people who are fed love portion turn out to be aggressive in those forced relationships and if you feed them more portions they turn out to be highly dangerous' that neck incident comes to mind but nah, Musa is an angel, he was just mad because of his d*ck. This hag wants me to doubt myself.

'Mpho wee like I said, I don't pay you to think or warn me, wena just do as told okay'

'Yes mam' Good, I throw my phone on the couch and relax, I know within an hour she will text me with a solution. Things are coming together, fake it until you make it. Sometimes we have to force things until they happen. I love that man and I can feel that with time he will reciprocate the same feelings as me without drugging him to do it. I need to visit my gynaecologist to give me something to speed up the process of falling pregnant. I have to be Mrs. Nkosi with a bun in the oven before this year end.

I must say I applaud thando for knowing when to put down her battling sticks. She is not even fighting, I thought she would throw tantrums in class this past week but like a sweet naïve girl she is she was just a student and I was a lecturer. If she keeps that good girl act I'm going to make sure she pass my module in straight A. The only problem is Musa's mouth, every now and then he makes sure to compare me with that thing. Even my cooking's aren't as mouth-watering as thandos, I don't even bother anymore. We live on takeaways. Let me take a nap, I will wake up later feeling fresh and ready to be serviced when Mme Mpho brings my portion number 2.

Two hours later i'm woken up by shuffling in the house, I scrub my sleepy eyes to find Musa and Thabo watching soccer. The love of my life didn't even cover me with a throw at least, they just watching soccer laughing. So much for loving someone. I pray with time he will love me back the way I need him to unlike now. Now he loves me yena but there is no care in it, no gentleness and warmth, I can feel that he loves me because he feels like he has to

“You are awake” Musa snaps me off my thoughts. I nod “Good go paint or draw, whatever you do. You’re disturbing us or better yet, go google ways to please a man. You’re so cold Dimpho I swear even a fridge on level 7 is warmer than you” That hurts, I’m itching to tell him back that he is the one with a dead pipe but because I’m a girl with a plan I will shush. I know once I look him straight in the eyes all this rudeness will fly out of the room, the portion Mme Mpho gave me draws him to me when I look straight in his eyes. Thabo smiles supressing his laugh but when I look at him he clears his throat and focus back on the tv. Nxa! My phone rings saving me. I attend to it walking out of the lounge.

‘Mme Mpho’ I speak lowly, careful not to be heard

‘We are here’ I’m confused

‘We are here? You and who and what are you doing here?’ she sighs

‘Our usual doctor refused to help us. He said the same thing I told you that it’s highly perilous to hypnotize one with various portions in such short space of time’

‘And what do you suggest I do because I need this man to service me today’

‘I’m here with Gina, in the cottage house. She is a Nigerian doctor who said she can help, although she comes very expensive. She needs just five minutes in your bedroom’ sigh!

‘I’m coming’ the things we do for love. The two monkeys don’t even ask questions when I exit the door. That’s just goes to show how this man still need more portions to be exactly where I want him. He doesn’t care. Thankfully the cottage is not that far, I quickly march there.

“Hello” the shady woman just agree with a nod when I greet

“Gina this is madam, you can explain” the shady Gina nods once again before she speaks

“Madam, my process is very easy, I use two types of leaves, there is a calling leaf which draws your partner to you and the attraction leaf which wakes his manhood for you. I’m going to give you the calling leaf which you’ll place underneath your tongue the entire afternoon calling out his name. It will invite his desires to you, he will be sexually drawn to you tonight. Then I’m going to sprinkle attraction leaves all over your mattress which will entice your

partner's arousal. All you have to do is make sure he spends the night with you tonight, both leaves only work within limited time"

"So tomorrow he might wake up not wanting to touch me again" she nods hesitantly. Sigh! I guess one night of action is better than no action at all. I'll figure something out tomorrow "Okay, let's do it" she fumbles about in her handbag and give me something wrapped with a newspaper, I take it it's the calling leaf "I'm going take him to a club, once we leave you both can make your way to the house" Mme Mpho nods, she knows her way around the house

"What about my money?" bloody witch, I will not be scammed by witches

"You'll get your money after the results, I will not pay for something I'm not sure it will work" she sighs dramatically

"Make sure you pay me mam, the people I work with are not one to be messed with" whatever witch, I'll pay her once I'm sure it worked.

THANDO

In a space of a week I made friends with my housemates, we are so close one could hardly believe that we've only known each other for just a week. Bee and Gugu are the closest, Rema is just rema, too shy and too perfect but she is a nice girl in all. Today it's a Saturday and we were planning to watch series after series just to drink the day away.

I took a much needed long bath after doing my laundry and cleaning, it's breathtakingly refreshing as it was needed. I hear my bedroom door opening and I know it's one and only Bee. She is a special case that one. I've come to realise why she is called 'Bipolar' in a space of a week. She is the laziest and untidiest girls I've ever met. I used to think Lindi takes the cup with her laziness but nah, my friend is very clean as compared to this white girl. She loves people's rooms because hers is just..... I swear even pigs wouldn't want to sleep in that room. Her excuse is that all her entire life she is always had 'Esther' who did everything for her.

I find her displaying her white legs on my bed with those shorts that looks like were cut further up by a blind man. I don't think anyone in their right mind

would wear something so short. Her but cheeks are just out there, although she looks sexy.

“Get out I need to dress up” I have a towel wrapped around my body. I’m not comfortable with her sexy self staring at my thick thighs.

“Your boyfriend is here” she informs relaxing her whole body on my bed. And by boyfriend she means Krazy. I have told her numerous times that he is just a gay friend but somehow everyone in this house don’t believe the gay part

“He is gay and he’s just a friend, why didn’t you just say so when you got in here”

“I needed a moment with your clean made bed first. Hurry up before you find me grinding your suppose gay friend” she says walking out of the room. Sigh! What a crazy white girl.

I find both her and Gugu squashing poor Krazy between them in one couch. We have one two seater couch and single seater which Rema is weighing down alone. The two wh*res are all over Krazy. Their hands touch anywhere they like, I can see he is uncomfortable but he is gay moos so he can relax.

“Krazy” I acknowledge squashing Rema on the couch

“Tha.....Hey.....hmmm” Bee’s hand is traveling way up town close to his crotch. His breathe hitches “I need water” he abruptly storm to the kitchen. The two wh*res both burst into fits of laughter

“I told you he is not gay, you saw his bulge” Bee whispers looking at me. I don’t know but that reaction was a reaction of a man feeling things. I’m starting to believe them, but the question remains, why would he lie though?

Seconds later he comes back, this time he resorts to standing. I can’t help but check the bulge out. I see it’s there although he is trying to hide it with his hands in the pockets of his pants.

“We were about to watch series, sit down” he shakes his head still standing as if he is in fear

“I actually came to invite you to a club, I thought we could just have some fun” say what?

“Oh my god that could be so much fun, I haven’t had some fun in a while” Bee chirps in

“I was actually inviting tha.....” bee cut him standing as she slowly walk to him. He keeps covering to the wall “You know what, we can all go” she smiles retreating back to the couch. Her and gugu both look at Rema and I with questioning eyes

“I can’t, I have never been to a club before” I tell my honest truth but everyone looks at me in disbelief. I know I may appear wild but I swear I’m just a big mouth. I don’t know where club doors are located. The one time I tried going out with Lindi back in the days, Vuyani panel beat us to a pulp. We both swore never to go out and we never did, we just drank when we had our own kind of fun which entails chillers, get together and parties but never clubbing

“You lie” Rema remarks next to me. I wonder what her perfect self knows about clubs

“Never ever” Gugu asks shock evident. I nod.

“Then it’s settled, we are all going clubbing. Kuku please prepare Ree and I’ll clean thando up. We don’t need this two to embarrass us. In the main time request an uber handsome” Bee is already dragging me back to my room while Gugu also takes Rema from the couch. I guess we are going clubbing.

Gosh! If Vuyani was to see me now, he would be horrified. I think I look hot and the way I was turning heads when we got here, I give Bee a ten out of ten for dressing me and dolling me up. Although the shoes are way too high for me, I’m not complaining because where we are seated there is not dancing. We watching people sweat down the floor while we, the people who rolls up with Krazy who happens to know important people are placed on the upper floor. We have been sloshing alcohol since we got here in the afternoon, now it’s starting to pack up meaning it’s club time, night. Krazy comes with another round of shots, this is the fifth one, or sixth I’m not sure. Already I can tell that I’m drunk because I’m starting to see double of everything. Combination of vodka shots and savannah is not good doesn’t play.

“Wait.....wait I toast this round first, to....to my uncle, I hate you uncle” Bee is kak drunk, she is lying flat on the couch, I wish I was sober enough to question

more about this uncle of hers. As for Gugu I don't know where she disappeared. She did confess though that she is a dancer, so I guess she must be somewhere on the dance floor. With all the shots we are taking, everyone downs it with a dedication.

"To...to my ugly ex, may he have a miserable life.....with that wife of his" Rema toasts already down the damn thing. We all know about her ex that got married without telling her, it's her biggest misery, she is been toasting to that the entire night with different words. We are all drunk as hell.

"No no no no.....this one is special to me.....to....to....Tee, the most beautiful, gorgeous, sexy girl I know" that's crazy, I just smile at his toast. This mother f*cker ain't gay. I'm going to confront him when we are sober. It's my turn.

"To mwa, the girl who dated her brother" gasps, Bee raises her drunk head from the couch "Yeah, I slept with my brother and now I lost him, I lost him and I can't fight..... you know why?" No one responds but they are all looking at me with drunk eyes "Because he is my brother before my lover, I told Buhle. I told her but she still pushed me to date him, I didn't want to because I was scared that if things don't work out between us, I was going to lose him in all aspects. He and Vuyani are all I have but now....." My sentiments are accompanied by drunk tears "Now I lost him, he f*cken dumped me for my cousin, bloody toothpick with....."

"You're a wh*re, you and your family, all of you are wh*res. You sleep with your brother and your cousin takes him from you, bloody wh*ring family" Bee affronts from the couch, I try to stand to jump her but something trips me, I end up on top of the table with my stomach.

"I'm....i'm going to.... To pee on your head, someone accompany me to the toilet" Krazy is our security for the night, although now he is slightly tad drunk as us. He holds my waist and walk me out as I kick insult at Bee "This b*tch say I'm sleeping with my brother, I'd never sleep with Vuyani mina. She is a b*tch" he agrees with everything I say as we walk to the loo. The line is so damn long, I don't know if I can hold it that long. I keep squeezing my legs tight together to hold it.

"Maybe we should go outside" Krazy suggests next to me, I shake my head No "Let's go to the gents, I'll make a plan for you" that's better. He intertwines his

arms with mine and walk me to the gents. When we turn the corner, Krazy pins me to the wall. His face is all up in my face, it's like he is smelling me "Teeeee" his face is on my neck

"Nooooo" I don't know if it's my drunk state but no, what I'm seeing in his eyes is a big no for me

"I love you" I can't help but laugh, for some reason it's so funny

"You do?" I'm crying tears of laughter the way I'm so tickled

"With everything in me"

"Gosh I don't love you, I..." his lips try to meet mine, I try to fight him but I'm too weak "Noooo" it comes in a whisper because I'm laughing and trying to reprimand him at the same time. Behind Krazy I feel him before I raise my eyes to him, alcohol escapes my mind instantly. He looks livid. I don't know how or when but poor Krazy is thrown to the wall behind him, I see him painfully groan to the floor.

"Uhamba ama'club manje thando?" (You go around clubbing now...) his demeanour reeks danger, he is flipping mad

"F*ck you Dalas" the words escape my lips, before I know it, I'm flying across his shoulder like a sack of potatoes "I f*cking hate your ass, and I'm going to pee on you" he spansks by behind hard, the sting sensation aggravate my need to pee "DALAS I NEED TO PEE" now I'm crying, we are now outside. He puts me down and I immediately down my underwear, right now I don't care who sees. I can't help but moan as I relief myself. It takes a while before I finish. I feel him still staring down at as hook my underwear back up, I have nothing to wipe with but who cares, I'm drunk as hell, I can't look him in the eyes. I try to turn back to the club but his strong hand grab my arm.

"Where do you think you're going? I'm taking....." Hwaaaa! Bottle of beer shatters on my man's head, when we both turn. It's bee behind us.

"Where do you think your taking my friend Mr?" she has another bottle, ready to strike again but gorilla Dalas hasn't crumbled to the floor. He is just standing glaring at Bee in what I think is astonishment with my arm still tightly grabbed by his hand. Bee hits like a white girl, if it was me, nigger would be on his way to hell right now.

“Who is this?” he asks me calm

“My friend, I came with her” Bee’s bottle fall to the floor, he grabs her with his other hand

“You’re both going home” Bee is crying, she is screaming her white voice out. He doesn’t listen, he shoves both of us at the back of his car and drives.

The drive feels like a fast and furious scene, it’s no driving, it’s flying. I don’t know if bee is asleep but she so damn quite for someone who was screaming moments ago. I think drunk sleep must have engulfed me because I wake up only now when I feel cold chills all over my skin. I open my eyes to inspect and I see myself still in the car with the door wide open. Footsteps. Dalas, he carries me like a baby out of the car, only now I realise we are at the commune. He carries me straight to my room. Alcohol is slowly escaping my system.

“How...how....” Eish this voice, I clear my throat “How did you know where I live?” he puts me on the bed and take off my heels. He doesn’t respond, I can see he is still flipping mad. He unzips my dress and it falls to my waist, I have no bra on because Bee said the dress doesn’t need a bra. For a minutes he becomes distracted, he stares at my boobs for while. I’m sleepy drunk now, I just want to close my eyes so reprimanding him is not in my mind. He comes to his senses and pull me to his chest allowing my dress to hit the floor. He feels warm, the feel of his hard bulging pipe poking on my stomach makes me giggle.

“Your horny” he side smiles shaking his head. He carries me, I thought to the bed but to my surprise to the bathroom. He dips me in a bathtub full of warm water “I don’t want to bath Dalas”

“I’m going to f*ck this bitchy tendencies you seem to have developed in only a week” I squirm and turn to look at him, he is serious. This nigger is serious, hell he ain’t touching me. Not now, not ever, he dumped me.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 49

BACK TO SENDER, TWO TIMES AGGRESSIVE

MUSA

It's one thing not holding my woman to sleep every night but seeing her in the hands of some imbecile boy aroused my ire. I saw them from the moment they entered the club. The VIP section is above both floors. She and her friends were chilling on the second floor above the ground floor. I don't know why thando was clubbing in the first place. Last I checked she never cared much about clubbing. I swear her rebellious behaviour is going to ruin my plan, and I'm so close I wish she could just be patient with me.

She looks so innocent sleeping, I wanted to bury Nkosi in her so bad but she denied me plain straight on my face. Her refusal line was "Go f*ck that meatless girlfriend of yours and leave me the hell alone" if only she knew how much she owes my d*ck, she owes it multiple orgasms for holding it in for her. I must say I give my d*ck a total shine, my d*ck's got class. Purely exquisite. It doesn't entertain ratchet witches, even when she tries to seduce me by parading her skinny bone all over my face aooo! NKOSI JUST SIMPLY STARE. I'm going to f*ck thando the entire week when all this shit over.

Part of me still doesn't believe that Dimpho fed me love portion. That little wh*re! Sometime I refrain myself from strangling the life out of her witching body in the middle of the night. This is beyond obsession, I think it's safe to say she is damn possessed. How can one woman with everything be so evil? I swear her evil spirit doesn't rest. Somehow I wish I had went home with her today just to see her reaction when her plan fails once again. What I have planned for her is so vile but at least I will not have her blood on my hand, Gama advised that I keep my hands clean especially when I'm dealing with witches like her.

I must say I owe thabo my life, if it wasn't for him I would still be stupid in love with Dimpho. Her portion worked well but just for two days. I saw her trying to seduce Thabo in the kitchen one morning and for some reason I was not mad at

what I saw, instead I went back to the bedroom and pretended like I didn't see anything. I questioned myself why I was not mad I saw the woman I 'supposedly' love trying to seduce my friend, I couldn't come up with an answer. Thabo saw that I saw them but Dimpho didn't see anything. As shy and reserved as Thabo is, he wore his big pants and approached me at work. He asked if I believe in witchcraft, I laughed him off thinking he was trying to be stupid but he was saving me from the witch's claws.

He asked me why I wasn't mad that Dimpho was naked in front of him, I couldn't give him an answer, in fact I was happy that she was with someone. Every moment with her in those two days felt like hell on earth, I felt like I couldn't breathe. Like I had no purpose in life. Thabo asked if it was Thando in front of him naked what would I have done, from the thought of it I had him pinned on my office wall. He raised his hands surrender and told me he's just trying to make me see a point. If I suddenly love Dimpho as much as I claimed I did, why don't I care if other man touch her? Instead I care about my ex I supposedly don't love anymore. That made me question my sanity, I realised that I don't love Dimpho. There was just this voice in my head that told me I love her and every time she looked in my eyes, I would feel drawn to her.

Thabo asked we go see a traditional healer, just to be sure. I had nothing to lose so I went with him. One of my drivers directed us to his healer, the moment we entered that old man's house I could see him cringe from a distant. He looked at me once and told me I reek of love portion. He shook his head and gave me a bucket and one sip of mixture that made me puke the whole portion in the bucket. The old man asked to strengthen me. He said something about me being in a powerful position that attracts all kinds of danger. I gave him the go ahead and I'm proud to say it worked, the moment we left his house everything was so clear. I couldn't believe that I kicked the love of my life out. I wanted to kill Dimpho on the spot but Gama calmed me down. He had called to update me on baba and checking on me, he advised I use Dimpho's witchcraft against her. So I set up a plan with Mme Mpho whom the healer revealed that she was an accomplice in feeding me portion, she is now on my pay roll. I couldn't believe the things she told me, she was placed in my house by Mohapi and her daughter on purpose. I decided there and then that I'm keeping Thando out of this evil, it's best they think and believe we broke up so they leave her the hell alone.

But tonight I tried to keep my cool but I couldn't, that short thing she calls a dress had my d*ck dancing for her from afar. I was so jealous of that boy close to her, I felt like his eyes were on her thighs and her almost cleavage. She should not hear me calling her cleavage almost. I need to keep that boy in check, thando is mine and mine alone. I had Dimpho next to me but I couldn't look at her, my focus was on thando. Horny ass*les were ogling her, I had to make an excuse to dimpho and follow her and that boy to the loo because I didn't trust that f*cker, and I was right.....

She shakes in my hold trying to change sides but I'm holding her too tight, I loosen my grip but it's too late, she is waking up. I intently watch her as she fights the disorientation off her sleepy mind, she looks perfect even in sleep. She tilts her head to the back and frown at my face. She reaches for the side lamp and switches it on.

"The f*ck!" she is on her feet, looking at me like evil "What the fu....." She doesn't finish, she rushes to the bathroom and I'm right on her tail holding her braids as she throws up. These are the consequences of downing vodka shots like glasses of water "I'm never drinking again" she says standing from the toilet. She goes to the basin to clean up while I flush.

"This is what happens when you drink alcohol like it's the end of the world" she rolls her eyes and bump me going back to the bedroom. I missed her and her attitude.

"What the f*ck are you doing here Dalas?" she asks exhaustedly sitting at the edge of the bed

"Language thando" I reprimand. She heaves a sigh and look up the ceiling drawing strength before she looks back at me

"Bhuti Musa what are you doing here" I can't help but laugh, she is never called me Bhuti even when I was still a brother to her. She is definitely pissed.

"I'm spending the night with the love of my life" she throws me an evil look before she climbs the bed going back to her pillow. My d*ck wakes up at the sight of her ass covered in that tiny silk night dress of hers, I put her in it after bathing her because it's my favourite. I missed seeing her in that tiny thing that I always fight the urge to rip it off her. And the fact that I know there is nothing

beneath that tiny thing is doing things to me. Gosh I miss being deeply buried in her cookie jar!

“Boy you’re crazy, you forgot you dumped me for your toothpick” now the attitude is back, she says laying back in bed. I climb back the bed and follow her, she stares up from the pillow once again, completely bewildered “Dalas why are you here, get off my bed?”

“No one’s going to erase what I have for you, even witchcraft. I have it bad for you sthandwa sami” I push her back to the pillow lying on top of her “for some reason you going to have to believe that I love you and I will always do, I’m doing all this for us thandolwami” she is worn in confusion, she tries to find clarity in my eyes but she ends up shaking her head

“Dalas what’s going on?” her voice comes in a whisper, I’m winning her

“I miss you” she breathes, astonished “Have you been taking your meds properly?” she nods “thank you sthandwa sami, I love you so so much” I intertwine her forehead with mine and just stare at her

“But.....” I interject her

“But nothing, just give me this night thandolwami, please mami. I’m begging you” my hands find the hem of her nightie as she debates with her conscious “Please mami, I want you, I want to feel your warm tight p*ssy clench around my cock” I whisper in her ear. Her nightie is flying off her, I always make sure to remove it first because I don’t want to risk ripping it. It’s my favourite.

“Daddy you.....you dumped me” she moans lightly but tries hard to suppress it

“I didn’t, I was.....just let me have you please baby girl” my hands finds her skin, so warm, so tender just the way I remember her. She smells so delicious, her scent always warms me in every way. The feel of her soft skin in my hands runs chills down my cock “Please mama, give me what’s mine” I find her lips, when she allows me to peck them first I know it’s a goal. I take full possession of her lips, gently worshiping her body as I caress her anywhere I like. She moans in my mouth, her hands find my boxer. She stops at the waistband of my boxer. She sobs in my mouth and I immediately open my eyes to find her silently crying beneath me.

“THANDO!” I swallow my horny desires and wipe her tears “Look at me mami, what’s wrong?” she sniffs opening her eyes

“You know how much I love you Dalas, you’re going to f*ck me and then leave me and go back to your” I interject cupping her face and shushing her

“Shhhhh” I wipe tears flowing down the sides of her eyes “I’m so sorry thandolwami” I climb off her and lay her in a spooning position facing me “Let’s just talk ke sthandwa sami, is that okay?” she nods sniffing, as horny as I am I have to understand how she sees this whole thing “You know I love you right?” she nods “I need you to say it thandolwami”

“I love you too Dalas”

“Thank you my love, what I’m about to tell you, you have to promise to keep your cool. Don’t go around throwing tantrums or challenging Dimpho my baby, she has to believe that we are over” she nods multiple times “I dumped you because Dimpho fed me love portion” her brows furrow in confusion

“Come again” I know she heard me, I just look at her “She bewitched you?” I nod “OH HELL NO!” she flies off my grip “THIS BITCH DOESN’T KNOW ME, IT’S ABOUT TIME I LET THIS BITCH TASTE MY STRAATMATE BITCH SLAPS” she is screaming, she throws some pants and sweater on the bed from the wardrobe, she is looking for shoes now. Lord help me! This is why I didn’t want to tell her until I’ve dealt with Dimpho my own way.

“Thando?!” she doesn’t look at me “Thandolwami stop what you’re doing and come back here” I command patting her prior position next to me. She heaves a sigh before she throws the pants back on the bed. The change in her breathing ensures me how worked up she is, I take her small soft hand in mine and plant a peck on top of them “Do you trust me?” she shakes her head no “WHAT?” I’m shocked she doesn’t trust me

“Dalas they fed you love portion, how can I trust a man fed love portion. Lord knows even your mind is not working right now, so no thank you, I’m not about to trust people’s tokoloshes mina” that’s insult at its highest order

“Point of correction, fed, she did in the past. Now I no longer have that shit in my system hence why I’m here” she raises her eyebrow “I went to a healer and he took all that shit out of me” I clarify

“Are you sure?” Jesus this girl “Nah don’t look at me like that, you might not be you you, you’re probably dimpho’s tokolosh now”

“I’ll f*ck this sweet lips if you keep insulting me” I threaten. She slightly laughs.

“But why, how, when.....I....Dalas this is so confusing” I can see she is overwhelmed

Sigh! “Remember the Saturday you went home when mme Mpho offered to cook for me?” she nods “Mme Mpho put that shit in my food as per Dimpho’s orders. She has something against her and she blackmails her every chance she gets. Apparently it wasn’t a coincidence that some cleaning agency mistakenly placed her in our house, it was intentional by Dimpho and Mohapi so she could spy on us” her jaw drops

“Oh my God baby, I hope you fired her” I deny with my head

“She is on my payroll right now and I’m using her against them”

“Baby do you trust her? I mean she could still double cross you” I gently rub on her shoulders to ease her

“She won’t, trust me” she sighs doubtfully.

“What does Dimpho have against her?”

“Apparently she was friends with dimpho’s mother, her and dimpho’s mother conspired in chasing thabo’s mother from Mohapi. They were employees in mohapi residence back then and sometimes mohapi would steal dimpho’s mom, she was just a mistress until she couldn’t take being the mistress any more. Her and Mme Mpho saw things they weren’t supposed to see as employees. Mohapi had a dark room in his house that his wife didn’t know about. He used that room to torture and kill anyone who dares cross him. Mme Mpho and dimpho’s mother led Thabo’s mother to mohapi’s dark room while he was still busy with his killings . They knew she was a sweet woman of God who wouldn’t stand for any evil and indeed she packed and left and never looked back. That’s when Dimpho’s mother became the madam after mohapi’s futile search for his wife, apparently he gave up searching after two years”

“So Dimpho uses that to blackmail Mme Mpho?” I nod “Jesus this witch, what are you going to do with her?”

“At first, a thought crossed my mind. I wanted to f*ck her just to infect her on purpose and tell her face on just to teach her a lesson” she gasps “then I remembered how Lawrence broke you by doing that to you, and I knew you would hate me if I did that to someone else, even if it’s dimpho”

“I can’t believe you even thought of doing something so cruel, I hope you didn’t go ahead with that evil thought of yours but pass me here, you’re now positive too?” eish! Where is this conversation going? “DALAS?!” well I might as well come clean. I nod. She heaves an exasperated sigh and look up “How could you Dalas, is that why you didn’t want us to use protection?”

“Thando I love you, I thought long and hard about that choice and I still made it. It was my choice and I made it. Best you accept it and we accompany each other to the clinic. Don’t throw a tantrum about it because it’s pointless now” she is annoyed

“Your so damn stupid, you don’t get it do you?”

“Can we not trail off the real topic here, we’ll visit my status topic after we deal with Dimpho” she heaves a sigh

“I just can’t believe you can do something so stupid Dalas, I thought you were taking preps” I guess we are having this conversation also

“What made you think that? When have I mentioned preps” she shrug “I’m positive thando, accept me please that’s all I ask”

“It’s not even about that Dalas, I just don’t understand how can you make such a selfish decision, now I feel horrible that I infected you.....”

“Thando it’s not for you to understand, this is my body and my choice” she closes her eyes for a moment. I guess she is taking in the news. She eventually opens them, she is still annoyed but she lets it go for now

“So, you and dimpho?” Thank God we are back

“So she and I have never sexed” I know that look, she thinks I’m lying “Nkosi doesn’t react to her touch”

“You’re lying Dalas, you had your tongue down her throat the other day on the couch”

“And that’s where it ends, we just kiss nothing more, her kisses don’t do anything to me”

“You see why I don’t trust you? The tokoloshi she has on you is on nyaope. You can’t have that sexy girl in your bed and not dip her, I know you dalas, Nkosi is ever ready” sigh

“Yazi I swear I have never touched that girl like that” she waves me off

“Whatever, what does you two not f*cking have anything to do with your solution to this mess?” now she is asking the right question

“She approached Mme Mpho once again, asked her to help her find some portion to wake Nkosi up. So Mme Mpho came to me with the news, we set a trap for her and she took it. If all goes well, tomorrow she will dump me and hate everything that has to do with me, and I think it’s already working because she hasn’t called to ask where I’m at. I left her at the club and she didn’t even scream”

“I don’t understand Dalas, what did you do?”

“Let’s say I found a Nigerian witch doctor who gave her two leaves, the first one she was ordered to put in her mouth calling my name. She thinks it’s to draw her to me but little does she know the leaf makes her harbour resentment for every time she calls my name. She is going to be disgusted at the mention of my name. The second leaves were going to be sprinkled in our bedroom, she thought it’s to make my d*ck rise for her but nah. The moment she sleeps in that bed, she is going to turn into a real prostitute this time. The type that sells by the corner, her bean is going to dance at the sight of everyman except me” she covers her face in shock

“Jesus Dalas, what have you done?”

“I gave her a taste of her own medicine, she is about to be madam of prostitutes in Joburg” she stares oddly at me, for a while. Like she is having some introspection.

“That’s so so cruel Dalas but I don’t blame you and it’s better than your prior notion” Thank God, I thought she was going to give me a hard time “So vele vele toothpick didn’t touch my staff” there is dangerous glitter in her eyes, I know

she is being silly right now. She rolls us over and lay on top of me, her favourite position.

“Not even once, Nkosi just died” her soft hand travel between our heated bodies. She sneaks her hand in my boxer. God she feels so warm, so soft.

“But Nkosi is alive now, ready for action” she deliciously holds my hard

“Maybe you should give him that action” she giggles slowing hooking my underwear down, I help her kick it off as she takes my vest off

“Let’s if Nkosi can still play” she whispers in my ear biting it while at it. She knows how much that drives me crazy..... I guess Nkosi is finally getting laid.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 50

I'M SEXY AND I KNOW IT

LINDIWE

There, behind beautiful darkness lies our promising future. Behind the blindfold I can picture something, something romantic, something sacred, something meant for us. I already know his aim for the day. He wants to mark me, to be officially Mrs. Ndlovu. I feel like this day is running too fast, I don't want this day to dissipate. I want to enjoy and remember each and every detail. He kidnapped me home yesterday night, I'm sure Buhle is tired of making excuses for us. But not for long, I'll be officially Lindiwe Ndlovu soon and I cannot wait.

My blissful engagement day started with scrumptious breakfast in bed, then I was pampered in lavender scented bath. Just when I thought he couldn't do more, he dressed me in a simple floral dress I don't know. It fit me like a glove. He left me for some minutes to clean up too and I took that moment to beatify myself more for him. When he was done he looked jaw dropping, ready to husband me behind. He asked to blindfold me the entire journey here and I didn't even hesitate, his warm palm was holding my hand as he drove and with every squeeze he gave my hand I grew more eager. I could feel my skin shiver in anticipation.

I feel his warm body behind me as he walk me to the unknown. He is gently holding me from behind. I trust him to be my eyes because I'm blindfolded "Let me take off your shoes" his voice comes in my ear, I'm wearing wedges because I can no longer do heels and the dress he bought me matched with wedges. He slips me off my shoes and I feel a caress of grass beneath by feet. Even the breeze now that I pay attention is different, there is this sharp wind caressing us, it feels like we are in an empty space, like there is..... "I love you" he whispers in my ear undoing the blindfold. I only glance once and I can tell where we are.

We are in a stadium. New Denmark mine stadium. From where we are standing begins a train of white rose petals to the table. The table is nicely decorated in the middle of the stadium. It looks simple yet elegant, just a round table dressed in a white cloth and two chairs facing each other. Slowly he pace me to the table, with every step I feel my heart pounding louder, he keeps planting wet kisses on my neck from behind and brushing my bump. I know its madness because I know his intend but I still feel surprised.

“This is.....baby” I’m lost for words, I feel his content smile on my skin. His buried his face in my shoulder, he keeps kissing me right there where I love the most “its beautiful baby” words finally leave me

“I’m glad you love it, have a sit my lady” he pulls a chair for me. On the table sits only one gold plate covered. He puts both his hands on the table and signals for me to place my palms in his, he squeezes my hands first “Before we start, babe I need to ask few questions first” with a swallow I nod “Lindiwe do you truly love me?” this one is a given, I don’t need to think. It’s who I am.

“Vuyi you’re my reason for breathing, I love you with all your flaws and I’m ready to carry them with you” he smiles

“Thank you MaNdlovu wami, I love so much too” I nod “But baby I once asked you to step in my mother’s house and promise to never leave me but you still left me, how do I know that now you in it for the long haul? How do I know that you won’t leave me again when.....” I shush him, I know I broke his heart when I left him

“Baby if there is one moment I wish I can take back is leaving you and going back to Theo, that was the biggest mistake of my life and I will regret it until you forgive me. Now I don’t care if Sindi pops your child” he laughs “I don’t care if a truck hits you and put you on a wheelchair tomorrow, all I know is that I will be here through all the storms, we’ll weather all storms together my love. I want to wake up at dawn to dusk carrying your name vuyani, I hope that assures you that I’m in this for eternity” his crying baby mode just activated, there is suspicious glitter in his eyes that I can tell with a blink, rivers will flow down his cheeks. He brings my hands to his face and wipe suspicious tears.

“I love you baby” it comes in a whisper. He sharply in hales to cluster his emotions “In this plate lies my pure heart, I want you to know that once you

open this plate you take me as I am. You agree to be mine and mine only” I try to pull my hand out of his hold to uncover the plate but he holds me tight “I need to tell you something first before you open” my heart seizes for a minute “relax it’s nothing bad, it’s more like something I need to ask you” with a heavy heart I give him the go head “I want five children upwards” huh!

“What?!”

“And amongst them there should be at least two boys, so if there are no boys it means we’ll keep trying” this man is got to be kidding me!

“Vuyi I only want two babies”

“Compromise sthandwa sami, you promised to take me with my flaws. I’m the only male child in my mother’s house left. It’s my duty to make sure her surname lives on. Thando is a female child, eventually she will be married. I need you to understand my responsibility, I have to grow my home and if you agree to be mine then you’re agreeing to bear my soccer team”

“But five though baby, can’t we at least tone it down to three?” he laughs

“Please MaLindi wami, five upwards” sigh! Things we do for love

“I guess we’ll see” he smiles

“Take my heart sthandwa sami” he lets go of my hands and I slowly uncover the plate. On top of the plate lies a key and my beautiful engagement ring that I already know. He picks the key first and puts it in my hand “With this key I say my home is your home, with this key all I own is now yours, there is no ‘I’ in this union. From now on everything is ‘ours’. And lastly with this ring, I say let’s build our home my love, let me love you the best way I know how for the rest of our lives” now it’s time for me to cry. He slips the ring on my finger “Do you agree to help me build my home Mrs. Ndlovu?” I nod with tears rushing down my cheeks. He rounds the table and embrace me in a tight hug “Thank you sthandwa sami, you have made me the happiest man on the planet” I’m a mess in his hold but I don’t care, I love this man.

“Gosh you’re making me hungry with all this sweet words” I feel him cringe holding me

“You’re hungry?” he asks still holding me to his chest

“I’m ravenous my love, where is the food?” I fight off his embrace, the look on his face is rather shocked

“But you ate before we came here” he better be kidding me

“Vuyani you planned a romantic lunch with no food?”

“Babe I didn’t think you would be hungry, I thought we could only talk here and then eat at home, I cooked your favourite there” what a turn of events, now I’m pissed.

“Take me home, I’m hungry” he is on my tail as I hurriedly march to his car. I can’t believe he planned lunch with no food. He knows I eat every time I feel like.

The drive back home is filled with silence, he tried sparking conversation but I couldn’t reply. I felt like I was depleting the last drop of energy I have by talking to him so I decided to keep my energy until I eat. The good thing is that he is flying just the way I need him to, although he keeps stealing glances at me and smiling to himself. I wish he can share the joke, but I’ll hear it later. Right now I just something to chew in my mouth. My baby must think I hate her, I only ate three times today and it’s after 2 in the afternoon. I’m a very bad mother.

Thank God we are here, I could already hear my daughter’s cry for food in my.....wait! What the hell is he doing here? Theo’s car is parked outside the gate. I can feel Vuyi’s grip tightening around my hand, he is suppressing his anger but he is going to break my hand the way he is holding so tight.

“What’s he doing here?” I just shrug because I’m as clueless as him “Stay in the car” say what? Never, this I’m sure it’s about me so I need to hear it as well. He pierce me with his displeased look when I also climb out of the car, I ignore him and follow him to Theo who is standing out of his car. Vuyani takes my hand and holds it tight “Theo?” he acknowledges my ex, almost husband. This is so awkward.

“Vuyani” the both nod “Wifey” I roll my eyes, he laughs but no one joins him. In our happy days he used to call me wifey

“I’m sure you didn’t come here to disrespect me Theohelo” Vuyani. Can he chill a bit, we wronged the poor guy, we owe him an apology.

“No...not at all, harde vuyi” (Sorry) he sighs “I’m here because as much as Lindiwe and I are not together anymore, the child she is carrying is mine and.....” Vuyani cut’s him with a chuckle and look at me. Eish I forgot to tell him, I didn’t think he would come back.

“I’m sorry Theo, the child is not yours. She is Vuyanis”

“Don’t lie to me Lindiwe, I know you hate me but don’t dare keep me away from my child” Vuyani sighs annoyed

“Listen Theohelo, I know we did you wrong. I’m sorry for what we did to you but she is telling the truth, the child is mine. Not yours” Theo chuckles in disbelief

“And how do you know that?” he questions Vuyani with a raised eyebrow “Did you have a paternity test?” he mustn’t dare put doubt in Vuyani’s head “For all I know she was screwing the both of us, so the child could be mine as much as it could be yours” why do ex’s always crawl out of their hell holes when things starting working out for us? It’s like they can sense that we are happy and they just want to ruin all that.

“Theohelo Medupe, get this through your big head. You’re not the father of my child, Vuyani is the father” I had to be slow to get that out, this nigger is making me lose my mind.

“And how do you know that? Akere wena o pere you sleep around.....” (Isn’t it you’re a wh*re.....) he doesn’t complete his sentence, Vuyani shoves him to the car griping his neck with one hand while the other one gives him one hard slap

“Take that back”

“Vuyi let him go” I brush his arm and he frees him. Theo touches his knees gasping for air. He eventually opens his car and gets in. He rolls down the window before he leave and say

“You two are going to regret this, I’m going to have my child whether you like it or not” with that said he speeds off. I wish he can drive into a tree and die instantly.

“Uright my baby?” he brings me back, I was staring at Theo’s car hoping for my wish to come true.

“Yes my baby, let’s get in I’m starving” he laughs

“Go ahead, I have to park the car first” I nod already heading for the gate. So much drama on my engagement day.

THANDO

Sunday mornings are blissful, especially when I’m immersed in his scent. I can smell him with my eyes closed, I smile to myself thinking of the things he did to me the entire night. My housemates will forgive me if they are already here, as far as I know only Bee is in the house. My sweet cake is tender, he devoured it till the wee hours of the morning. I can feel that he was in there for the longest time but I’m not complaining, matter of fact I get goose bumps just thinking of our indecent night.

I finally open my eyes and succumb to wakefulness, I didn’t want to open them, thinking if this is a dream, then I don’t want to wake up. He is nowhere in sight but I can feel him, I know he is here. His smell roams my room, the right side of my bed is wrinkled. He is here, this cannot be a dream. I scan my room until my eyes land on my bathroom door, I smile to myself, he must be in the bathroom.

“Babe.....Dalas” no answer “Babe?!” this time I’m loud enough, I’m starting to panic. Did he come here to f*ck me and go back to his girlfriend? a sting of pain hits me, I cannot believe him. Tears feel up my eyes. One blink they drop down my cheeks. Gosh! Why am I crying? I’m not a cry baby. This is all my doing, I shouldn’t have let him have his way with me and go back to his sexy girlfriend. I hate him, I hate him so much. Why did I let him do this to me?..... I’m a crying mess by now, hugging myself on top of the bed. I cannot believe I was so stupid to..... My bedroom door opens, he comes in carrying a tray. I feel relieved in all senses. The smile on his face is immediately replaced with a frown, I think I ruined his surprise. He puts the tray on my study table and come to squat next to me

“Thandolwami” his voice comes lowly gentle, he cups my face wiping stupid tears that keeps flowing even now. I’m not sure why am crying now because he is here “Talk to me sthandwa sami what’s wrong?” I sniff, now its sounds so stupid I don’t want to say it “Mami?”

"I thought.....I thought you left" he takes his lower lip in his mouth, I think he is suppressing a laughter

"It's nice to know you still love me" I roll my eyes as he laughs "You thought I came to snack on you and then leave?" he can be so stupid, I didn't say it like that. He pecks my cheek and disappear to the bathroom, he comes back with a wet cloth "Sit up straight" I do as told because I think he is going to wipe my hands for whatever is on the tray. Instead the cloth goes to my nose, I try to fight him but his too strong. He wipes my nose and to my surprise there is blood "Look up your bleeding" Jesus! Why am I bleeding? Nose bleed, this is the first "I hope last night was the last time I see you drowning yourself in alcohol like that" Dalas the brother just activated, he goes back to the bathroom and come back with the cloth again after rinsing it "I don't mind you drinking and having fun but drinking like a fish....." I block him out, I know he is just starting. When his brotherly mode activate he goes way way in "ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME" gosh he is now shouting

"I'm sorry baby, I'll never drink again" he manly rolls his eyes because he knows that's a lie

"Sit up straight, it has stopped" I oblige "Sniff" he orders placing the cloth on my nose, I feel like a five year old. Even if I protest I know that look, I do as told and he wipes me one last time and disappear to the bathroom. This time he takes a while, I guess he is washing the cloth. He comes back with another clean one and hand it to me "Wipe your hands, I made you breakfast" him? Breakfast? I saw the tray but I just thought he bought it.

"You should dump me more often, if you come back with breakfasts in bed" he is melting, he laughs sitting next to me and placing the tray on my lap. Wow it smells nice, simple toast, eggs, tomato, bacon and sausage.....wait bacon, I have no bacon, what did he do? "Where did you get the bacon?" he frowns

"In the fridge?" Jesus

"Dalas it's not mine, you...." He cuts me

"Can you just eat, I'll replace it" sigh! I don't want my housemates thinking I use their things. I take the first taste of my food, damn it's good, way better than I expected. He is looking at me expectantly, he wants me to praise his cooking

"Wow this is delicious babe" he is happy, his smile is content

“Really?” I nod “Well in that case you need to thank Thabo, he taught me how to cook simple things because hai! We were starving” I laugh, I know what he means. Dimpho doesn’t look like the kitchen type. He stands and opens my wardrobe while I eat.

“I’ll start packing up, eat fast. I want us out of here” I put my fork down, this one is going to be a fight I know it

“Babe stop” he turns to me with a frown “I’m not moving back with you”

“Why not?” I have to come up with something concrete for him to back down, I’m honestly happy here and it’s very close to school. And on top of that I have never had any independence, I always had people around me all my life. This is the first time I actually can just do me.

“I mean not today, I’m not coming back today. I think you should go check if your plan really worked before we jump the gun” he bits on his lower lip, I know he is thinking. He does that when he is in his mind.

“Your right” sigh! “Eat up so we can go” that again, we?

“Do I have to come with” that look again, I know he won’t take no for an answer. Sigh! “Okay let me finish up and get ready”

The first horror we see as he drives in is broken windows, almost the entire house windows are shattered to the ground. I’m shocked, he is laughing. He takes my hand in his as we walk to the house but I quickly yank it out of his grip. I don’t want his madam breaking me too. The house looks like its haunted. From the door we are welcomed with smoke, I think now he is starting to panic. I wonder where is thabo in all this mess. The loud sound of Beyone run the wold blast the whole house. This feels like a movie. We both follow the smoke and it leads us to the bedroom. His bedroom. The mattress is on fire. Jesus!

We both stand rooted shocked, what in God’s name happened in here?

“We run the.....world girls girls” her drunk voice comes from the balcony, we both look at each other and follow her drunk song. She has a bottle of whisky in her hand, she is dancing naked, all the moves in the song, naked. I think naked dj’s got himself a side chick. Dalas is as shocked as I am, he didn’t realise that his plan would unfold like this. She eventually sees us when she turn still

breaking her bones, those moves are..... I wouldn't even attempt to break my bones like that, Kamo Mphela is got nothing on her. She stops singing, the bottle in her hand is send flying towards dalas but he is quick to jump it. It shatters to the floor.

"Yah ntja!" (Dog) my jaw hit the ground, she looks haunted, like something demonic resides in her. Her hair.....it's like she was electrocuted. And the fact that she is in her birthday suit makes the whole scene bizarre

"Dimpho don't you want to put something on?" I mean girl is.....this is not a sight for my eyes, I swear this is eyes abuse for me. She ignores me, she is like a hunter, her prey is Dalas. I never thought there would be a day when I say Dimpho is ugly but damn! Today she looks like the female version of VhoKK from Muvhango.

"Bloody bastard" she keeps walking towards him but dalas cowers "I f*cken hate you, I hate you mother f*cker, the sight of you makes me wants to puke all over the floor" Dalas eventually hits a dead end. He hits the wall "Nigger I'm going to burn you, I'm going to burn you like that mattress of yours. Only ash will be your remains when I'm done with you" I think only now it registers to Dalas how dangerous she is. Nigger runs, he asks his feet to carry him and he flies out of the room. Such a coward!

Now I'm left with a livid woman. She passes me and walk back to the burning room, I can't help but stare at her flat behind as I walk behind her. I swear ironing board is got figure as compared to her. She pulls a traveling bag I wasn't aware of when we got in here, she is walking to the door, I can see she is leaving.

"Aren't you going to put something on?" she turns throwing daggers at me

"I'm sexy and I know it, I want the whole world to see my sexy a*s" ironing board behind she means. Well I tried. She walks out and I sigh before going to the bathroom to fetch buckets of water to put out the flame. What a short love story they had, short and very dangerous. I feel sorry for her.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 51

THE ARREST

THANDO

What turbulent month it's been! Dalas and I have been through it all this month. He still isn't pleased with me not moving back in his house, we fight about it a lot but I always use my female touch out of the argument. One round it's all it takes for him to soften up and let me be, my poor cookie is paying the price for my stubbornness. Today it's one of those days when he wakes up mad that I wasn't next to him when he opened his eyes, I say so because he hasn't called since morning. It's after midday and I'm heading straight to his place after class. Operation soften him up is on motion.

This class is treading. I want it to be over and done with so I can go be with my man. It used to be Dimpho's class but poor thing has lost touch with reality so bad that the college had to let her go. She made papers weeks back "BUSINESS MOGUL MOHAPI'S DAUGHTER DIMPHO SPOTTED AT THE CORNER OF HIGHVELD MORTUARY" there was a picture accompanying it and it wasn't a decent picture at all. She looked like a hooker, not just any hooker, the Hilbron likes. Speculations went on, every tabloid came for her "FROM FAMOUS DESIGNER TO PROSTITUTE" I must say I feel sorry for her, it's like she lost touch with reality.

The college immediately released her off her duties. They found a new lecture who is trying her best but we all know time is not on our side. Exams are in a month's time, we should be preparing for those than being fed useless theory at this point.

"What is she even saying, it's after lunch for god sakes. She should ease down on the theory" Krazy whispers next to me. He keeps sleeping and I keep nudging him to wake him up. We still friends, although undercover friends because Dalas doesn't want to hear anything that has to do with him. He apologised about the other night and confessed, he is not gay after all. He pretended to be gay because he wanted to get close to me and I wasn't having it, he said I only warmed up to him when he said he was gay. I forgave him, I believe in giving

people second chances but I made it clear to him that he should forget about me. I'm signed, folded, stamped and delivered to the certain Nkosi man that makes me quiver every time I think of him.

"Thank god" that's me, class is over.

"You going to the commune?" he asks as we march out of the lecture hall

"Nah, it's Friday I'm spending the weekend with bae" he laughs

"Lucky bastard"

"He will break that back of yours this time if he hears you say that" he laughs and kiss my cheek

"Bye beautiful, I don't wanna run in to your hulk anytime soon" he is already flying in another direction "The girls and I are clubbing this week" what a party animal he is. He is now become all our friend at the commune.

Hmmm! That smell. I'm welcomed by clean air, air that circulate a thoroughly cleaned house. Gentle lavender scent hits my nostrils, the house is squeaky clean, like it doesn't have any occupants. He said I'll find him home because it's Friday and pay day, his employees decided to go out. Dalas is an introvert, if it was any other boss he would have joined his employees for some drinks. But not him. The bright light shimmering from all the floors renders me suspicious, he said he fired Mme Mpho although she still works for him as a snitch. Who would clean his house like this? He better not have some skank up in here, this time I'll do the dumping myself.

"Dalas?!.....Babe?!.....Helloooo!" where is this man kanti, my screams are not answered and every room I have checked there seems to be no sight of him. Since I'm in the bedroom I decide on a quick shower, it's too hot lately and I sweat a lot this days. Maybe I'm gaining more weight. The first thing is bra off, that thing I love it for cleavage and all but lord knows every time I enter the room it's the first thing that leaves me. I cannot stand how tight bras are. The bedroom is.....let's just say no one would believe me if I said this room was once on fire. He bought a new bed and painted the whole room. My quick trip to the shower leaves me as fresh as I needed, but I have another problem. No clothes. When he dumped me I packed everything I own. I guess his shirt will

do, thiza is not here, he went out with his colleagues that I know. It's going to be just us, roaming around with his shirt is not a bad idea.

I continue with my prior search after I'm covered with his shirt with nothing beneath, not even an underwear. Sigh! The wh*re in me never rest. And lately every time I think of him I drench my lady part. Maybe no underwear is a good sign, he might service me fast.

I'm going to search his study before I call him. A beautiful middle aged coloured woman catches my eyes on my way there, she is cleaning one of the guest rooms. Her eyes fall on me before I could run, god I feel so naked right now.

"Good afternoon Mrs. Nkosi" my hands keep pulling the hem of the shirt down, I didn't think he had anyone in here

"Hi...hi" I cannot recognise my voice, it comes out shocked and embarrassed

"Oh I'm sorry, I'm Suzen your new house keeper" she gives me her hand and I reluctantly shake it, I'm embarrassed by my lack of clothing "Would you like anything? Though I was told not to touch the pots" Once bitten twice shy, Mme Mpho showed him flames with cooking. Dalas and giving me wings, I'm not the madam of the house but I don't mind his claim on me

"No thank you, do you know where Mr. Nkosi is?"

"In the study" just as I thought, I nod and scurry to the study. I can hear his voice as I approach the study, he sounds like he is shouting. I poke my head first, he is on the phone. Facing the wall behind his desk "Vuyani I love your sister you know it..... I keep telling you I was bewitched damn it!No I wouldn't and you know it.....it was a mistake that will never happen again..... Vuyani you have, Vuyani, Vuyani?"

"Shit" he curses dropping the phone. Vuyani is not forgiving him anytime soon. He told me I'm stupid when I told him I'm back with Dalas, he doesn't even want to hear the story. The fact that he dumped me and kicked me out is his song every time I mention Dalas. I don't know how I'm going to fix that one, this is the problem when you involve family in your relationship. They keep hating your partner even when you two fix things.

He roughly turns his chair, I can see his exasperated. He glance up and notice me, unintended smile spreads across his face. I melt at his expression.

“Mrs me” he pats his lap and I make my way there. My hand freely explores his face, his beard is growing

“Your beard is growing” I inform with a perk on his nose

“I have no one to shave me, you’ve deserted me” such a big baby, he brings his lips to meet mine while his hand travels there, to my most fickle organ “You look sexy wearing me” I roll my eyes as he releases me off the kiss

“You hired someone?” he nods brushing on me, his eyes are everywhere on my body but not my face

“Your nipples have grown” he squeezes them through his white t shirt. I spank his naughty hand.

“Baby do you think it’s a good idea to hire someone especially after Mme Mpho’s betrayal” I finally gain his sight, he looks at me amused.

“You want no one around your man do you?” I roll my eyes once again “Relax mami, I hired a white woman for a purpose. I’m never working with black women ever again” I can’t help but laugh “Or maybe you can come back home so I won’t have to hire anyone” this one I don’t like because we going to end up fighting. I have to change the topic.

“Vuyani is still giving you a hard time?” he nods with a sigh

“And it frustrates the shit out of me because he doesn’t even want to listen to reason” sigh! Maybe I might have a solution to this one

“I have an idea that might get you two in good books once again” he gives me the go ahead look “Baby promise not to be mad” he just stares at me and I heave a sigh before breaking the news “Lindiwe is pregnant with Vuyani’s child” he is blankly staring at me “And they are getting married” this time he raises an eyebrow “He wants to pay lobola before she gives birth but he couldn’t get hold of Bab Nkosi, he is afraid to tell you” he heaves a sigh

“I knew those two were fooling around but I didn’t think it was that serious” so much for holding in my breath, I thought he was going to explode “I’m cool with it, and they both have my blessings. I would rather have Lindiwe with Vuyani than that Medupe boy. I trust Vuyani to take care of her. Now Siphos vision makes sense” I hug him

“Thank you for understanding my love” he leans down and kiss me. I stop him for a minute and straddle him, I wrap my one hand around his neck and the other brushes on his bearded cheek. I kiss him back. My need for him takes him by surprise, he feels the kiss where it’s going. I want him. Without wasting time he responds with the same effort. He pulls back, looks at me with hooded eyes

“Someone missed Nkosi” shyly I nod and burry my face on his shoulder. He stands with me wrapped around his waist. My behind is settled on the edge of the table. He brings his heated body to mine and gently grind against by body while he scatter papers on his desk “Nkosi misses you too mami, you have to come home” his words comes in my mouth. A low groan escapes me when the kiss intensifies and wakes all my desires. God I want him now.

“Baby now” my voice is begging, he stops kissing me and looks at me bewildered. His hand travel down my back, my thighs, he caresses them first before he continue to my drenched organ. He groans feeling on my wetness

“It’s raining in here” I moan and open wider for him to play with me. He lays me across the table, my head is almost touching the other side edge of the table. The sound of him undoing his belt and zipper grows my anticipation, knowing that his staring me down there while he does this rains me more “I’ve got you sthandwa sami” he brings closer to his member. Just as I’m mentally preparing to be filled up, Suzen’s voice comes from the door. She screams from the outside.

“Sir, Mr. Nkosi?” We both seize and glance at the poor door. Such a timing Suzen! He breathes hard and closes his eyes responding. I giggle at the frustration on his face.

“Yes Suzen” His voice is laced in desire

“There are three police officers looking for you” that flies all desire off the room, the room now reeks of fear, wonder, what are they doing here? He also looks as confused as I am.

“Thanks I’ll be there shortly Suzen” we hear her steps dissipate after she responds okay. He pulls me up and prepares himself “Stay here, I’ll be back shortly” stay here? His got to be kidding me, I find a box of tissue on his table and wipe myself and immediately follow him. I’m right on his tail but barefoot so he is not aware on me behind him.

“Gentlemen” he greets the officers in the lounge but none replies, their eyes are all piercing through me. When he follows their eyes only now he realise me behind him, he swiftly turns and grab a fleece on the couch “You’re not dressed thando” his voice comes as whisper in my ear, he is not pleased. It totally slipped my mind that I’m only in his shirt. After wrapping me with a fleece he offers the officers his attention once again. One officer stands and approach us.

“Your Musa Nkosi right?” he reluctantly nods “Your under arrest Musa, for the murder of Lawrence Pula, you have a right to remain.....” Everything blanks out, when the officer produce cuffs from his waist I hear a stinging sharp sound in my head before my body touch the floor.....

“Wait..... wait, I need to make sure my wife is okay” he sounds so close yet a bit far “Babe, thandolwami, sthandwa sami open your eyes” I feel him lightly spank on my cheek before I open my eyes. His looking down at me, terrified “Suzen please bring me a wet cloth” he scoops me off the floor and carry me to the couch, suzen is quick, she hands him the cloth and it goes to my nose. I’m bleeding again “Look up sthandwa sami” he is kneeling before me

“We don’t have time for this” one officer complains

Dalas ignores him “Uright baby” I nod looking up “What’s with you bleeding lately?” I shrug “Go see a doctor first thing tomorrow morning” I nod with a pounding heart when the officer with cuffs comes closer

“Ndoda we have to go, you’re under arrest” Dalas irritably stands and face him

“I heard you the first time and I’m not resisting the arrest, don’t dare put those cuffs on my hands. We can go” the officer backs off a little, he turns to me “Baby call my father, if you can’t reach him call Mondli or Spider” I nod coupled time with tears falling down my cheeks “Don’t cry sthandwa sami I’ll be back before you know it” he kisses both my cheeks and gives the officers the go ahead to leave, I watch them usher him out of the house and my heart breaks more. What the hell is happening? Dalas kill Lawrence? I refuse, Dalas is not a killer but even if he did, he cannot go to jail for that woman abuser. Never!

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 52

A BROTHER WILL NOT FAIL A BROTHER ONCE AGAIN

THANDO

The afternoon of his arrest still feels so present in my head every time I think about it, in fact it's the only thing embedded in my troubled mind. It's been three days, three days of utter failure. I feel so useless. I haven't gone to see him, I don't want to see him like that. That man is my hero, I don't want to see him tormented like that. I have been cooped up in our room wallowing in my own woes. I blame myself, this is all my fault. If I had followed my heart from day one we wouldn't be in this position, if I hadn't dated that fool he wouldn't have killed him for hitting me. This is me from three days ago, the moment I heard he killed my ex I wasn't shocked that he killed Lawrence, I was just shocked that he killed someone. To me Dalas is a definition of a good man, he wasn't name 'kind' by mistake. Everything about him is genuine and kind. So hearing that he took a life just.....it shocked me to the core.

The door swiftly opens in my daze of thoughts, my back is facing the door while my face is lost staring at the opened balcony as curl myself on the bed. I hear him take a huge sigh before he rounds the bed to my face. His cologne gives him away, he smells great. One day when all this is over I have to tell him how proud I am of him, he is renovating our home and extending the house. Project managing seems like a walk in the park for him.

"Neno?" I don't have the energy to reply, I just continue staring to space "Baby you have to eat, you're the only family I have left" I almost chuckle, he throws that every chance he gets to blackmail me.

"Thank you Vuyi for being here but I can't, not when I don't know what they are feeding him there" I cried more when Vuyani arrived, I didn't know who else to call when I couldn't reach all the people he asked me to call. I felt defeated. I needed comfort and my brother was all I could think about at that moment. I called him the same day and he dropped everything and came same day.

Someday when this is all over I'm going to laugh at him, he wanted nothing to do with Dalas but the minute I told him he is jailed he came flying, for me and him. He and the rest of his family are the ones who have been to see him, I haven't stomached much liver to do so. The only thing I feel out of this is guilt and failure.

"Neno you have to eat, you promised me at least one meal per day" sigh! I wasn't aware he has a tray of food with him, he puts it on the bedside table and dares me with his stare to argue. I know he won't leave me alone until I do so, like a good girl I sit up straight and start taking lazy bites "He asked about you" I follow his statement with a sigh, from two bites I'm instantly full.

"What is the lawyer saying?" he shakes his head

"All he keeps saying is that it's not looking good" my heart drops to my chest. I don't trust this lawyer but I have no option. I couldn't get hold of both his fathers, I then tried Mondli and Tshepo as requested both of them are also unreachable at the moment. I left tons and tons of messages in both their social accounts but there is still nothing even today. As for spider and croc I was told that they left the country a week ago with Gama's lawyer, something to do with BabNkosi's treatment needing a legal advisor.

MaCele came flying with Sihle and Langa, they suggested this lawyer. He is trying yena but I don't know if it's me and my impatience, I feel like he is not doing enough.

"If only we could get hold of Bhuti Bonga" Vuyani murmurs lost in thoughts, it immediately hits me. He is a lawyer, and I know before he abandoned his family he would have done anything for them. And on top of everything I happen to know how to reach him if that button mobicel he left still works.

"Your right, I'm coming" with the little hope I have left, I quickly stride to the study in search of the phone. I pray it's still where I last saw it. The second drawer of his table, here it is, still dead. I plug it and pace the room with my prayers, I pray God helps me with this last spark of hope I have. I need my man home, he cannot go to jail for that bastard. I expel some heavy air off my chest before switching the phone on. It doesn't fail me, it welcomes me with a

welcome tone, now I have to think. I don't know Bhuti bongani's number and neither did Dalas but he specifically asked him to reach him with this phone, meaning his number is stored in here. Indeed the phone book has only one saved but not named number. With a pounding heart I dial it, I try it twice before someone picks, whoever picked keeps their silence on the other side.

"Hello" my voice comes out laced in fear, I can hear every beat of my pounding heart "Hi bhuti bongani, are you there" the person releases a heavy sigh before they respond

"Who is this?" it's his voice, I know it very well. Now it's time for me to take a sigh to calm down.

"Bhuti Bongani it's Thando, they took him, they threw him in jail and....." I'm in panic mode

"ho ho hooo! Wait up, slow down Punkie, who took who?" I retire on the chair and take a deep breath

"Dalas is in jail bhuti bongani, the police took him. They said he killed Lawrence"

"What? When and who is Lawrence?" he is the one panicking now, he sounds like he is on the move, there is suddenly shuffling going on through the phone.

"Three days ago, Lawrence is my ex-boyfriend"

"F*ck" he curses "Did he do it?"

"I don't know and I don't care if he did it, I just want him home. Can you bring him home for me?"

"He is still in holding cells right?"

"Yeah! I think so, he hasn't been to court"

"Where are they holding him?"

"Central, down town"

"Good, don't cry punkie, I'm bringing him home. He is going to sleep right next to you tonight" for some reason I believe him, I wipe the stupid tears on my face with a smile of hope "I've failed him too many times, I'll not fail him with this"

now he sounds like he is convincing himself more than me “Are you safe there punkie?” that name, he used to call all of us with that terrible name. It sound like something I would name my gay puppy one day. I’ll let it slide because I need him to release my man.

“I’m safe, I’m in his house”

“Good punkie, go cook him a feast, I’m sure he is starved. You know how much that man of yours eat” we both chuckle

“Thank you bhuti bongani”

“Don’t thank me punkie, Musa is my brother, it’s always been my job to protect him but I failed him, I promise you I will not fail him this time. Switch the phone off immediately after I drop this call okay”

“Okay”

“See you later punkie” he drops the call and I immediately honour his request. Switch the phone off. Now I feel lively, there is finally a leap of faith. The phone call urges the song Leap of faith by R Kelly, the man did despicable things but one cannot deny that he sang with his heart, as much as we suddenly hate him, his music will forever live in us. People glance at me like I’ve lost my marbles when I finally honour them with my presence singing the song. A feast is what I’m cooking for my man, they are welcomed to watch.

MUSA

Three days, I swear three days in holding cells feels like three years. I don’t know how people who are sentenced years in jail survive. If I could barely breathe in three days, I don’t think I would survive jail. My hope is gone, all the people I know can get me out of this mess cannot be found. I’m starting to prepare myself for jail because I can see it’s where I’m headed, my lawyer is one incompetent fool. I don’t trust him to win this kind of case.

During this three days trapped in this pit the only thing that’s been constant in my mind is thando, she hasn’t come to see me and that scares the shit out of me.

My mind is running wild, what if she hates me? What if she leaves me? No women in their sane minds wants to hear that the love of their lives are murders. The only thing I pray about the most is that she doesn't leave me, I know it's selfish but Thando is my drug. Even if they sentence me to ten years I need her to wait for me. I love my girl so much I refuse to see her with anyone else but me.

I hope she went to the doctor about her sudden bleeding and maybe the crying too. Thando is one tough cookie I know, she didn't cry when we buried her mother and Sipho but lately..... tears are always paving her cheeks. For my sake I hope this is not what I think it is, I wanted her to fall pregnant with me around. If she is pregnant how is she going to raise the baby with a jailed father? She is going to hate me for real if I go to jail and leave her to raise my child.

"Sboshwa, you have a visitor" I don't know why most wardens are this rude, we are still in holding cells but already he is calling us 'Abo'sboshwa'. His eyes are looking at me, I thought he was speaking to the guy next to me in shinny suits. He and I both arrived on Friday, he was so sure he would be out of here the next morning but three days later he is still next to me. His shinny suit is slowly loosing it's shine, even his confidence is starting to fade. As odd as it is to have a visitor at this time I still follow him because having a change of scenery is better than the four walls and same faces I watch every day.

I follow the rude guy to the visitor's room. The moment he opens the room my heart stops beating, everything ceases for a moment. I remain rooted on the same spot staring at him, he is staring back at me. He.....he looks different, he is growing old and.....

"Ei! Shona khona sboshwa" the rude warden pushes me further, I swear this one I'm going to hunt when I get out of here and teach him a lesson. Just rough him up to learn some manners. The more I walk closer to him the more nervous he becomes, he still has that habit of rubbing his palms together when he is nervous. I can't believe I'm seeing bonga after..... I don't even remember how long it's been since he deserted us

“Ntwana’ yami” a grown arse man with balls called ‘Ntwana’, I’m too drained to reprimand him. I take a sit opposite his in silence. For a moment he is just staring at me, I have nothing to say to him at the moment, all I feel for him is range but everything has a time and place, now I don’t have the strength to burst him instead I just exhaustedly stare at him. He finally sighs before he breaks the silence “I’m waiting for the paperwork to be processed, you’re going home today” I can’t help but frown

“How?”

“I’m getting you out of here” this man is got to be kidding me, getting me out of here how? “And you’ll not appear in court, Mohapi framed you and paid the cops to get you” I look around and lower myself to him

“But I did it” he nods

“Yes but there is no body and no murder weapon, what they have on you is just speculations and that is against the law to hold someone with just speculations. Mohapi doesn’t have anything on you, he just wants you to pay for what you did to his daughter”

“You don’t understand, he.....” he halts me raising his hand

“I took care of that, I made sure the body is burnt and scattered those ashes. I believe you got rid of the gun, right” I nod

“How do you know all this? And how do you know Mohapi” he sighs

“He is the reason I abandoned my family, he took you in to get to me” I’m confused. One of the police officer that arrested me walks in with a file in hand.

“This is all Mr. Nkosi” Bonga receives the file and pages through it

“For the sake of this bloody police station I hope this is all or else I’m suing this corrupt station. When has someone ever been held for speculations? Tell that useless station commander that if he doesn’t make this right soon, tomorrow he is going to make headlines with this play house he calls a police station” the officer keeps nodding with his mouth shut “Let’s go” he says to me pushing the chair, I’m in disbelief but because I’d rather be elsewhere than here, I quickly follow him out. We gain ourselves an audience from the entire station, I wonder

what he did because almost every officer steals a single glance and looks the other way. I follow him to the car in silence. The minute we both settle in, he turns to me driving out “How did you get yourself hooked up with Mohapi?”

“Bhuti omdala, I would really like to fill you in but can you please get me to my house first, I just want to kiss my girl, bath and eat. Then we can talk, please” he sighs and drives, that’s a yes. I look at him once before closing my eyes, I have so many questions and I’m so mad at him but now I need to close my eyes a bit. No one sleeps in jail, even in holding cells.

“Musa.....Musa” eish! I rub my face “We are here” I wake from the chair, indeed we are here. This still feels surreal

“Thank you bonga” he smiles

“It’s the least I could do after everything I put you and our family through, stay out of trouble going forward”

“You not coming in?” he shakes his head

“We’ll talk through the phone, me being here is putting all of you in danger. I’d rather have all of you hating me than not having you at all” sigh

“Bonga I hate you, that one I want you to know but your my brother, as much as I hate you I would still take a bullet for you same as you coming for me. I know I may appear as your useless uneducated little brother but I’m asking you to put your faith in me. Please trust me to help you out of whatever situation you got yourself in? How long are you going to live in hiding? Do you know that Baba is dying? Do you really want him to die before he reunite with his one and only son” he frowns

“What do you mean one and only?” sigh!

“A lot happened, please don’t go mf’wetho. I’m certain your uncle will help you out of whatever mess you’re in” more frown

“Uncle? What are you talking about?”

“Bonga, my door will always be open for you, when you’re ready to trust me, you know where to find me. Thank you once again” with that said I leave him in the car, he doesn’t bring the engine to live. I hope he makes the right decision.

The minute I open the door the whole house falls into silence, everyone's jaws hit the floor. I don't care about them, I search for my girl and she stands rooted by the stove. I stride to her and bring her to my embrace, she breaks, the crying I was talking about earlier.

"I'm sorry" it's followed with a mess of hiccups and sniffs

"Shhh, let's go bath your man so you can feed him" I plant a kiss on her forehead and pull her to the bedroom.

I need a thorough shower. She strips the both of us off our clothing and gets in the shower with me, she washes me in silence. I missed her touch on my skin. She takes her time washing me and I let her be. When she is done she dries both of us and pull me to the bedroom, her lotioning me wasn't part of the plan because I know it might wake sleeping bulls. But I still let her be, she knows how to tame the bull when it wakes up. I've never lotioned my back and behind until today, she lotions me everywhere including my face. I feel like a man baby.

When she is done torturing my skin with too much lotion she dresses me in just a robe and gestures for me to sit on the bed. Only then she attends her body too. She retires next to me when she is done, she is been avoiding my eyes all this while. Even now she is fiddling with her fingers looking on them.

"Should I dish for you here or you'll eat with the others" her eyes are dancing away from me. Sigh!

"Did you go see the doctor" she shakes her head no with a sigh

"Bring my food in here, tomorrow we seeing the doctor" she nods and turn to leave. I hope we make it out of this, I don't know if she will ever look at me the same.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 53

ONE SHOT OF VODKA

BONGANI NKOSI

If there was ever a person asked to write a biography about myself I'm sure they would have just about two words on paper. Bongani Nkosi. Because that's all there is about myself for the world. But for the life I was given I'm a husband and a father to two beautiful girls while in true reality I'm also a son and a brother, the later relations I had to bury way deep to keep those I love safe until I found out that the devil himself found them.

I'm that son who was raised well and did everything right. My father risked with me, I wasn't the brightest of all students but I was a hard worker unlike my little brother who was an A student. When I finished matric and passed well enough to be admitted in law school, my family was ecstatic. Even I myself couldn't believe it. As a black family we didn't want to let that chance go, my father gambled with his pension money. He took all his pension money and a loan from the bank to pay for my tuition fees in full. He only asked one thing of me, come back home with that degree and take your siblings to school as I did for you. That's all he wanted and failed to honour his request.

For the first years of my schooling years I was still a decent young black man ready to honour his father's quest. My hurdles started when I was doing my articles. It started with one night of celebration, we were celebrating our internships. One night of fun caused me my life. One shot of vodka put me behind the wheel, my friends trusted me. I still remember Thabo's words "Bonga, will drive. He'll make sure we get home safe and sound, he only had one shot" I believed him and I believed myself that one shot of vodka is nothing. Like a fool who thought one shot is sober I jumped the wheel but before we even turned the corner, the wheel jumped us.

I was with three of my friends in the car. The three of us survived except one. One Thabo Mohapi who happened to be the son of the ruthless man I had ever

seen back then. He happened to be the only heir to the Mohapi Empire. And just like that I took his life with one stupid vodka shot. He was the youngest of our pack, the youngest but the most rebellious. He reminded me a lot of my little brother hence why I agreed for him to roll with us. He was always on my tail, asking this and that. Most of my friends didn't like him but I adored him to death.

For me he was just one of those bright boys you always wonder how they did it. I think he was the youngest in class too, every time when we asked when he started schooling because it was very odd to find a guy his age in varsity, he would joke by saying "having a devil for a father will make you president if he wants you to be one" well I learned later in life that it wasn't a joke. His father was the devil himself. Thabo was young and tiny but he was a dynamite, a bit shady here and there but he was a young man with a bright future ahead of himself and I took all that away from him.

The devil dragged me to hell with him when he found out I took his precious stone. I was never arrested. Recovering from my mild injuries on the hospital bed I woke up to the devil staring at me waiting on me. He dragged me to his house and told me "From now on, forget your life. Forget everyone you love because you're going to be what my son was supposed to be, you're going to live his life" I was shaking in my boots, by then I didn't have no phone on me and he made sure to keep me from the outside world.

He tortured me the whole festive season in his basement making me chop guy. My job to earn myself one meal per day was to chop all the bodies he brought into pieces. I had to cut each and every bone of everyone he killed for a plate of food. It darkened me in some way.

When my articles were about to begin he finally paid me a visit in the basement. He made me an offer "Go to school and finish all you have to do but your now working for me, your my puppet or else the next bones you crush we'll be of....." he called all my family member's names, starting from my father to my youngest sister Zinhle. I knew right there and then that I was screwed. I took him on his offer but like a fool I tried reaching out to my family, Musa had just

passed his matric with flying colours back then. He was guaranteed to get a scholarship but everything blocked for him. A straight A student didn't even get one funding. Mohapi told me it was all his doings for trying to reach out to my family. I slowly succumbed to the life he gave me from then but he didn't know I was also creating my own army with his people.

I blocked my family from my life. My father being the father he was he came to fetch me and I had to break his heart. I told him to leave me alone and never call me his son. He left Joburg heartbroken and never came back. Everyone tried to reach out but I shut them all out because I knew Mohapi had powers. He had eyes everywhere. Even the police station I tried several times and all the detective who gave my story an ear ended up being in the next bag I chopped. He made me chop everyone I tried to reach out too, including my two friends that were in the car accident with thabo and I.

Earlier this year Mohapi was on the venture to start afresh somewhere. He was going to let me go and take his daughter with to start oversees. He organised his one last heist that was supposed to set him up for the life he wanted to live abroad. His brother was supposed to lead that project as some payment for whatever he owed him but his brother ended up dying. He postponed leaving until he didn't anymore.

Somehow he still went after my brother, I don't know how he and Musa came about but I found out later that he had my brother under his wing. I think Musa was his new project until he became difficult, I know Musa is not like me. He is not one to be moulded, he shapes his way the way he wants it to be.

Working under Mohapi for such a long time I made friends with his employees. Most of his employees are his enemies, which is his mistake. I know they say keep your enemies closer but for me those that bites are the ones closest to you, so careful with who you let in your circle. Most of the people who work for him wants to take him down. We were in a mission to kidnap his daughter hence why we staged for me to be her lawyer. She doesn't know me because her father makes sure she stays away from his ruthless life.

Plan was to kidnap her someday and make her father free all of us for her life but she is got tight security around her, most she is not even aware of because they keep a safe distance. Our plan was going okay until the bi*ch woke up one morning and decided to be a nude prostitute. I specify nude because girl just became foreign with clothing. I once passed her by the mortuary corner down town singing and twerking to one of the songs my daughters love. Girl is singing run the world in every corner and she gets a line of clients from all the neighbouring countries.

Dimpho turning to be a prostitute took us ten steps back, Mohapi doesn't care about her anymore. Sometimes I wonder what kind of a father he is. He didn't even try that hard to help his daughter, within a week he was okay with what she is.

So here I am, with no plan getting out of here. Musa just offered me a deal. I'm afraid to take it because I'm not sure how tight it is, I don't want to risk getting him killed and me being his chopping guy. For some hours I sit in the car battling with my thoughts until my tracker goes off. Yes, that's how much of a control freak Mohapi is. If this tracker goes off for 30 minutes and I haven't gone through security, he will chop one of my family. Now I have more to lose because regardless of my situation, I still married my varsity sweetheart and gave her two children. He was cool with that but he reminded me every time that they are also on the list if I don't abide by the rules.

I quickly bring the engine to life and fly to my house, in no time I'm going through security at my house. Taking Mohapi down wouldn't be such an endless train if he didn't have this tight security. I wonder where he takes them. They are loyal as f*ck to him..... No one can penetrate them.

Lomile my beautiful wife is waiting for me by the kitchen, she is frustrated

"Daddy do you want to be in the next chopping bag?" I hug her frustrated chubby body to mine and kiss her forehead. This woman is my ride or die. She knows about Mohapi too. She sacrificed her family too to love a man like me. Her family wanted us to do things the right way but I didn't have a family to do so, so they washed their hands on her when she choose to be with a man who didn't pay lobola for her. One day when all this is over, I'm going to give her the

wedding she deserves. Not the home affairs signing we did. I'm going to give her family any amount they want to right my wrongs.

"Daddy is here, stop worrying. Where are the girls?" I'm holding her waist brushing on my handles

"Stop doing that, you're tickling me. They are doing homework" she leaves my hold and stride to the microwave, I guess to warm my food but immediately stops "Wait, your brother..... did you get him out" I nod, only then she sighs and resumes her prior task "What exactly connects him with Mohapi?"

"We didn't get much time to talk, I'll call him with a burner phone to find out later on" she nods with a sigh

"I wish all this can be over someday, now I'm starting to be afraid for the girls" she puts a plate before me "Wash your hands so you can eat" I'm not doing that until I know what she means

"The girls.....explain" she sighs

"Mandy said the driver took them to a dodgy place today, she said he picked something heavy like a person sleeping wrapped in a black plastic" the f*ck! My daughter is only eight years old to be seeing dead bodies. Mohapi's security detail also drives my daughters to school. It's part of his plan to keep me in check. One wrong move he can kidnap them or make them die by car accident like I did his son.

"Baby I think it's time to escape" she looks at me shocked

"How?"

"I think it's time I trust my family, time to put my faith in my brother"

"The jailbird?" I nod "A....a baby I don't....."

"Lomy trust me my wife, get the girls and their certificates. I'll get our important documents, we are getting out of here"

"Are you sure we are taking this risk baby" I nod not so certain myself

"It's time to go back home sthandwa sami" she hesitantly disappears the kitchen. I have to get permission to take my family out for 'dinner'. I'll take that chance as my way out. No child of mine is going to be seeing dead bodies.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 54

WELCOME BACK HOME

THANDO

Awkward. The heavy atmosphere that looms between us is very awkward. I'm not used to this mute side of him, some say his an introvert by nature but his never been one with me. Last night I fed him two full plates and a bowl of dessert which I knew he was just eating to please me, he lacks a sweet tooth this one. When he was heavy with food he held me in my favourite sleeping position and dozed off. I understand he needed to rest last night but now this is more than awkward. I can sense that he is awake beneath me but he hasn't even said one word.

I on the other hand I feel guilty, I'm consumed in regret. If I hadn't dated that good for nothing son of a beach we wouldn't be in this position. My man would not know how a jail cell feels like, he.....

"Mama?!" I shut my guilty mind and reply with a hmmm "Aren't you going to school today?" konje its Tuesday bantu benkosi, can school die for a minute? I need at least two days with him, he's lost so much weight.

"I'm not feeling well" lies! Lies! I'm perfectly fine but school can wait a bit. Within a second he shifts us, I'm now lying beneath him, his now on top of me supporting his weight with his elbows

"What's wrong?" he worriedly search my eyes, now I have to lie and I cannot lie to him, he knows me too well

"I just don't feel like school today Dalas, I want to spend the rest of the day with you and feed you" he side smiles and plant a peck on my forehead "Krazy will email me today's work, don't worry about school" that look, did I say anything I wasn't supposed to say?

"Krazy?" shit

"Hhm, I meant....meant Crazy with a C, my new friend, a lady one" that look again, he knows I'm lying

"You befriend them mad neah?" my shallow smile expose me. He shakes his head and turn us over once again, I'm back on my favourite position "Siright?" (Are we okay?) He asks brushing on my back, now he is talking about our awkwardness. We slept without talking, which was the first in our relationship and I hope it was the last. I nod with a sigh to agree that we are okay "What about you? Uright?" (Are you okay?) Again I offer him my nod. He stares at me, digging through my soul "You know I won't be satisfied until you say it, right" sigh!

"I'm fine baby, super now that you're here" he pecks my cheek and stares at me for a moment

"I'm sorry" he takes me by surprise but I know what he is sorry for, I don't care and I don't want him to apologise

"Dalas i....." he interjects me

"No, listen. I'm sorry you had to find out that the man you love is a murder, it's one thing I never wanted you to know about me but I want you to always know that I don't regret killing that man. He killed my best friend and put his filthy hands one you, for those two reasons he had to die. I hope you understand my reasoning behind"

"Dalas I understand and I don't care. What weighs me down is guilt, I feel guilty that this is all my doing" through my sentence his already denying with his head

"Don't ever and I mean ever ever blame yourself for that twisted man. This is the last day we talk about that pig, he is dead and he should remain like that in our lives" I nod with a smile "And you owe me a f*ck njalo, last night I came back from three years of prison all you feed me is food for my starved body, what about my famished d*ck? You owe me some soul food woman" and he is back, his hand is cupping my boob..... I spank the naughty hand

"And three days had to be three years my love, ihaba!" (Exaggeration) he laughs "So vele vele they didn't... you inside" I spank his behind. He is confused "I mean like they didn't taste you're behind my love" he burst, rolling off me. He stands and does the turnaround spanking his flat behind while at it

"This a*s is very much a virgin my love" I can't believe he did that, he disappears to the bathroom leaving me with my jaw sweeping the floor "Don't worry, I'm just taking a piss. I have to f*ck you for three days before you leave that bed" he

screams in the bathroom, that's my escape plan. I can't let him have me with his family in the house, I know how loud we can be when we haven't busted each other in a while. I'll freshen up in one of the guest rooms. I take my gown and wrap myself flying out of the bedroom.

BONGANI

To be sure we are safe my family and I had to ditch the car, loose our mobiles and pay cash for a hotel night sleep. No transactions at the moment. My wife and I did our best to settle the girls, Mandy is an understanding kid, she reminds me a lot of Musa but Nikky..... my five year old can talk and complain till the sun comes out. She was the one with most questions.

"Daddy I want to go home..... Daddy I miss Sandy (the teddy bear she sleeps with).....Daddy I want to watch sofia" the list didn't end until her mother bribed her, she was promised a pocket of sweets the entire day which I know she will want first thing in the morning.

The uber I ordered with hotel phone drops us at the front of Musa's house, it's probably around 7-8 in the morning. The sunrise is still welcoming the day. A black G wagon halts right behind us as we make our way to the entrance, my heart almost jumps but I notice it's none of Mohapi's people. The driver door opens and out comes.....God, what do we call this? Is he gay? Nah! He looks manly enough. A man wearing a white doek on his head and wrapped with a blanket around the shoulders. Nikky is giggling in my arms.

"Bafo did you grow the Denzel Washington inches in my mourning period?" what the hell is denzel Washington inches? And who is this guy that looks just like me? He glance at me once and goes to the other side opening, he continues talking to himself I think. Out climbs down the short cute girl matching with the guy. Is white doek and blankets a new fashion? Now Lomy and Mandy are also giggling, am I the only one lost? The girl is under his arm, they come towards us, he stands before me "You even grew a beard? Jeez you look old, who is this stufuza?" I'm shocked, I'm just staring down at him "Were you always this tall though?" the girl nudges him but he doesn't budge, the girl is now staring at Nikky in my arms, she extends her hands for nikky to come to her and nikky does without hesitation. This is the first, my daughter is not very friendly. This

somehow touches the guy, seeing my daughter in the arms of the girl shuts him up. He kisses the girl's cheek.

"You promised no more tears" his talking to the girlfriend, I take she is the girlfriend from how he looks at her. She just smiles and kisses nikky's cheek. She looks up at us with glassy eyes

"She is very beautiful" Lomy smiles at her, they are talking, women secret talk, you can always tell in the way they look at each other

"God will bless you again" Lomy, the talkative guy is now mute. He is looking at me expectantly, like I should say something. He finally sighs when he realise I'm nowhere close to whatever he thinks I have to say.

"What kind of a brother are you?" I'm lost, he looks pissed all of a sudden "No hug, no kiss, I lost my daughter for god sakes, you should be rejoicing throwing me a welcome party" the girlfriend nudges him again

"I don't think this is Bhuti Musa" he looks at her like she is crazy

"Sthandwa sami I know my people" he looks at me "Wena, I want a bash, my job and the main bedroom, your one insensitive bastard" he storms to the house, Lomy and the girl both look at each other and follow him in.

I'm the last from the door, the talkative is standing looking at the full table of people who are all staring back at us in shock. I notice Vuyani and Buhle from the table, I smile inwardly looking at them. They have grown. There is an old woman I don't know, one guy who looks familiar and as for the other two that looks again like the younger version of me has me rooted on the same spot.

"Did someone die?" the talkative asks, his voice comes out serious, not the carefree guy from outside "Where is thando?" no one replies him, he turns and look at me "Oh my god bafo, where is thando? What happened....." thando emerges from the passage singing, she stops, stares at us too. The talkative looks back at her and me too, now his mouth forms an O in shock "You're taking another wife?" he is whispering but I think everyone can hear him perfectly "Is the stufuza the first or second wife? Jesus I salute you, hats down bafo....."

"thando.....thando?" Musa's voice comes from the passage before he himself emerges, the talkative looks at him, then me. He repeats the process coupled times before he fans his face.

“I’m weak, I’m seeing things. I thought I dealt with my daughter’s passing but the double impact I’m seeing with my eyes.....I need water, sugar water” he fans himself retiring on the couch, no one gives him water but both Thando and the girlfriend attend him. Now that he is out of side I realise all eyes are on me. Musa finally breaks the silence, he comes towards me.

“You came?” I nod “Thank you” he gives me his hand and we shake “No more running”

“No more running” we shake on it before we hug on it, sugar water is alive once again, I don’t know who gave him his water. He is looking between us again.

“You must be shocked” Musa, sugar water jumps in

“You have no idea” he is still worn in shock. His eyes continue to dance between Musa and I.

“I wasn’t talking to you wena mourning-cation” I wonder what means. He looks at me “Come let me introduce you to everyone” he hugs the short girl first before walking us to the table “How was the mourning-cation” she laughs

“It was amazing, I think your brother is going to need to see a doctor” they both laugh as we walk to the table. Thando has already added more chairs, she was busy during the shock moment. The old woman takes Nikky from the girlfriend’s arms and position her on her lap. Everyone settles down. Musa clears a throat for attention.

“Maa this is bonga” the woman smiles

“I figured, welcome back home son” there is something sincere about her

“Bhuti Bongani?” the talkative, Musa nods

“The runaway son?” one of the two boys asks

“Look who is talking, the cousin smashing son” the talkative jumps in not pleased

“Ei cut it nina, for everyone who doesn’t know, this is our eldest brother, they call him bhuti bongani I call him bonga” (Stop it you) Musa, everyone smiles except Buhle. This one I know she hates me, I have to do a lot to win her trust back

“Everyone as he says, apparently you don’t have names. This is my wife Lomile and my two daughters Mandisa and Nikiwe” they are all pleasant except Buhle who keep burying me with her looks

“I’m not nikiwe, I’m nikky and she is Mandy mommy is Lomy” the table laughs at the little clarification from nikky including my little punkie

“What about daddy?” the talkative asks

“Bongyy” the talkative is in stiches with the cousin smashing, I have a feeling they are storing this name to humiliate me someday. Musa clears his throat again gaining attention.

“Bonga this is Macele, uncle Musa’s wife.....” I cut him

“Uncle?” he nods “We have an uncle?” he nods again sigh!

“I’ll explain after breakfast, next to her is sihle” the cousin smashing has a name “then Langa” the quite smiling “And Mondli” the talkative “And lastly my very good friend, Thabo Mohapi” the f*ck! I choke, everyone looks at me but I’m looking at the guy

“Did you say Thabo Mohapi” I need to be sure. He nods. Lomy and I share looks, this can’t be what I think it is.

“I’ll explain.....” I stop him with my hand, the guy is looking at him confused. He has thabo’s features, my thabo but he can’t be him. My thabo was younger and petite, I know it’s been years but this guy looks like he is somewhere in Musa’s age “I think we should skip breakfast” Musa suggest already on his feet. Indeed, I need to know who this guy is “Gents” Every male on the table stands, I need this clarified “Niya’phi?” he asks Sihle, Langa and Vuyani

“Aaaa I’m the same age as him” Vuyani complains pointing Mondli

“Age doesn’t say anything, are you married? Have you lost a child? Nigger I’m not your age mate, I’m way older than you with life experiences” Mondli

“I’m also getting married and I’m going to be a father” Vuyani mumbles

“To who?” Mondli questions with a raises eyebrow and a bit of smirk, they are like tom and jerry

“No one”

“Exactly, you can’t be in big boys meeting, you lack life experiences”

“Grootmaan doesn’t have a wife and a child”

“Don’t involve me in your petty arguments, bafo, thabo lets go” Musa

“I’m not staying, I deserve a seat at the big boys club” Mondli complains behind us with Vuyani on his tail, I block their back chattering and focus on this ‘thabo mohapi’.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 55

IF COLD WAS A PERSON

MUSA

I haven't been with my brother for almost a decade but I still know him like the back of my hand. He is still the man he was about almost ten years ago, I can tell that he is in a state of agitation. My instinct tells me there is more to him being uneasy at the mention of thabo. His eyes refuse to leave the poor guy. Thabo keeps shrinking like a balloon stabbed with a needle. He hasn't said a word, he is just staring at thabo like a piece of art, something you study and wonder how it came about.

"I think we should get straight to the point, why are we in here?" I'm happy he is back, I knew he'll be the one to break the ice. Everyone agree with him with a nod.

"Bonga as I promised earlier to clarify thabo's situation. This is Thabo Mohapi as in Mohapi's son but....." he halts me with a hand, his reaction says what I'm saying is impossible

"It can't be Musa.....II" he trails off, words fail him to complete his statement "Do you have whisky in here?" I point him the cabinet and he attends to it fixing himself something to quench whatever thirst he has for thabo. He hisses when the drink waters his throat and put the empty glass back on the table. He rubs his palms, I know that's his nervous breakdown. He offers us his nervous attention "I don't know how to say this, so I'm just gonna say it like I know it. The reason why I could not go home and abandoned you all is because I killed Mohapi's son. I killed Thabo Mohapi. He cannot be Thabo Mohapi because I killed Mohapi's son who happened to be Thabo Mohapi" Silence, confusion and utter flummox wears the whole room.

"Wait back up, so there were two of you? Like a twin maybe" Vuyani. He enquires looking at Thabo who is just clueless.

"I don't think I would have a twin with the same name as me and even if I had one, my mother and uncle would have told me" he delivers with a shrug, I

believe him, he has no reason to lie and he has been loyal from day one. He wants nothing to do with Mohapi and he has kept his identity from him.

“How old are you?” Bonga

“32” Silence once again, Bonga rubs on his chin thinking

“How are you Mohapi’s son, maybe that might spark something I’m missing because right now this does not make sense” thabo sighs

“My mother was Mohapi’s first wife, I was told that she left when she learned she was married to the devil and never looked back. That’s how I came about and that’s all I know about Mohapi”

“Dimpho had a brother that died couple of years back” I’m solving the equation in my head but it seems I was very loud

“And that’s the Thabo Mohapi I killed in a car accident” Mondli laughs, we all look at him because this is no time to be funny. His laugh though it’s the laugh you make after cracking a flipping equation that defeated even the genius of geniuses.

“Guys it’s simple. Mohapi named his second son after his first born son that disappeared” we just staring at him, he sighs at our stupidity “He named Bhuti Bonga’s thabo after this thabo” it’s crazy, only a delusional person would do that but then again this is Mohapi, the guy who kidnaps his own niece for money. Bonga agrees with him, he nods coupled times.

“It makes sense and I agree with you because my thabo was way younger than him, he would be 29 this year if he was still alive” everyone seem to be piecing the pieces together, this is the only logical explanation at the moment

“There is only one way to find out if this is true” I suggest because when it comes to Mohapi I have to be sure of my battling sticks, my information has to be correct “As much as I hate to say this, Dimpho is the only one we can milk information from, she is the one that can affirm if all our speculations are correct”

“The trending hosepipe?” Mondli asks and I nod “Simple then, she is a prostitute moos, book her” Never

“And have thando marinate me with peri-peri the entire week? No thanks. Tshepo is very understanding you book her” I offer him a solution

“My wife and I are mourning, I can’t be around prostitutes they will bring dark clouds to our mourning period” bunch of lies, he is overplaying the mourning period “Vuyani should do it, he has nothing to lose” Vuyani eyes him, not pleased.

“Yeah Vuyani will do it” I encourage, on purpose. I need him to confess that he knocked my sister up.

“No, not me”

“Why not?” he looks everywhere but bonga and I

“I just can’t”

“That’s no reasoning, the whys’ should always be replied with Because followed by bunch of lies” Mondli

“What are you? Major English?” Vuyani snaps. The back chattering has started.

“No one is booking Dimpho, you all are going to her corner” Bonga finally intervenes

“When you say ‘you all’ I take it you made a mistake, maybe you were trying to say we” Mondli

“No you all are going. I can’t be seen out and about, Mohapi has people looking for me” oh that! We almost forgot the real reason for this meeting

“Speaking of you being in hiding, you still haven’t explained why you abandoned our family” I probe. He retires with a sigh on the chair and unfold everything, from A to Z, not leaving a single detail. I believe him. I cannot believe we hated him for nothing, he was just a corned young man turned into a slave “I’m sorry we gave up on you, I’m sorry we didn’t try harder as your family to find out the real reason behind your sudden change” he shakes his head

“No Musa, you don’t have to apologise..... this is all me, I killed Mohapi’s son and he punished me at the cost of your future. He blocked every opportunity for you to make something of yourself to punish me but through every fire he put you through your still standing, even after fire here you are being the kind hearted soul you are. I am deeply sorry that my one night of stupid fun cost you

your future, I hope one day you'll forgive me" Blood is thicker than water, this is my brother, it's in my blood to forgive him. I offer him my hand and we fist bump on it.

"Your forgiven bhuti wami" (my brother) I whisper in his ear and he chuckles, I remember only calling him bhuti when I wanted something.

"Yeah yeah! Enough with the sissy sh*t" Mondli, he cuts our bromance, jealousy in him never rests "What I want us to discuss is how do we finish this bastard? He has been in our business way too long"

"And finish him as in like tomorrow, I can't believe he put you in jail" Vuyani. Mondli pops his eyes, he doesn't know.

"You were in jail?" I nod "Jesus! For how long and what for? Whose beach were you? How does it feel like having another man grind you" Am not answering any of his nonsense "Jesus you need cleansing, I'll speak to my father in law to organise you some holy water..... Please keep distance from me, I'm mourning and I cannot be around dark clouds. The atmosphere around you is so dark, I can feel it from here" this idiot! The day I strangle the life out of his doek wearing behind. He excuses himself with Vuyani, apparently I'm suddenly too dark to be around.

"Please explain this boys and this uncle thing you're talking about, last I checked tyma was the only child at his home" (Father) Bonga enquires as soon as Vuyani and Mondli leaves the room. I also convey everything. From A to Z too. Instead of being surprised he frowns, as if remembering something "You know, now that you mention it I think I know him. I mean I was young but I remember asking about baba'omcane and Maa would bite my head off until I stopped asking and forgot about him" (uncle)

"Yeah, that's what's been happening while you were away"

"I'm sorry about Siphon, thando told me the other day" with a shrug I nod too, I can't believe it's almost a year without him. That was my day one nigger there, my real back up "And you and thando? How did that come about?" this time we both explode, he must leave me alone.

Vuyani, Mondli and I we drove to Dimpho's corner. I must say what I'm seeing before me is not pleasant. Now looking at what she turned out to be makes me feel like sh*t. Poor thing looks like a walking skeleton. It's drizzling today and very cold but the poor thing is wearing..... what does thando call this thing again?

"Is she wearing lingerie?" Mondli. Yeah that. That's what thando calls that thing "I know prostitute are supposed to be nude but I still prefer my prostitute with a bit of clothing, that's to....." he fails to find a word for it "Jesus! It even has a whole on her nana" (Vagina) Vuyani laughs. He is describing it like we don't see it ourselves. Now I regret bringing his mourning behind with me "I'm sure that whole is for business, you don't need to take the lingerie off. You just go straight to score the poor nana" the way he is studying her, I didn't even realise the whole until he mentioned it "You guys go, I'll be your watch guard. There is no way in hell I'm tainting my mourning period by being around such prostitute" can this mourning period end already, this one is over doing it

"Vuyi let's go" I'm already opening the door climbing down but he folds his arms and look ahead like his friend. And then? "Haibo! Am I alone?"

"We'll look out for you here, you not alone" mxm! Such a bunch of sissies

I stop by an older woman and buy an apple, I'm trying to assess if there isn't anyone around her looking. When I'm certain she has no guard I make my way to her. She frowns at the sight of me. Two feet to her she shakes her head no for me to step further to her.

"I don't deal with man with broken d*cks, I need real man with real d*cks that stands hard" sigh! Konje my d*ck was a marshmallow to her

"I'm not here for my d*ck, it's still a wack. I was passing by and I saw you. I thought maybe I can buy you lunch" that frown again

"Why? Why are you so nice? Thando left you didn't she?" play along Musa. I have to remind myself. I nod. She grins

"And now you think you can come back to me? Nigger I don't eat my puke" what the hell is she talking about? "I mean I gave you my virginity and you still left me for that gogo, now she left you too. Life is a beach. Where are my kids? I hope

your taking good care of them” I respect Gina wherever she is, this girl is really crazy.

“Yes the kids, I want us to talk about them” now I think I’m getting through her. She stops her craziness to think for a minute.

“Okay let’s go” thank god

I didn’t dare bring her to the car, Mondli would have escaped his mourning behind from the car. I chose a dodgy restaurant right in this area, people didn’t even mind me walking with someone like her. I guess they are used to decent guys coming to buy. I make sure to choose a corner table.

“How are you?” I ask after she places her order. There is no way I’m eating with her. She is suddenly quiet and I don’t know how to go about it. She shrug.

“Good I guess, I think about them every day, they haunt me” here we go again “The eldest would be 8 right?” she seeks confirmation from me and I nod whatever the f*ck I’m nodding “I killed my babies, I had four abortions and I don’t even know why”

“What about Thabo?” I feel the need to ask, somehow right now she seems a bit personal. Not shouting, everything she is saying right now is straight from her heart. Her eyes sparkle with tears.

“After I killed him everything went south for me.....” What! “He was the perfect son, did everything so damn right all the time..... my father barely noticed me..... He was the golden son named after his beloved son that disappeared with its precious mother before us..... I was never seen..... it was always thabo this, thabo that.....his empire was all in his name and I wasn’t even in a single dotted line. I got tired of it and I killed my brother” she stops every now and then to sniff

“How?” the word gently escapes my mouth

“The 18th. I live with that day. The golden boy was going to celebrate his internship with his friends, he was almost done with his law school. I was 18 and had passed my matric with flying colours but my father didn’t even notice me. He celebrated his golden boy. It hit me hard because I had worked day and night for him to notice me but he never did. I got infuriated when he threw him

a party for his success leaving me behind. The golden boy asked for permission to go have fun with his friend after the party and he was given the go ahead. What you must know is that I'm my mother's daughter, calculative by nature. I followed this problem to the club, I knew I had to remove him for my father to notice me. Once he was in the club having fun with his friends I paid a bouncer to tamper with his car breaks. Because money can get you anything in life, the bouncer did just that and tomorrow we woke up to perfect news. No more Thabo Mohapi and I lived happily ever after and earned myself the rewards of my name being the only one dotted in black in all my father's empire documents" If cold was a person. And here I was feeling sorry seeing her like this. I place the R200 note and dust myself up.

"Enjoy your miserable life Dimpho" with that I leave her to her miseries.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 56

TIME TO GO TO WAR

THANDO

Coming back from school the first thing I see outside is his car parked inside our yard. Sigh! I knew he would fly here when he didn't find me at his place when he got back. I had to catch up with my school work but him being him I know he is going to make a mountain of why I left. I hope he doesn't make my housemates uncomfortable in anyway, I'll have to talk to them just to make sure he isn't cramping their style. I'm glad that he is here though, I have great news to share with him. Bee is in the kitchen, doing god knows what because girl cannot even fry an egg.

"Your hunk is here" she jumps in my face as soon as she sees me

"I know, I saw his car outside" there is grocery shopping bags consuming our kitchen floor, lots of them "You went shopping?" I ask

"Yes, with our bae" I frown for her to clarify, I hope our bae is not my man "When our bae arrived here I told him I want my bacon that he used the other day. You won't believe what he did. We went to the mall and he told me to buy everything we need so walaaa! We have grocery" this white girl doesn't have manners, if I wasn't so exhausted from catching up with school work I would straighten her forward behind very fast

"You made my boyfriend buy us grocery?" she has no shame, she nods with a smile

"And toiletries too, girl he bought me that Garnier I was telling you about" I rest my case. She exhaust me. I turn on my heels to my bedroom and find him lying on my bed facing down. When I shut the door he turns and just blankly stare at me still weighing my mattress.

"Yah minister of grocery" he doesn't respond, he burns me with his stare as I put my school bag on the table and take my jacket off. Sigh! He is not pleased of how I left his house. I had school work to attend to that I abandoned the entire

weekend dealing with his arrest and all, so as soon as they left the house, I also left. His house is too crowded at the moment, I can barely concentrate with everyone ordering me around.

Gently I eat the distance between us and sit beside his head, my fingers brush on his beard. There are many ways to kill a cat, just don't make it aware of your intentions. His face is relaxing to that smile I want but he tries very hard not to break "You mad at me?" still no reply. I lower my face to his, plant a peck on his nose, both cheeks, chin and lastly his lips. This time he breaks into that smile I want.

"Are we going through something I'm not aware of?" I'm taken by surprise, I'm not sure I understand what he means "Thando did I do something to put you off or....." he fails to complete his sentence "what's is going on sthandwa sami?" he asks as calm as he can be still lying on the bed

"Nothing is going on Dalas, I just..... I like it here and I had work to do" he momentarily closes his eyes

"You'd rather be here than be with me? Do I suffocate you that much?"

"Dalas that's not true and you know it, can we not fight about my stay here? Please, I miss you" I climb him and straddle him on his waist "Please let's not fight, how did it go with Dimpho?" he heaves a sigh

"Great I guess, because we have new information that can set bonga off Mohapi's hooks" he puts his hands on my waist "but I'd rather we be doing something else than talk about that, I'm one starved man of lately"

"Your d*ck does not rest shame" we both burst "It's always ready to score.....oh speaking of scoring, I have to tell you something" within a minute he sits us straight, with me still on top of him, he wraps his arm around my waist while his other hand dances on my stomach. I watch him intently looking at his face breaking into a grin, am I missing something?

"You're pregnant"

"I'm pregnant?" I repeat what he said just to be sure I heard him correctly. He nods.

“Are you telling me or asking me” he fails to reply me, he instead just looks suddenly confused “Dalas why would you think I’m pregnant” for a minute his eyes dance away from me until he finally sighs

“You’ve been sick lately, the bleeding and headaches. I was just hoping that you’re pregnant” I can’t help but laugh

“Well my ancestors work over time to protect me, I’m on my periods Mr. forget baby number two from me” his expression makes me feel guilty, he truly was hoping that I’m pregnant. I’m not going to entertain his sadness, he’ll get over it.

“What did you want to tell me?” oh yah

“Sindi called, she gave birth to a bouncing baby boy this morning” he beams

“Really? Why didn’t she call me?” I just shrug “Did she send you some pictures?” slowly I nod with confusion, one minute he didn’t want the child and he even denied it but now his expression says otherwise.

“You still going to do the paternity test?”

“Yeah I’ll do it but I know it’s mine, let me see” he is in my phone, scrolling through the pictures. Why am I a bit jealous? “My little man. My Dalas, I’m a father babe” he kisses the screen “We going home tomorrow, I have to see my son and.....” F*ck I block his happiness out of my head, truly speaking I don’t even know why am jealous because I was the one rooting for him to acknowledge his child.

The trip to his house turned to be a trip to Mpumalanga. He couldn’t hold his excitement, he wanted to hold his son right away. But I’m glad that the first thing he did is ask for the paternity test to be conducted which Sindi didn’t have any problem with. She was happy when we arrived but immediately dozed off, I guess she was still exhausted from labour. Dalas on the other hand he doesn’t want to leave the hospital before he holds his son. His like a bee inside a honey pot.

Finally after the longest wait, the nurse brings the biggest baby wrapped in blue. His eyes sparkle before they even place him in his arms.

“Mfana ka baba” (Daddy’s boy) he gently holds the baby kissing his forehead “You made me a father wena” his having a conversation with an infant “What do you want? Hmm? Welcome to the world gift.....You want a bicycle?” Dear lord please intervene “Baby please take us a picture” with an eye roll I snap them, this is going to be one spoiled baby “Don’t be jealous thandolwami, your phone is got enough space, take some more” this is going to be the longest afternoon ever

“Baby let me see him” he doesn’t even look at me, his eyes are glued to the baby. I hear a low chuckle from the bed and turn to find Sindi awake “Hey” she smiles “You look terrible”

“And I feel terrible and hungry”

“I bought you food, it’s in the drawer” she wastes no time and reach for her food. Only now Dalas pays attention to us when he hears shuffling of a paper bag

“Oh your awake, how do you feel?” he asks

“I have been better, did the test come back?” he denies with his head

“They said they will call me when they come out, maybe in a week’s time” she nods and sighs “I actually wanted to talk to the both of you” we both offer her our attention with Dalas still cradling the baby “I have nowhere to go, I can’t raise a child between thando’s home and your home. Your mother doesn’t want me in her house, she kicks me out whenever she feels like and now with a child. I need you guys to help me with a permanent accommodation”

“You can come with us and move in with.....” I don’t wait for him to complete his nonsense, he mustn’t dare test me

“Yei, yei, yei! Breaka bhuti.....take a break right there Mr, don’t dare annoy me” Sindi is laughing “No one is moving in with his baby mama here, not when I’m still alive” hau! Next thing will be having baby number two from the same mother and it will be another mistake “I’m sure we can all come to an understanding that will ease everyone”

“Any ideas my love” now he is talking

“You’re on maternity leave right?” she nods “How about you go to KZN with macele when she leaves, I’m sure she will be more than happy to help you. When you come back will sit again and have another talk. More of a permanent

solution” she doesn’t mind, she agrees. Dalas on the other hand wants to dispute. I give him a look that says don’t dare try me, he swallows his argument when his eyes meet mine. I’m glad he is happy but he mustn’t dare dance on top of my head.

LINDIWE

I’m seven months, exhausted as hell. All I do is eat, shout and sleep. I miss my man now, I don’t know why he isn’t coming back because my brother was released. I hope he man up while he still there and confess his sins. He keeps postponing telling my brother that he knocked me up like a coward. I don’t know how he plans to solve this situation because sooner he is going to have to come clean, I’m going to pop in two months and I can’t hide this rock on my hand forever.

I reach for my phone with an aim to shout at him for.....for not telling my brother and.....just to shout, I feel like shouting. There is a text from unknown number, I immediately know it’s from Theo before I even open it. I don’t know who reminded Theo of me, him and his family are suddenly back in my business.

My mother wants an update about the baby I wish I knew where they sell lightning, I would buy the most expensive one and struck him with everything with a Medupe at its tail. Wipe the entire generation.

A faint knock disturbs me. With my heavy stomach I don’t dare stand, I shout for whoever it is to come in.

“In here” I shout once again for whoever it is to follow my voice to the lounge “I said in here” it takes a while for whoever it is to appear, two black muscled guys eventually appears by the entrance. For a minute I’m just confused staring at them until one takes something like a picture from his pants, he looks at me and the picture as if to confirm. Only now when I notice the weapons on their waists all my follicle hair stands up, I shiver immediately and sweat. I suddenly feel like taking a piss.

“Where are your other sisters?” my jaws are sweeping the floor, everything is suddenly frozen. My eyes refuse to leave the pistols tucked around their waists,

I have never seen this machines live until today “Hei! Young lady, today” the other mr. muscle snaps his fingers over my face

“I....my...my sisters?” I heard him but I’m confused and because of fear I’m trembling “May I aks who are you and what do you want with my sisters?” my voice comes out soft and gentle, I don’t want to piss them because they look highly dangerous. The other one grips my arm hard making me wince in pain “Auch! Wait, please wait. My sisters are in joburg with my brother” I’m lying, only Buhle is there, Zinhle is at school

“I guess will have to take you only” the one gripping my arm informs already dragging me out of the house. I scream with all the voice I have but he puts the cold pistol on my tummy “Scream again, I will blow you huge tummy within a minute” everything in me ceases, I feel cold instantly “Now you’re going to be a good girl and walk out of this house without any hustle or else....” He makes me feel the cold pistol once again. I quickly nod in agreement. And just like that two buffalos escort me out of my home with pistols. Inwardly I say my silent prayers “Dear Lord please don’t let anything happen to my baby and I”

BONGANI

A wise man once said “No situation is permanent in life”. At some point in my life there was a time when I didn’t believe such quotes, there was a time when I thought being Mohapi’s puppet was what I was all meant to be in this life, there was a time when I thought I’ll die a hated son and brother, there was a time when I thought I’ll never mend the cracks I caused in my family. But finding my little brother pulled me out of that dark hole. I can see there is finally light at the end of the tunnel. I feel light and hopeful after what’s been the darkest years of my life. Knowing that I didn’t kill Thabo gave my soul some comfort I didn’t even realise I needed. I slept like a child after the discovery.

I joyfully watch my family have fun. The girls are at their happiest, nikky’s even stopped nagging. She is enjoying having gogo, uncles and aunts. Musa promised to bring her a little brother when he comes back. He was so excited about being a father he couldn’t wait, he dragged thando to Mp just to see his son.

My bunner phone beeps disturbing my wild thoughts. It’s a text from one of Mohapi’s guys who works from me. Eric.

Mohapi is on the move, call me immediately I dial him

'Eric' he heaves a sigh

'Eish man! I just found out that Mohapi has one of your sisters, they just kidnapped her today'

My heart stops 'WHAT? WHO?'

'I don't know man, the one in Mp' there is two of them there 'I'm trying to pin their location, I'll let you know where they are taking her once I find out'

'Taa man, keep me posted'

'Sure, get ready for war, this moron is livid. His ready to kill'

'Let me get my team ready, thanks once again man' it's time to go to war.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 57

CHANCE

MUSA

Like an insane mentally deranged man he is, he had to strike where we least expected. Kidnapping Lindiwe is his way of drawing us in, his way of letting us know who has the upper hand and I'm afraid to admit, he has us right in the palm of his hand. This is his game and he knows it. I hate that we didn't have time to polish our mission, a lot can go wrong because our plan is not finely formulated. We have to react because we are under pressure not because we are ready to face our opponent. And what unsettles me more is Vuyani. He is like a ticking time bomb, ready to explode any minute. As tragic as this situation is, at least one good thing came out of it. It forced the truth out of Vuyani. He finally confessed his intentions of marrying Lindiwe. I wish we could leave him behind when we go to get Lindi but he won't budge, he said he wants to put a knife at the person who touched his girls. He refuses a gun. His weapon of choice is a knife.

As soon as Bonga informed me of Mohapi kidnapping Lindi I went home and took Maa and Zinhle with. We had to put everyone in one place until all this is over. Speaking of Maa.....my heart breaks at what's become my mother. I know I'm not her favourite son and I should feel nothing for her but at the end of the day she is the woman who birthed me. My mother is fading, she looks so weak and fragile. I asked if she is sick but she keeps denying.

We have 30 minutes to kill before we go for war. I thought I'll find my heart's keeper with Vuyani but she is nowhere to be found. I search for her the entire house until Macele tells me she is in the garden.

There she is. I intently watch her staring into space, she is just sitting with Nikky and Mandy in the garden, but her mind is somewhere in the wild. I wonder what's eating my baby so bad, I hope it's not the baby. We haven't had much time to talk about little Siphos arrival.

“If there was ever one thing I was proud of from you, it’s her” MaBongani. She almost startles me, she is right behind me. We both stand in silence staring at Thando “She is beautiful” My eyes find her behind me, there is something in her eyes when she looks at me that was never there. I thought she would be over the moon when she saw Bonga but she was just.....I don’t know, just happy that we are finally all together.

“Maa are you okay?” I feel the need to ask because she is acting quite strange.

“I’m proud of everything you achieved, from the bottom of my heart I need you to know that I’m proud of you son” with a frown I turn to look at her again “I was never a good mother to any of you but you.....I was a monster to you. I never gave you any love but like your name you always killed me with your kindness no matter how hard I spat on your face. But you know what you my son did? You went and got yourself the perfect girl who will mother all your children. The girl who will give your children the love your mother never gave you. She is perfect and she complements you well” I’m speechless, I’m waiting for her to laugh and say her usual hurtful words but instead she wipes a tear from her cheek I wasn’t even aware of “I’ll be content knowing that you’re in good hands, that you finally have the love I never gave you. And oh, congratulations. I see another Musa is coming”

“WHAT?” I’m confused

“Thando, she is pregnant right?”

“No, she said she isn’t” she chuckles

“You’re going to be a father once again, that one is pregnant” she leaves me shocked. For a minute I just continue to stare at my girl but I need to make sure of this pregnancy accusations. Slowly I eat the distance between us, she turns to look at me when I’m just one step away from her. When she raise her head to me I realise that she is crying. This is one of the things that made me think she is pregnant, Thando is not a cry baby but lately.....

“Sthandwa sami” I sit beside her. She puts her head on my chest, crying while I brush on her back “What’s wrong?”

“I feel guilty Dalas, it’s all my fault that Mohapi is in our lives and now.....” She infected me with her eye roll habit, I feel like rolling mine too as I kiss on her head

“Don’t stress about that thandolwami, I’m going to make sure that Lindi and little Thandeka comes back to you safe and sound”

“You promise” she sniffs. I nod kissing her forehead and wiping her salty waters
“You also promise to come back safe and sound”

“I’m not going anywhere, not anytime soon” she beams “How are the period pains?” now I’m investigating

“Mxm! I don’t know what’s wrong with me yazi, I think you were right. I need to see a doctor”

“Why?”

“I wasn’t bleeding, it was more like spotting. I thought I was on my periods but only to find a dot of blood on the pad” music to my ears. I plant a peck on her forehead.

“We’ll go see a doctor when I come back” she nods “I need to ask you something and please be honest my love” she nods once again “How do you feel about little Siphos?”

“Before I answer you, how are you suddenly so sure that he is yours?”

“Dalas confirmed in my dream that he is mine”

She sighs “Okay now it makes sense. Anyway I don’t have a problem with the baby, problem is you and your extra too much happiness. You tend to think with your dick....i mean, you don’t think when you’re happy. Inviting your baby mommy to come live with you, have you lost your freaking mind?”

“That was very very stupid of me, and I apologise for that. It will never happen again. Please forgive me sthandwa sami” she pecks my lips but the kiss lingers on, I find my hands feeling all over her soft skin

“Sies maan” Nikky. Jesus this kid, I forgot they are here “Yak, Malume that’s nasty” tasty she means. This one is a little diva.

“When are you leaving?” thando whispers with a giggle in my ear

“In less than 15 minutes”

“I’m horny” she informs gently so the two intruders don’t hear us “And my horniness scores you one fast and furious quickie for the battle, just to strengthen you”

“Plus I’m very weak my love, I need all the strength I can get” I’m already dragging her back to the house. A man can never say no to free meal.

There is no element of surprise in this battle. Its two teams going for a match, only the best trained will win. Eric confirmed that Mohapi brought Lindiwe to his house. That was a go ahead for the guys to go knock straight on his door because it would be mission impossible to try and get in Mohapi’s place without being seen. Especially today of all days. The level of security is doubled in all exits.

He gave his security detail permission for them to let his opponents in without any hustles. He wants to look them in the eyes when he eliminate them. Especially Bongani and Musa, he doesn’t care much about the other three guys, being Mondli, Vuyani and Thabo. But they can always serve as collateral damage, in every war there are casualties.

His security detail escort the guys in until his spacious lounge where he sits like a filthy rich man he is sipping on his whisky and smoking. He choose to wear white today, like someone prepared for a picnic not war.

“Chopper” Mohapi. He smirks, puffing on some cigar staring at the terrible five thinking they can take him down in his armed mansion “You escape me to form a banyana-banyana team” Mohapi’s guys explode in laughter “I must give it to you, your one dump son of beach. You desert the five star class live I gave you for what.....banyana team?” Vuyani huffs

“Where is my wife?” Vuyani. He is beyond annoyed, he has no time for this lame boast show.

“Who the f*ck are you and who f*cken granted you permission to open your useless mouth” Mohapi

“That’s what I don’t have time for m’dala, I’m here for my wife and that’s it” with that said Vuyani throws his knife at Mohapi and it lands right on his chest, stabbing him. Chaos erupt. Guns go off. Everyone finds something to hide

behind while shooting. Mohapi is groaning on the floor, none of his guys has made it to him. Vuyani crawls to him.

“Where are my girls?” he hisses, pressing the knife further into Mohapi’s chest. Mohapi winces but laughs.

“Boy if you kill me, you’ll never get them” arrogant bastard, even when stabbed he is still arrogant. All this is transpiring behind the couch, bullets are still flying across the room with more bodies falling.

Lindiwe’s piercing scream halts the shooting. One guy emerges from the passage with Lindiwe and a gun pressed at her baby bump. Vuyani trembles clenching his jaws, he watches the guy to kill him.

“Drop your weapons or else I shoot” the guy threatens. The terrible five drops their guns without any hesitations. Mohapi’s laughter from the floor fills the entire room.

“I told you boys, your nothing to me” he finally stands, careful not to take the knife out of his chest “You fool” he kicks Vuyani hard on his face “I’m killing you first, gun!” he yells for one of his guys to hand him a gun, quickly they give it to him and he cocks it and aim at Vuyani “You piss of shit, you stab me?” Lindiwe screams begging Mohapi not to kill Vuyani. Vuyani laughs instead of shaking, his laughter pisses Mohapi more “You think I’m funny wenja?”

“Baf’wetho I’m sorry” he says looking at the guys, they look at each other confused because this is not part of the plan “You know what’s funny the mighty Mohapi?” Mohapi huffs “Is that you’re going to let us go, we are going to live this place right in front of your face” now Mohapi is pinching his nose in annoyance “Dear Mohapi, you’re doing this for your son right? Your golden boy right?” you don’t mention Mohapi’s son to him, no matter what, now there is sweat shooting off his skin the way he is so mad “We have your son” the guys look at each other

“My son is dead. This piss of shit killed him” He aims at bongani

“I’m talking about your first born and No he didn’t kill your second born, your daughter did” Mohapi’s hand is trembling, ready to pull the trigger “Which one do you want first? Reunion with your son or the confession of a sister killing her own brother?” he doesn’t believe him but because he would do anything for

a chance to see his son, a chance to know him, to see how he looks like, to fill the gap his mother left in his heart. Just a chance it's all he need.

"My son. I want him" Vuyani laughs

"Now we talking boy, listen. This is how it's going to be, you going to let me and my girls go. And once I call the guys and confirm that we are home safe and sound, the guys will take you to your son" silence. He doesn't want to believe him but that chance, that voice in him asks if this is the only chance he has at finding his son. As rich as he is, he tried, he tried finding his son and wife but it's like they vanished into thin air. What if this is his only chance at finding them?

Hesitantly he nods, giving the go ahead for a guy holding Lindiwe to let her go. Lindiwe runs to Vuyani, helping him up. Vuyani mouths I'm sorry to the guys once again before he limps out of the house with his girl under his arm, only now everyone notice that he has a gun wound on his leg. Again dead silence wears the whole room, now they wait, they wait for Vuyani to call and confirm that they are home safe and sound. Mohapi on the other hand is itching, he is not thinking straight. His mind is on his son, he can already see what he looks like but little does he know he is right in front of him, if only he can look close enough.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 58

THROUGH FIRE

SILENCE. Silence reigned the entire room, it was almost deafening. Even a drop of feather hitting the floor would have made a sound in that moment. The lack of sound made people listen to their inner selves, everyone found comfort in staring at their inner demons from within as they wait. Wait for the call. The call that can resume the earlier action. Looking at dead bodies on the floor one wonders if they are not next. If this is their final departure.

Through the mist of deafening introspection, Musa's phone chimes, it rings out loud after what felt like eternity, bringing the whole room into another commotion. With a sigh he puts his phone on speaker.

"Gootmaan we are home" Vuyani's voice comes from the mobile. Making everyone hold tight to their machines, waiting now for the next order to fire. He drops the call immediately after the deliverance, it's what they have been waiting for. Now the unplanned plan must continue.

"I kept my end of the bargain, now it's your time to keep yours" Mohapi. He reminds the guys.

"Except that now we have nothing to lose, so..... I guess we still call the shots m'dala" Mohapi huffs

"Don't f*ck with me Nkosi, you promised me my son"

"You see, that's the thing about power. Once you have it and you know you're in control, it's very hard to just let it go"

"What the f*ck do you want?"

"Another deal" Mohapi chuckles

"You have to be f*cking kidding me"

"Well I have the power, you can kill us now but you'll never know where to find your son. Or you can give us another deal" he knows he is cornered, he can't tell him to f*ck off because they might be his last hope at reuniting with his son. He

closes his eyes and gives him the go ahead for his new deal “Lot of blood has been shared, there is no need to spill more blood. The new deal is that you let us go and we reunite you with your son. No more blood” Musa pleads but his plea tickles Mohapi’s fancy, he laughs his lungs out.

“Are you scared Nkosi?.....you know, your one dump son of beach, always so kind and thinking of the right thing. That’s going to be your downfall Nkosi. I don’t care about more blood being spilled, you promised me my son and that’s what you’re going to give me” there will never be two bulls in one kraal, one has to know who calls the shot. The exasperated Mohapi fires his shot straight at Musa’s knee sending him to bleed all over the floor. Chaos erupt once again but Thabo’s sharp voice puts another comma to the gun fight.

“WAIT!” Thabo’s voice comes loud holding the gun battle that was about to continue once again “Please wait” he stands raising both his hands to surrender “I’m here, it’s me. Papa it’s me Thabo” Mohapi laughs, this f*ckers played him. They don’t know where his son is. His vexation triggers his hand to pull another trigger, he shoots another bullet sending it straight to Thabo’s head, he joins his partner in crime on the floor, immediately closing his eyes after his brain scatter all over the walls.

“NOOOOO” the wounded Musa cries, he crawls to his friend crying “Thabo noooo!” he tries to revive him but it’s too late, he died on the spot. With his father’s bullet. The man that brought him to the world took him from the world. He was his beginning and his ending “You....you killed him.....you killed....your own....son” the shattered Musa informs Mohapi holding his friend’s wounded skull. Mohapi doesn’t believe him, he knows the boy, he had seen him couple of times, there is no way in hell he could be his.

“You boys tend to forget who I am” Guns go off once again, more bodies fall to the ground. What was once pure white floors is now tainted in red. This is the battle of today, if one makes it out of this, this is their last battle. No one wants to find themselves in this kind of position once again. The second bullet meets Musa’s chest, the guys are outnumbered. Mohapi’s guys are like flies, just when they think they are making progress, more keeps flooding in. Musa is weak, lot of blood is gushing out of his chest wound. Bongani crawls to him at the realisation of his brother’s weakness. He pulls him to his side and shade him.

From behind Mohapi's guys starts falling, someone is approaching them from behind finishing them off. Mohapi pulls a hostage. The weakest being Musa. It's too late for bongani to try and fight, he already has a gun pinned at the weak Musa's skull. His guys are all dead on the floor. From behind comes spider, croc and Vuyani. This son of a beach came back with more.

"Clever mother f*cker" Mohapi affronts pulling the weak Musa with him as he reverses to the door behind "If any of you comes anywhere near me, I'm going to pull the trigger" he warns, continuing with his reverse "More of my guys are coming, you better f*ck off here while you still have a chance" indeed the screech of hurried car brakes are heard from the inside. More cars are flooding in the yard with more of his guys "No one is making it out alive"

"Bafo.....ba...bhuti....." blood chokes off his mouth, refraining him from delivering his sentence "Tha...thando.....is.....pregnant.....please please take care.....of....my daughter" he feels weak, he will not make it even if he tried "Call.....her.....Musa.....my little angel" a subtle chuckle escapes him followed by more blood choking him "Hambani.....hambani baf'wethu" (go.....go my brothers) Croc holds both Vuyani and Mondli while Spider holds bongani out. No one wants to let go of Musa but it's pointless, he is half past dead, in few minutes he will be cold. More of Mohapi's guys are flooding in and they will not have a way out once they surround them once again.

The guys made it home but it doesn't feel like home, it's a couple of minutes but his absence is already felt. The longing in their hearts cuts deeper than a knife. No one would have predicted such outcome, no one thought they will lose him. From all of them he was their keeper, the one that glues them all together and without him they feel stabbed, right at the core of their hearts. As heavy as it is Croc and Spider are the first to climb off the vehicle. The three shattered remains in the car, with tears freely flowing in silence. The pain cuts too deep. They went as a group of five but came back as a group three.

Both Croc and Spider stand outside the vehicle, hesitant to go in and deliver the devastating news. The door burst open, making their heart shatter more at who opened the door. The first one out is Thando. Followed by all their women and family. Everyone makes their way to the vehicle. Thando ceases from the door

when she realise that there is no Musa inside the vehicle, she steps aside for people to take in their man.

Lomile opens the fragile bongani's door and takes him for a hug, Tshepo is next also engulfing Mondli in a hug, Lindiwe brushes Vuyani's cheeks. Buhle is standing next to thando, she was prepared to jump thabo, today she didn't care about her brothers, she was ready to claim him. Both her and thando look at each other, both in question. Thando is asking her where is Musa while she is also asking where is Thabo.

"Where is my son?" bab Nkosi's voice comes from behind, the guys freezes. Now that's a question they are not ready to answer. Vuyani found them home when he arrived with lindiwe and immediately bab Nkosi was left behind while he and the others went back to rescue the rest of the guys. He is as healthy as horse, the treatment worked like oil on a machine in him. He looks like the father Musa was longing to see all along but pity he isn't here today to see how healthy he is. Bab Nkosi is looking between Vuyani, Mondli and Bongani. He eyes stops for a while at Bongani, the long lost son is finally home but where is his Keeper, the kind soldier of a son who held him and his family through all the trials and tribulations. The one who provides for his family no matter what "Where is Musa?" their eyes already says it all but no one's got courage to break the news, even themselves are still in disbelief

"Where is Dalas?" Thando, She asks tapping Mondli's shoulder next to her, everyone can already tell except her. Macele is pushing through the crowd to stand next to her, just to hold her when they break down to her.

"Where is Thabo?" Buhle, as much as they tried to hide their affair, almost everyone here knew. This is Bongani's news to deliver, he looks above restraining his tears from falling and gathering the strength to break his family. He came back but him coming back cost them Musa. The soul of the family.

"They didn't....they didn't make it" with a trembling voice he breaks the news

"Didn't make it how? Where are they? Where is Dalas?" thando, she heard him but it's still not clear, she doesn't understand. Bongani shakes his head to emphasise the news to her with tears flowing down his cheeks. She shakes her head back in denial, buhle is already weeping together with every female surrounding her "No.....no.....he....he promised, he promised to come back.....he

promised to come back.....safe and sound” she is cowering back, to hold on to something as she feels strength leave her “Nooooo” she shatters to the ground, but vuyani is quick to catch her. She wails in Vuyani’s arms. Macele sits flat on the floor, shattered herself, the son they just found, the son her husband was longing for all along, this is going to break this family.

“BONGANI WHERE IS YOUR BROTHER?” bab Nkosi, he questions once again from behind, he is hyperventilating, holding his chest

“Baba I’m sorry” Bongani, it’s the only thing he can say, nothing more can be done. MaBongani’s sharp scream breaks from behind, she crumbles to the ground, rolling like a Nigerian widow. The words she had earlier with Musa were her last to him, if she knew it was the last time she saw him, she would have apologised thoroughly, she would have told him she loved him, she would have tried to be a better mother. She thought she would go first, be the one to die first so she can pay for her sins. That’s what she deserved but God had other plans, he took the one that kept them together. The heart of the family. No one attends to her, both Lindiwe and Buhle are besides their father, no one really knows if she really is shattered, she hated the boy for all they know.

“NOOOOOOO” thando’s pained cry comes alive once again in Vuyani’s hold, Vuyani is crying with her “Vuyani I want him, Vuyani bring him back, please bhuti wami” the words cut deeper in Vuyani, making him break into finer pieces

“Neno” thando starts thoroughly shaking in Vuyani’s hold “thando.....thando” he panics, trying to hold her tight

“She is fainting” Macele announce with panic besides them, she is starting to eat on her tongue. Bongani is quick to squat on them, he holds her jaws tight to stop her from biting her own tongue. He carries her to the vehicle, Vuyani jumps on the driver sit flying to the hospital like a maniac. It doesn’t take long for him to arrive at the hospital, immediately he desert the car screaming for help while Bongani carries the shaking thando in his arms.

“She is pregnant and she fainted and started shaking” Bongani explains to the doctor who receives thando, Vuyani is shocked at the pregnancy news, he didn’t hear Dalas confess earlier on. The doctor receives her with a nod and

immediately rush her in “Lord please don’t let her loose the baby” bongani prays looking up in space. She lost the love of her life, maybe a little Musa is all she needs to weather this storm.

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 59

AFTER FIRE

“He.....he.....was.....your son” Musa’s fragile voice comes in a whisper to the also frail Mohapi, his grip on the gun pointing at Musa’s head is starting to lack strain. Musa can feel him become feeble with every breathe he takes but because he himself is also weak, he saves his last strength for whatever miracle may come. Vuyani’s knife wound is starting to become unbearable on Mohapi’s chest, his skin is starting to turn pale with some sweat shooting off his pores.

“You think you can f*ck me even in death” the enraged Mohapi questions. His holding the fragile Musa to a gun point on the floor. The guys left or his guys killed them he is not sure. They are taking forever to come in, his becoming impatient with every minute that passes by. His wound is starting to sting, the sharpness is shooting right at his heart and the red print all over his white shirt is evidence that he is also starting to lose more blood. He is going to shoot the first one to walk from the door for taking so long to come in the house.

“Look.....look...at him” Musa’s voice comes weak once again, but this time begging “Ple...please” as annoyed and irritated as he is something in him propels him to look, like he looked at him before he looks nothing like him but something in his wake dead eyes spark him, something in his eyes catches him. He has bab Maseko’s eyes, his brother’s eyes, the brother that he never looks at because he hates. The boy looks like his eldest brother. Musa feels him take a huge breath, he heaves a sigh of disbelief, like he is in denial “My.....my.....phone.....there.....is a record.....for you” every word he utters feels like a mountain, but Mohapi has to hear this, he has to know that his daughter was the master mind behind all his misfortunes.

For once in his life he does as told, he searches Musa’s pockets for his phone and plays Dimpho’s confession with trembling hands. His breathe hitches at the confession, he ceases in everything, becoming totally numb for a while “He.....he.....was.....your blood” Musa informs him one last time, this time a sharp cry shoots off his mouth

“NO....NO.....NO....NO” he lets go of the weak Musa, trembling as he crawls to his son, the son he longed for all his life but the son he shot with his own hand “NOOOOOOOOOO!” a piercing cry breaks from his voice, holding his dead son to his chest “NO.....NOOOOO.....PLEASE....GOD” even devils will remember God in their time of need, if he could cry blood he would the way he is so broken. He is beyond mending at this point, nothing can repair his torn heart. He had him right under his nose, but because he looked like the brother he hated he never even once looked at him, he hated him from the first time he saw him thinking he was Musa’s body guard “KILL ME” Musa is too weak to move, Mohapi is begging him to take his life, if it was a few hours ago he would have killed him on the spot but now looking at how broken he is, there is no need to kill him, he is just a body with no soul, his soul died with his son “PLEASE” he begs, staring into space as he holds the lifeless thabo, he can’t look at how he scattered his son’s brains. His voice in his head echoes like a piercing scream inside a cave ‘I’m here, it’s me. Papa it’s me Thabo’ he said but he didn’t believe him or even give him a chance to explain, now that he replays his voice once again in his head he even sounded just like Lekgotla, Thando’s father. His boy grew to be nothing like him, he resembled both his brothers except him.

The door finally burst open, he takes his last breath thinking it’s his guys. He has only one request, for whoever it is must put a bullet in his skull, like he did his son, that’s his final request. But to his surprise, in walks his worst nightmare, well he doesn’t care much right now, Gama can take his life, he has nothing to live for. Gama is ready to shoot him but he sees his first born son weakly choking blood from the floor. He runs to his son deserting all his guns.

“GAMA.....NAME.....MUSA MTANAMI DON’T DO THIS.....DON’T DO THIS TO ME MY BOY I WILL NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF” immediately he scoops his son from the floor, crying and begging him to hold on. He carries his son out of the room, he stops halfway from the door to look at the bastard behind

“KILL ME” Mohapi begs, staring into space with his dead son in his hold. Gama huffs shaking his head. He kicks his gun to Mohapi.

“You deserve to die by your own bullet, kill yourself devil” with that said he hurries out of the house, just as he makes it to his car, the last gun goes off, the devil took his own life. The end of Mohapi. Like lightning he speeds off to the nearest hospital, singing his clan names begging them to protect his son, he

didn't raise him but this right here is his soul, if he leaves him he doesn't know how his family is going to pull through "MUSA HOLD ON MY SON, HOLD ON FOR ME, FOR YOUR FATHER, FOR MANKOSI AND FOR ALL YOUR SIBLINGS" he continues his pleas for his son "GOD PLEASE SAVE MY SON, RATHER TAKE ME HEAVENLY FATHER" even he himself today remember there is a living God amongst us. Finally he makes it to the hospital but Musa is starting to close his eyes "BOY DON'T DO THIS TO ME, THERE IS A REASON WHY GOD MADE ME COME BACK TODAY, GOD MADE ME COME BACK TO SAVE YOU SON, PLEASE GAMALAM' DON'T MAKE ME LIVE WITH THE BURDEN OF NOT HAVING YOU" (My name) he begs carrying his bloodied son to the hospital.

Musa is immediately taken to the ER but he shuts his eyes right on the bed, Gama knows death, he works with death. He kneels right above his head when his son departs the world of the living, breaking into a piercing cry. The whole room comes into a stand, greatest sorrow wearing the entire room, watching a man break like that it's heart-breaking.

~

He no longer feels the pain, where it was painful is now numb. He opens his eyes to find himself engulfed by shine, white light wears the space he is in. He hears familiar voices, Gama's cry, thando's cry, bab nkosi's cry, mabongani's cry and all his sibling's cry. He hears them but he can't make out where they are crying from.

"You hear them?" Siphon, his best friend, besides him is thabo in white too. He inspects his clothing and he realise he is still in bloodied attire.

"Dalas" his voice comes in a whisper, happy to see his best friend but he is confused with thabo besides him

"It's not your time yet my friend, I can't let you do this to Neno, she deserves some happiness and you're her happiness" Musa is confused

"What do you mean? What is going on?"

"Turn around and see" Siphon instructs, from behind he sees everyone. Gama breaking near his lifeless body on the hospital receptionist, thando on the hospital bed with a trip, his shattered family and friends "Go back Dalas, go keep them together" he turns to his best friend, words failing him. He wants to ask of thabo next to him "He can't speak as yet, but he will visit you soon. His reunited

with his mother and uncle, he said to tell Buhle that she is special and she should move on, not hold on to him. True love is coming her way soon and she should take it with both hands” Siphso looks at Thabo who nods with a smile and disappears “Before you go my dalas I need one last thing from you” he sighs “Help Vuyani make the right decision regarding the return of baba in his life, he has to allow him back in his life because the child Lindiwe is carrying is the root of the Ndlovu family. The first stem to rebuild our mother’s house, he should let baba do what is right because if he doesn’t do right, he might not be able to rebuild our mother’s home. See him through Dalas, you know he can be very stubborn and not so forgiving, please help him forgive our father so he and his little family can start on a new slate with no curses from the past” he stands and smiles at Musa for a while “Go back, it’s indeed a girl. Go be a father and a husband” with that said he pushes him before he can say anything, Musa feels his body falling down but he doesn’t reach the ground ~

“Sir you have to let go” the pained doctor suggest to the broken Gama, with tears still falling down his cheeks he holds his son one last time, he holds his hand to utter his last words but something happens, he pops his eyes looking at the doctor to confirm if he saw what he just saw “He moved, he squeezed your hand” the doctor confirms before he can open his mouth, he takes the hand to feel a pulse and its faintly there. This is a miracle “He is alive” the doctor announces to his colleagues, calling commotion all over Musa. Immediately he is taken straight to ER.

THANDO

“Beep... beep...beep....” Continuously the sound of a machine beeps in her ears, she feels too weak to open her eyes, she doesn’t want to open them because what await her cuts deeper than a knife. He impregnated her and left her alone, how could he do this to her while he promised to be with her through fire, after fire? He promised to hold her hand through all the trials, he promised to make an honest woman out of her, to marry her, give her a huge family but like all the people she loves how leave her, he also left her. Doctors confirmed the pregnancy news but she doesn’t want this pregnancy, she doesn’t want to raise this child without him.

“I hate you dalas” the words leave her mouth, accompanied by painful sobs, she keeps her eyes closed as she confesses “How could you do this to me?” she further breaks, thinking she is alone as she takes out all her pain “How am I supposed to raise your children without you? How can you be so selfish?” she brings the pillow to her lips, breaking into a painful cry.

A touch she knows very well brushes on her skin, her hand freezes causing her whole body to also freeze. This is his touch, the impact he has on her she knows very well, the way her blood respond to his touch she knows very well. But this has to be a dream, she can't risk it by opening her eyes. She dies further into the pillow enjoying the last feeling of having him touch her, with a pounding heartache she calls out

“Dalas?!” still buried in the pillow with shut eyes

“Thandolwami” it's his voice, weak but lively, he sounds alive but this has to be a dream, she needs to beg him to come back

“Baby please don't leave me, come back to me, I'll move back home with you, I'll never leave you again” with a trembling voice she begs. What sounds like a painful chuckle escapes him.

“You promise?”

“I promise Musawami please come back to me, and I made you a father once again, you were right, we are going to have another baby please come back to us my love” sniffing, almost every word is accompanied with a sob and sniff

“Okay, open your eyes sthandwa sami”

“I don't want to, what if this is a dream? What if you're not really here? What if.....” He interjects her

“MaNkosi”

“Hmm”

“Vula amehlo mama” (Open your eyes mommy) he follows his words with a touch, brushing gently on her skin. She heaves a huge sigh before she slowly opens her eyes and turn gently at the direction opposite her, where Dala's voice comes from. Besides her bed sit dalas. His bare chested, with bandage around his chest and a blood drip tube standing beside him. For a minute she stares at

him, with tears just making their way down “Come here” weakly he opens his arms “Come to me sthandwa sami, I’m never gonna leave you again”

“Dalaaaas” with a cry she throws herself in his arms, hurting him in the process but he soldiers on

“Shhhhh don’t cry my love, I told you I’ll be here, through fire, after fire”

“I love you dalas” she confesses sobbing in his arms

“I love you too thandolwami”

THROUGH FIRE, AFTER FIRE

Insert 60-Epilogue

THE WEDDING/ BABY SHOWER

Six months later

BUHLE

I swear I have dealt with pregnant women before but Thando takes the cup. The most dramatic pregnant fairy. She sends everyone around like we were holding candles during their baby making session with Musa, while his accomplice being Musa sees nothing wrong with everything she does. Then there is Lindiwe. Thank God the wedding is done and dusted with, she was a nightmare. Wanting everything to be just as she imagined in her head. Next week we were supposed to host thando's baby shower but the two 'best in laws' as they say decided to combine both events today. Today we having a combination of a shower and a wedding. Then bhuti Bongani and Lomile's wedding is following the next coming week. This month is very busy for this family.

"Makoti waka" (My daughter in law) he startled me, he walks like a ghost, I didn't hear his steps approach. After calming down I turn my head to look at his Makoti behind me but I see people seated with their partners, his eyes intently stare at me.

"Ntate Maseko" I acknowledge with my not so smiley smile

He smiles "How are you?" I reply his question with a smile, he makes me uneasy every time I bump into him. His back to staring in my soul, making me squirm on my seat but eventually he clears his throat and speak "He is a shy character but his heart and yours belong together" I almost roll my eyes but reprimand myself, I was taught better, the best thing to do when elders refer to you as their daughter in law is smile "I'm going to name you MaTieho, just like him. Yours and his was slow, it took its own pace because you intimidate him, you were supposed to meet him before his brother but the universe had other alternatives. Thabo had to be found first and reunited with his family before you two meet, you had to give thabo a glimpse of happiness in his adult life, though his mother was fighting for him to join her in the other life, you still had

to help him know that this world was not as bad as he thought had he stayed in that farm alone. If his mom didn't fight for him, you and him wouldn't have made it, you were going to marry and stay with him from guilt, your heart was always going to long for his brother but....."

"Thank God I found you" Sindi saves me, thank god she is here. I don't mind Ntate Maseko but him and his ancestral theories don't do the trick on me, I always stop myself from chewing my nails every time he starts with his visions and staff. I want him to connect me with Thabo not tell me about his son who is very handsome by the way but.....i don't know, I don't think he has feelings for me as his father and everyone around us say "You have to come, Lindi is about to announce her wedding gift to Vuyani and guess what is it" Ntate Maseko excuses himself, thank god. I frown, what can be wrong with a wife gifting her husband a wedding gift "It's a positive pregnancy test" my eyes dart out of my sockets

"Say what?" she nods repeatedly for emphasis "Thandeka is only six months old!" I exclaim, in disbelief, Lindiwe is a baby making machine

"Well?" she enquires with a shrug and I can't help the confusion, well what? I shrug back "Jesus did you forget we are having a wedding/ baby shower? I don't see fairy-tale Thando taking the announcement well" yes, chaos is about to erupt

"Sit, we told them it's a bad idea but they both didn't listen, we were told that we are coming between best in laws right" she nods "Sit, give me that, what are you drinking?" I'm already sipping

"Chardonnay....."

"Why are you drinking from a mug?" she rolls her eyes

"Musa, he doesn't want me drinking because I'm still breast feeding Siphoh" yes she is my nephew's mother, the DNA proved that Musa fathered the child. I hated her at first because of her ways but after Lawrence happened to Thando she changed, turned her life around. Her father even took her back, she went back to college and she is raising Siphoh.....well MaBongani is doing it for her, I think she is compensating for not raising Musa, she feels guilty, trying to be a mother she never was to all of us. Siphoh and Thandeka both live with my mother. Maybe that is why Lindiwe got pregnant again, she doesn't know the headache of raising a child. Bab Lunga (Vuyani's father) is also here, it's nice to see Vuyani

acknowledging his father, he totally refused to change his surname, he is staying a Ndlovu but at least now he has a relationship with his father.

“And it’s time for our beautiful bride to gift her ugly cry baby husband” Mondli’s voice chirps in through the mic, highly active and extremely happy. He is the MC of both ceremonies, he fired the poor Mc and took over. Speaking of a cry baby husband that is Vuyani. He is a mess of tears, he cried from when Lindi walked down the aisle, even now in the reception his eyes are still sparkling every time he looks at Lindiwe.

Lindiwe takes the mic, stands straightening her dress, now that I look at her from the knowledge of pregnancy, I actually see the bump. She really is pregnant “Vuyi” her voice comes out soft like a melody. I guess she is trying to sound perfect as she wanted everything to be. She stares down at Vuyani who is staring up at her with so much love, for a minute we all don’t exist, they look at each other as if in deep internal communication. Thando disturbs their moment, she is the maid of honour, right next to Lindiwe. I know she is going for another pee break, her daughter is always sending her to the toilet. I roll my eyes when Dalas follows her tail, he like a sick puppy, always around her. Back to Lindiwe.....

“Ours was testing my love, lots of turbulence along the way. I broke your heart too many times, walked out on you more than I could count” she heaves a sigh “But today, I want.....no I need you to know that I’m never gonna leave your side. I’m here to stay and ready to help you grow your mother’s family as you wish. I’m a Ndlovu wife today and I Mrs. Ndlovu have a perfect gift for you my husband” Mandisa and Zinhle are the bridesmaid, Mandisa hands her a small paper bag and she pass it to Vuyani. Everyone eyes Vuyani searching for what’s in the small bag, he comes out with a pregnancy test tube. His expression is not what we all expected, he is frowning looking at the tube.

“What is it” he asks worn in confusion, the audience is already laughing

“Turn it over and read it” Lindiwe. He does but he looks more lost

“It’s written pregnant, 12 weeks” now lindiwe is getting pissed, she looks at him like he should know “You want us to get pregnant in 12 weeks?”

“No your wife is pregnant, 3 months to be precise” the MC Mondli enlightens the lost Vuyani through the other microphone. Vuyani’s face lights up instantly,

he stands and embrace Lindi in an emotional hug kissing her all over. We all clap for the happy couple “Oh cut it, I’m also going to be a father, right baby” Mondli, he cuts the crowd’s excitement for the happy couple. If jealous was a person it would be him. Tshepo blows a kiss at him nodding “And my child is older than yours by the way, we are at 13 weeks, meaning if God blesses me with a boy, my son will chow your daughter, get her pregnant and.....” gasps. Bhuti bonga is quick to grab the mic from him.

“I think our Mc is called by his wife, Tshepo?” tshepo nods waving mondli over to her, only now I realise that Mondli is kak drunk “Next we have.....” he keeps quite reading the programme “The bouquet, single ladies gather on the floor.....whatever that means” he trails off but because he is speaking through the mic we hear him

“Let’s go” thando say behind us, almost startling us

“Go where?” sindi questions with frown

“The bouquet” sindi and I both look at her stunned, well the two of us can go if we want, but her?

“You’re not single MaNkosi” Musa reminds her emerging behind her

“Really? Where is my ring? Where is my wedding? Where.....” Something disturbs her drama, a bouquet of roses hits her on the forehead but lands on my thighs as im seated. Now all eyes are on me, people are clapping. I have the bouquet on my lap.

“Moving on.....” bhuti bongani, the current Mc. He is cold, too fast for my liking, I was still shining but he cut my shine “The garter, single gents on the floor” the sound of happy gents roams the hall

“When did she take it off, it’s supposed to be taken off in front of us” Mondli asks drunk, very loud. He is right, I would have liked to see that part. Tshepo kisses him, she is trying in every way to distract him. She pushes her brother forward too ‘my so called husband’ according to bab Maseko. Tieho is reluctant but he goes, he is not even pretending to be happy, he stands at the back but to everyone’s surprise the garter lands right on his head. He huffs while the gents cheers clapping hands for him. Mondli is back, he drags a chair and puts it on the centre of the hall.

“Buhle” he screams and points me to the chair, I sit tight when I feel all eyes on me but what do I know? Musa scoops me with my chair walking me to the centre, more enthusiasm fills the room. Jesus! Musa and Mondli are intended on embarrassing me. I think Tieho is smiling, trying very hard to suppress his smile but failing in all ways. Only now he is enjoying the show I think.

“Hi” he shyly greets giving me his hand

“Faka ndoda faka” Mondli screams loud once again “No handshakes, get to business” the room erupts, I know the only reason I’m allowing this to happen is because of the wine, I’m intoxicated myself. Tieho’s one knee hits the floor, his smile is drawing me in.

“May I?” he asks permission, now talking to me only. I nod stretching my leg to him.

“Someone hand them mics, I can’t hear them” Mondli once again, I wish he can die for just a few hours

“You have beautiful legs.....and extremely beautiful yourself” he trails off “You want me to make this dirty or should I be gentle?” a grin of naughty takes my face, he has a smooth voice

“Let’s see how dirty you can be” he cocks an eyebrow, astonished of my response

“Jesus I can’t hear them” Mondli screams exasperated, trying to stand to hand us the mics himself, Tshepo pulls him back to his seat. My wedding man takes off my heel, staring up at me. The touch of his hand on my skin has my leg shivering. I’m captivated by his eyes, taking me with him. His lip seductively runs over his lips first, more like warming them up. Then he eases his mouth to my first toe, sucks it like a lollipop, I moan unexpectedly, quickly putting my hand on my mouth when I feel him suck hard on my toe.....

“ENOUGH” the boring MC shouts through the microphone, stopping our session. I’m panting, I can see my chest move as I stare down at him and he stares up at me with a smirk

“Don’t bore us.....” Mondli, he screams cheering for Tieho to continue “Qhubeka bafo” (continue my brother)

“Musa cut that shit going on over there, it’s your time” Bhuti bongani continues disturbing our moment. I feel my chair move again, Musa is carrying me back to my table and I feel like cursing both him and bhuti bongani

“M’lande bafo.....don’t let them take her away from you” Mondli encourages Tieho loud enough for the whole hall to hear but I’m glad Tieho doesn’t listen to him, he goes back to his sit.....after the commotions dies down and people stop cursing Bongani and Musa. Musa is handed a mic and he takes it to the centre stage, I see ladies perfecting themselves, my brother is fine shame, I don’t blame them.

“My baby daddy is fine yoh! I dropped the ball there” Sindi remarks next to me, making me laugh. I don’t know where thando disappeared to, she would have barked at her if she heard all that

“I hope you’re not thinking of going back to being a bitter baby mama, chasing after him” she rolls her eyes

“With thando by his side, I wouldn’t dare. Not because I fear thando but because I fear what they have. Have you seen how he looks at her?” I nod, it’s true “They have a special thing.....” we are disturbed by Musa finally speaking

“Is this thing working?” his fiddling with the mic, turning it up and down

“Bafo turn it on, damn it! Don’t embarrass me, his not my brother people” Mondli again, drunk as hell. I feel sorry for Tshepo shame.

“Thandolwami?!” he calls for thando, searching through the crowd “Baby, Mrs. Me” now everyone is all searching for her, I think she went to the loo once again....well maybe not, she emerges behind the cake, decorated with cream on her lips. Jesus she was eating the cake, it hasn’t been cut by the way

“Jesus thando, that’s my cake, we haven’t even cut it” Lindiwe shouts on her feet, Vuyani pulls her back down

“Sorry....i was....i couldn’t wait.....I saw the cream.....and couldn’t help myself” Thando shyly responds, feeling everyone looking at her. She has her shy moments and I don’t like seeing her like this.

“Eat the cake wena thando, she also announced her pregnancy when you were out” I scream informing thando, she drops her mouth

“This is my baby shower damn it” she is back, fuming, marching to the front table “I’m the one pregnant here, I’m the one.....” Musa scoops her before she reach the table, taking her to the centre as she screams at Lindiwe “What’s wrong with you?” she asks Musa when he puts her down

“Mondli also announced Tshepo’s pregnancy” I’m happy with the information, screaming for her to hear, I love seeing her in a beastly mode

“WHAT!!!” now she is burning, Mondli is snoring on the table, I wonder what he drank. Tshepo is the one subjected to thando’s murderous look. I’m laughing my lungs out “The baby shower is off, people are taking my shine” she is crying, she cries all the damn time when she is pregnant

“Let’s steal their shine too sthandwa sami” thando sniffs, wiping tears with the back of her hand

“Why are you speaking through the microphone?” Musa laughs

“Because this is our time” she frowns staring up at him “the proposal” he whispers through the mic, I roll my eyes, I thought he was going to say something new. We all know they are getting married once thando pop that baby. Now thando is back at being happy, she beams. Wiping her face and straightening her dress.

“Go down phela sthandwa sami” Musa obliges, his one knee hitting the floor. The missus is feeling herself, looking at lindiwe with eyes that say the score is settled “In fact two knees sthandwa sami” I think she is the one taking over the proposal now “You have the ring this time, right?” Musa nods, down on both knees. She takes a deep breath, closes her eyes for a moment. God she is so happy it’s funny to watch. When she opens them, she looks down at Musa “Will you marry me?” Musa is in stitches, same as the audience, he nods buried in laughter. Thando screams, fanning herself “He proposed people” she beams with joy, giving Musa her hand. He slips the ring on her finger, still laughing because thando proposed. Through the laughter and cheering, I feel a tap on my shoulder, I look up to find Tieho, beautifully standing behind me.

“Ready to get out of here?” why does he captivate me so much, I feel myself getting warm everywhere with a touch of his hand on my bare shoulder. I nod shyly. Sindi burst laughing when I place my palm in his, allowing him to get me out of here.

“Use protection” sindi mouths at me when we walk out of the crowd, hand in hand.....the rest is for me only.

The end.

Thank you for the journey. I must confess this story wasn't planned, it's something I started without direction but now reading back at it, I'm proud. Not as bad as I thought. Thank you for being the best audience, giving me a space in your lives, allowing me to take your minds off the daily hurdles we face. Admin loves you all. Please continue to support my page. Invite friends and share the page in your groups.

Page name: Simple escapes reading

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