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PROLOGUE

Seven years back, my first lover was murdered right in front of me. I was heavily pregnant at that time, there was nothing I could had done to help him. I made a promise to Michael, that I would always protect and love to our daughter, Xiluva.

Being a single mother is not easy but I am grateful for having Xiluva, in my life and as my daughter. She has inherited Michael's features and personality more than mine. That was not a complaint, but it was me expressing my happiness for having someone who will always remind me of Michael.

It has been a long journey for me. I have lost friends and my parents' trust along the way. I was insulted daily because of having an Albino girl child, I was threatened and spat on but that didn't stop me from providing Xiluva a good and a healthy

lifestyle. With determination and a purpose, I had done it. I had faced each and every challenge that came my direction.

For I know that she is not my burden but my pride. I would lose all that I have in order to give my all to my daughter. I refused to be criticized for having a child in my teenage years. Xiluva is not a mistake, I knew what I was doing she was conceived. I am proud of standing up for mine and my daughter's rights. I am a young strong woman that is not ashamed of who she is.

I AM TSAKANI AND THIS IS MY STORY.

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1

Waking up to the sight of my daughter's face is the most precious thing to me. I kiss her forehead as I get off the bed. I take a cold shower as always, it makes me look forward to my day. I finish my hygiene process within fifteen minutes. I wake up Xiluva with kisses all over her face. She bathes herself while I get ready.

Being welcomed with a bunch of paperwork at work after dropping Xiluva off at Greyhood for girls' school makes me ask myself why I chose to do law. I don't even get to have proper breakfast as I bury myself with work. At lunchtime I pack my things and go to the restaurant down the street, where I'm meeting one of my exhausting clients! Don't be fooled by the luxurious lifestyles lawyers live. If you lazy and hate paperwork, don't even consider doing law! Don't get me wrong, I love my job and what I do for people. But at some points, I tend to ask myself why I even chose law, that's how much it feels like hell.

"Ms. Mabasa." I stand up to give my biggest client a handshake only to get pulled in a hug.

"Mr Khumalo," I say signalling him to take a sit. "You don't love good publicity, I see." I add, eyeing him. Mr Khumalo has been involved in more than five scandals because of his shady life. All in one month!

"I pay you for what you do. I even pay you extra. So please don't bore me."

I sigh.

"What would you like to order?" I ask calling for a waiter.

"Good day Madam and Sir. I'm Mfundo, I will be your waiter for the day. Order?"

"Good day to you too, Mfundo. I will have your half cooked ribs with salad and lemon water. Mr Khumalo?"

"I will have the same food as my lady, here, but with whiskey."

"Coming right up." Mfundo says writing on his notebook, while turning on his heels.

I'm way too exhausted by the time I knock off, luckily today is Friday, meaning Xiluva is going to spend the weekend with Michael's parents. I take a warm bath, while lost in my world of thoughts. I get out of the water as I could feel the water turning cold. I warm up my takeaway from earlier on, I eat while reading a thriller novel, "Cold Blood", a good read it is. I put my dish away as I start working on my case. Mr Khumalo is a strange man, I still don't get why he always resorts to killing. As a good and a loyal lawyer I am to my clients, I always let them get away with crime. This is what I hate about my job, letting criminals walk away freely. What can I do? A job is a job. At the end of the day, I have to provide for myself and Xiluva

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my flower.

A knock startles me. Who could it be? I look at the clock, it's past midnight. I hold a vase as I walk over to the door.

"Who is it!?" I shout, shaking.

"Khumalo," he coughs. I'm shocked, what does he want, at this time!?

"This is my home -" I say opening the door, I don't even get to finish my sentence as I'm met by a bleeding Mthokozisi who looks in distress. I quickly pull him inside and lock my door. Thank God, Xiluva is not here. I don't know what I would have done.

I quickly prepare a bath for him, I add some salts, to sooth him, of course. I wait for him to finish, impatiently. I almost doze off to sleep, but I'm awoken by a sound of footsteps. I sit upright. I look at him for some time before asking him what had happened. I'm not impressed by the answer he gives. It actually makes me angry, I find myself shouting at him before he shuts me up by a kiss. I respond without thinking. It is after some time, that I regain my senses. I push him off me. I walk over to my room after showing him the guest room he will be using. Luckily for him, I had painkillers that would make him sleep peacefully and would not feel any pain.

I feel somebody's hands around my waist when I try change the position I was sleeping in. I half shout, but Khumalo is quick to close my mouth. He plays with my hair until I fall asleep. I wake up before Khumalo, I stare at him. 'How can a handsome man be this troublesome?' I ask myself.

"Stop staring. I'm trying to sleep," I say nothing but get off the bed. I take a warm shower, for a change. By the time I finish dressing up, the bed is made up, and Khumalo is nowhere at sight, good riddance. My happiness is short-lived when my eyes land on a Mthokozisi who is frying eggs in my kitchen. A whole stubborn man, cooking?

"Like what you see?"

"I've seen much more better, than that."

"If you say so Madame." He says looking at me in a strange way.

"When are you leaving?"

2

Last thing I want, is to put my daughter's life in danger, hence I asked Mr Khumalo when he is leaving. The way I know Mthokozisi Khumalo, he wouldn't mind turning my house into a war zone. I don't care if he would have the money to repair it afterwards, I really don't. I worked hard for this house, it's literally the first thing that has my name on it.

"I asked you a question, Khumalo," I say, looking him in the eye. Men think that they own us. Maybe they used to own women back in the 90s, not anymore. We in the 21st century for God's sake!

"I will leave after few weeks." His eyes wander around the kitchen.

"Oh hell no!" I am not going to put my daughter's life at risk, I repeat!

"Please, Ms. Mabasa. Ngyak'cela."

As much as Mthokozisi's 'please' softened me up a little. I need to think about my daughter, my only flower. I can't afford to risk her life because of a man. A man I barely know. I'm not selfish, no! But when it comes to Xiluva, I wouldn't mind being selfish for the rest of my life.

"Khumalo. You love a dangerous life. You my client, I prefer it stays like that." He looks at me with a glimpse of hope in his eyes. I sigh as I continue. "And with that said, I simply mean that you can't make your personal problems mine."

"I am not making my problems yours. I just need your help, Mabasa."

"Mthokozisi, I have a daughter. I can't put her life at risk for you."

"It won't be at risk

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"

"Can you guarantee that?"

"My men will watch over her. I promise, Mhana Xiluva. I won't let any harm come to your daughter." I laugh at his attempt to speak Tsonga.

We spend the whole day watching movies. We barely talk to one another. We were both lost in our thoughts. I look at Khumalo. A tear rushes down his cheek. He wipes it only for more to follow.

"I was left at an orphanage, where i grew up until my teenage years," He says, more like starting to narrate his life story. "My parents had left me there and they were the ones who came back to get me. I was damaged by then. I had been bullied, abused by other kids and the caretakers. I bottled this all up even when my parents came to get me. Little did I know that I was building a monster inside me. It came out, one day."

He closes his eyes as if he was seeing that day itself in front of him. I say nothing. I didn't want to interrupt him or do anything that would make him stop telling me what eats him inside.

"I was sixteen, when my brother was shot by a group of teenagers in black. I lost it, I took out the gun that I never knew I had. I started firing at them like a professional. Not only did it surprise my brother, but it also surprised me. It was like I was trained, but I had never went for shooting lessons. I actually hated guns before that day. I thought that as time went by, I would forget. Who was I fooling? It always came back to hunt me at night, it would come in..."

I look at him as he tries to breathe in and out. He looks like he has forgotten how to breathe. A painful cry escapes his mouth followed by many others. I don't know how to console him, I have never consoled an old person. I hush him until he falls asleep. I position him in a good sleeping position on the couch, I then cover him with a blanket.

I try working, but who am I fooling? My eyes and mind always travel back to Mthokozisi Khumalo. I stare at him. How can a stubborn man like him be this broken and fragile at the same time? This is the problem with us people. Once we see a hardcore person, we think that nothing affects them. Only to find out that they are the most broken ones. They are the ones that

need healing more than any of us. How can they, deal with their pain and heal when we always expect them to not show their emotions?

Just like how therapists also need a therapist to share things with, it simply shows that nobody can be emotionally strong and above.

3

I lie on top of the bed as I think about how my life is taking a turn. I never expected this to happen. And to think that my daughter will be back in few hours worries me more. How am I going to explain this, to her? Or maybe I should just kick Mr Khumalo out. No, that's not the solution, what if the poor man dies? His death would be on my hands. Argh! I feel like shouting my frustrations out.

"Please don't tell anyone," His voice is low and soft, just like how he looks, 'fragile' is the word.

"What are you on about?" I'm not about to make Mr Khumalo feel uncomfortable around me because he told me his secret. I wonder why he told me.

He sighs, hugging me.

"You need help," I say for the millionth time. I really want him to live like a normal person.

"I don't need help, I'm fine." He says heading back to the guest room. I follow him.

"You don't need help, huh?" I can feel myself heating up as I ask him.

"Yes, I don't." He simply replies.

"Okay. Then get the hell out of my house." I turn, but I stop as another thing comes to my mind. "Oh. And get yourself another lawyer!" I can now see the panic in his face, good. Before I can walk out of the guestroom, he pulls me to him. I try getting out of his hold, but is he strong!?

"You can't do that to me!"

"Oh, yes I can." I say through gritted teeth.

"Do you care about your little daughter, your flower?" He says letting me out of his hold. Without thinking, I throw a vase at

him. Luckily, he gets down. "Whooooa, easy tiger." I take few steps at him. My slap lands on his right cheek.

"Nobody threatens my baby, got it?" He chuckles placing his right hand on his cheek. I give him another tight slap on his left cheek. I see him heat up, this one stings, I see. "Get out

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you ungrateful b!tch of a son!" He looks down before looking me in the eye.

"I am not going anywhere. I'm here to stay for as long as i like." If this is how psycho people sound like, this one will end in a mental institution, I swear.

"In whose house?"

"Yours, of course, sweetheart." Hileyi mihlolo! Nitaku swi yini mina leswi?

"I'm calling your mother, I can't deal." I honestly can't. I wonder why Mpho gave me this client of hers! I walk out of the

guestroom. I run to my room and lock the door after me.
Khumalo is unpredictable.

"Tsakani, open this door." He bangs on my door as if he knows how much that door cost me!

I act like I'm on a phone call with his mother. He stops banging the door. "Greetings, Ma... Yebo... Mthokozisi is stripping me of my rights. Please come and get him soon. Thank you. I will be waiting. Bye bye."

"Do you realize what you have just done?" He sounds defeated, as if I care, tsk.

"I can call her and say that it was a prank ordered by you, you know." I smirk.

"Please do!" He cries.

"Are you prepared to do everything I order you to do?" I test the waters.

"You pushing it, now."

"Get ready then," I sit on my bed and relax as I wait for his answer, patiently.

"I will do everything you say." I smirk as I take out my other phone and record him.

"Say, I Mthokozisi Khumalo, will cooperate with Ms. Mabasa, who is my lawyer." He repeats after me. "I shall stay out of trouble and let my lawyer continue living her life, peacefully, without me troubling her."

"What? I'm not troubling..."

"Khumalo."

"Fine! I, Khumalo, shall stay out of trouble and let my lawyer continue living her life, peacefully, without me troubling her."
He repeats, sulking.

I stop recording. I laugh as I pretend to talk to his mother again, telling 'his mother' what Khumalo wanted to hear. Being a lawyer comes with its fun.

4

Wondering about what I will say to Xiluva has me feeling in a strange way. I hate lying to my flower, I really do. I don't want her to grow up being a liar, and her reason for that would be, 'My mom taught me how to be a professional liar.' I can only imagine that at this point, but never again! I've decided to let Khumalo talk to Xiluva. He's the reason why I'm in this situation, so why not?

"I can't do that. I'm not good with kids."

"I don't care. It's either you do that or see yourself out."

"You such a bully!"

"Oh, am I? I'm not the one that always gets into trouble and hope for my lawyer to bail me out." I huff.

"I pay you," He says while marinating the meat. He is not going to stay here for free, he has to do some chores and cooking is one of them.

"Remind me to make you pay for living here as my roommate."

"Why do lawyers love money, this much?"

"It's not about money. It's about the things you make us do, the things you make us go through, not leaving out the paperwork!"

"You chose that career for yourselves!" Wow! Can somebody explain to this man right here, how being a lawyer feels?

"Let's just drop this," Khumalo can drain your energy out of you. I feel for the woman he is going to marry.

"No, we not..."

"Why do you love debating?" I ask, cause WOW! The man is always up for a debate, in other words, he is always ready to argue, in a good way though.

"Talking this much always helps, you know?" I nod. Hello, I don't even know what he means! He chuckles, did he see right through me? "You don't have to agree in order to avoid my explanation, I was going to explain to you

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either way..." Here we go again!

I look at him, as he patiently explains to Xiluva why he will be staying with us for few weeks.

"People want to take my life away from me, that's why I have to hide." He finishes off.

"Did you do something bad?" Xiluva asks biting her lips.

"No,"

"Then why are they after you?" Trust Xiluva to do interrogation on a person she barely knows!

"They want my fame," Xiluva looks at me before turning to look at Khumalo, again.

"What's fame?"

"It is the state of being famous,"

She does a confused face.

"Uncle Mtho here, is known by everybody, like a celebrity is."

"Ohhh," Mthokozisi and I burst out laughing.

"I think that will be enough interrogation,"

"But, Mom."

"We don't want you to miss your sleeping time, now do we?"

"No, we don't."

"Good. Let's have you bathed so that you can eat," I tickle her before picking her up as she continues laughing. I would die to hear this kind of laughter.

"You good at this thing, you know." I say to Khumalo making my way inside the kitchen, after putting Xiluva to bed.

"You lie," He frowns.

"I'm not lying. I'm just being honest. Why would I lie? To boost your ego?" He grins. "Oh, please!"

"What am I going to do in this house tomorrow?"

"I will borrow you my office for as long as you here. But please don't go anywhere near my files. You can do gardening if you

would like, nobody will see you. You can do anything, actually, just don't turn my house upside down."

"Thank you, I really appreciate it." I smile as I say my goodnights, leaving him watching an action movie.

Chapter 5

"Ma'am, Mr Grey is asking for you." I sigh, standing up.

"Thank you, Suzanne," She nods.

I quickly walk to Mr Grey's office, that man is impatient!
Working with him is a nightmare, these are times where I miss our old boss, Martin, he didn't abuse his powers. I breathe in as I knock.

"Come in," He shouts sounding like a person on top of the world. I enter.

"Good Morning, Sir."

"Morning, you can take a seat. This won't be long, did you know that, Mr Khumalo is missing?" I grasp.

"No, I didn't. When did this happen?"

"During the weekend," I nod as he buries his face in his hand.

"Can I take your leave?" He nods.

Working my ass out is one of the things I'm good at. Life taught me many things, in a hard way. If my parents hadn't disowned me, I don't think my life would've been this way. I still don't get why daughters have to be the innocent children. I started drifting away from my brothers the day my parents kicked me out. Luckily Michael's parents were still in the country, I don't know what I would've done if their flight wasn't cancelled. I started believing in God, more than I did, that particular day. If it was up to me I would personally thank God, for all he has done for me.

"You should be eating at this time," I look up to see her glowing face. Thank God, I didn't see her when she knocked, otherwise...

"Mommy!" I run up to her. She accepts my hugs and kisses.

"What did I say about working during lunchtime?" Her worried expression is hard to miss. "Michael wouldn't like this at all,"

"Mom

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" I say in a low tone. Talking about him with her always brings me into tears. Seven years since he was murdered, but it still feels hard to talk about him.

"Baby, when are you going to move on?" She asks, striking my hair as I lay my head on her thigh. I sigh.

"It's hard," It truly is. I can't picture myself with another man. I feel like I would be betraying Michael.

"You have to move on," I say nothing. "I've been dreaming of him." A smile creeps in.

"Is he happy?" She giggles.

"As he was, before." I nod. Why doesn't he visit my dreams nowadays? "We visiting his grave, later on. Want to join us?"

"I can never refuse that invite,"

"Oh, my baby, I wish I could get rid of the pain you still holding on to."

That's what she always says. She tried, oh God, knows she did and she still does. When one doesn't want help, there is nothing that can be done to help that person. I thought that she would get tired of me, but who was I kidding. That woman loves me more than my own biological mother once did.

Getting ready to go to the graveyards is always hard, to me. I always want to look gorgeous, for my man. The man I still love, even though he is dead.

"You look amazing!" Khumalo compliments me as I walk out of my room. He looks at my eyes, before looking down at his feet.

"You can come with us,"

"I don't think so, this is supposed to be family only."

"You will stay in the car then, my parents will join you after leaving me alone at his grave." He nods, uncertain of what he is about to do. He eventually goes to change before we hit the road. Luckily my windows are black tinted. I look at him through the rear-view mirror of the car as he plays with Xiluva.

"You will be a good father," He laughs as I smile.

"Does it mean that he will be my father?"

"No..."

"Yes, that's what your mother is saying." I look at him, he assures me that it's fine. I don't like this at all. I don't want to confuse my baby. I'm sure Michael is turning in his grave!

6

We fetched Michael's parents on our way to the graveyards. We clean his tombstone before putting the flowers bought for him on top of it.

"Oh, my baby. You've been gone for years, but it feels like a decade. The pain, the endless pain is more than the pain I had yesterday. But through it all, I have my beautiful granddaughter, Xiluva, a blessing she is. I don't think we could have survived without you, if it wasn't for her. Thank you," Tears flow down her cheeks. There's nothing that can be more painful than seeing your parents cry. Seeing them break down feels like the earth is crumbling down, itself. You feel like taking their pain and making it yours. "May your soul continue resting in peace," Michael's mother says nothing but walks away in her husband's arms, crying.

"Mommy, I want to go." Xiluva has always been scared of situations like this. I can't force her to deal with it the way I do. So I let her follow her grandparents.

I look at Michael's tombstone without saying anything. A moment of silence is all I need.

"I cannot do this, I just can't." I say, I couldn't think of a better way to start venting out. "Losing you was... It was hard, not only to me but to all your loved ones. I've gotten tired of asking you why you left me to face this evil world, alone. I've gotten tired of holding on to the past, I want to feel loved. I need someone to hold me tight, just like how you would. I need... I need to let my heart heal. I need to let go of you. My love for you will always live..."

I sigh, as my heart starts aching. My breathing pattern changes. I forget how to breath as a lump forms in my throat. A painful sob comes out. My knees come to contact with the earth. Rain pours down, without a warning. My body feels numb. I feel like a statue. I try getting up, as hard as it is. I say my last words as I turn to walk away. Yes, walking away... from all the loneliness, the pain and from the heart that had walls built around it, for Michael. My knees feel more weaker, I can feel myself going down with each step I take. As I'm about to hit the ground again

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he holds me. I look at him as I smile, faintly.

Waking up in my bed comes as a shock to me. I try thinking about how I got here, but it all leads to no ends.

"Don't think too hard," A voice echoes in my room.

"WTF!" I shout.

"Sorry,"

"You startled me!"

"I said I'm sorry, though. What more can I say or do?" Argh! Khumalo Mthokozisi is... No word can even describe this man. "The doctor said that you should have rest."

"I'm fine,"

"You not fine, you have to rest. And believe me, you will rest." I roll my eyes. "Like it or not,"

"Khumalo, I don't remember getting married to you, so please."
He sighs.

"Why are you so difficult?" I gasp.

"Me? Difficult? No no no. I'm not difficult, you are the one who is difficult."

"I really don't want to argue with you. So, go take a shower, I will make you a hot plate." I mumble.

"I am not going to repeat myself, young lady!" I quickly jump out of the bed.

"God! Why did you do that!?"

"To get your reaction, of course." He says walking out of the room, chuckling.

I decide to take a bath instead of a shower I was ordered to take. Relaxation is what I really need. At that, I'm calling in sick at work. I'm certain that Xiluva is at her grandparents' house.

"Don't drown yourself in there!" I sigh. I wear my long pyjamas as it's freezing.

"You... you irritating you know?"

"She hates me," He makes a sad face, before making a serious face. "Oh, I don't care." I laugh.

"Are you gay?" I ask stuffing myself with food.

"No, I learnt this from my nieces." He smiles pulling me close to him.

"What are you doing?"

"It's cold, I want you to warm me up."

"I'm eating," I frown.

"I will feed you." I smile, thinking about my unforgettable memories.

7

Waking up in big warm arms, is the best feeling. Maybe it's because it's been long since I slept in someone's arms. I know Khumalo is my client, but the warmth. I smile as he pulls me closer to him.

"You squeezing me,"

"You say it like you don't like it."

"I'm serious, you hurting me."

"Sorry," He unwrap me from his arms.

"Why did you do that?"

"I thought you said..."

"I was kidding," I say getting in his arms. He kisses my forehead.
"Xiluva,"

"She is fine."

"Okay. Thank you for being there for me, yesterday."

"It's only a pleasure. I'm glad I could help." He pulls me closer to him, making me feel his crotch in the process. 'I need to release!' I say internally before getting ready for the day. I've already called in sick, so I'm free! Thank God.

"Hello,"

"Good morning, ma'am. Ms. Mabasa, you are needed in the office."

"I'm not feeling well, I've already reported."

"This is important, ma'am." What could be more important than my own health! I sigh.

I bid my farewells to Khumalo, before driving to work in my homewear. I feel comfortable in my grey sweatpants, more reason why I prefer wearing them at home.

"I really don't like this!" I shout as I walk inside my office. "Mrs Smith," I shake her hand before taking a seat.

"My husband is threatening to take the kids away from me, if I divorce him."

"Mrs Smith, I did warn you, didn't I? I asked you to weigh your options but you reluctantly refused to do so."

"I sincerely apologize

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"

"Your apology won't get us out of this mess. You taking us back to square one. I'm good at what I do, I'm not going to lose this case because of your selfishness."

"I pay you,"

"We doing this my way,"

"But..."

"It's final!"

"I really don't appreciate the tone you just used Mabaso,"

"Mabasa." I correct her. "I don't care if you appreciate my tone or not! We've been going back and forth, for what!?"

"I did apologize!"

"Like hell you did!"

This is what I hate mostly, dealing with clients that think they know best. I mean like, who studied law between me and them? I did! Therefore I expect their commitment, honesty so we don't keep on going backwards. Yes, they pay me. But their money won't make me win their cases when they don't entirely give me the details I asked for.

"Mr Grey, you asked for me?"

"You may take a seat, I've received a complaint from your client. I really don't like the way you dealt with the situation." I sigh. "This is not good for our law firm,"

"With all due respect, you definitely can't expect me to react nicely to being called at work when I should be resting, now do you? How many times do I apply for a leave in a year? Let alone a day off! Mrs Smith can't control everything around her. If it wasn't for her lies! I would know which direction her case is leading, but no! I'm still in the darkness regarding the details I

should have long known. If you don't mind, I ask you to get another lawyer for her, cause I really can't deal."

"Tsakani, that is not necessary." Oh yes, it is! "I will talk to her,"

"That would be appreciated. But I'm not going to change my mind regarding the case, Sir. Can I now leave?"

"Yes,"

I go back home after leaving the building. I need to see my baby!

8

"I really can't deal with this moody you,"

"Please leave me alone." I say, burying my face in my pillow.

"I have a surprise for you," Surprise? For me? "Come."

I follow him, shocked.

"Oh my word!" I jump on him. A spa treatment brought straight to me! My biggest surprise is when I see Xiluva and her grandparents already through it.

Ever felt like a heavy burden has been removed from your shoulders? That's how I feel, right now. Maybe this is what I needed, this spa treatment showed me that I have to pay attention to myself as much as I do to my work. I feel like a new person.

"Thank you,"

"It's no big deal. You all needed this. That was nothing compared to what you doing for me, so thank you."

"You not a bad person, after all."

He chuckles, the kind of man chuckle that can make you feel like you in heaven. We have few conversations while cooking.

"Are you sure, you not dating?"

"Mommy,"

"What? She is asking because of the way you are acting," Dad says grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge.

"And you need to move on,"

"I will okay. Now please stop with this conversation,"

"It's not over,"

"I know," I shout, laughing, as they walk away holding hands.

"Don't mind them,"

He laughs, caressing my chin.

"They are being truthful. We would make a great couple. It's no lie that my Mom also wants a good daughter-in-law,"

"I'm sure she has plenty of them,"

"She does have plenty of daughters in laws

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but they don't match the qualities she expected them to have."

I laugh, brushing what he said off. "I'm serious,"

"Ha ha ha, whatever!" We both laugh as we resume to our cooking.

"This tastes nice!" I laugh, rolling my eyes.

"Yummy," Xiluva also adds to the compliments Khumalo has been receiving.

"Thank you, it's no big deal." Khumalo says with a smile plastered on his face.

"My son, when you receive compliments, accept them wholeheartedly." Dad says, complimenting Khumalo more.

"I helped, you know?"

"We know," Mom rolls her eyes.

"Yeah yeah, we know Mom." My daughter is choosing Khumalo over me, okay!

"I'm so jealous and hurt right now," I laugh at how they have been dismissing me.

"Stick around, nkosazana, I will take you places." Khumalo rubs the salt to my wound.

"Whuu! Only if I had known,"

"We glad you didn't!" They say in unison before laughing.

"Wow, okay!" I say before joining in their laughter.

"Khumalo we need to talk about the case," He turns to look at me, frowning.

"Right now, let us finish putting the dishes first."

"You are something else, MaKhumalo."

Are those goosebumps I feel in my stomach? I swear I even forgot how they feel.

"MaKhumalo?" I say trying to hide the fact that I'm flattered.

"Yebo, angithi ngiyo shada wena. Makoti wa MaKhumalo the first,"

9

"So what really happened?" She sighs. "And I want nothing but the truth," I add.

"He cheated on me, with my best friend. By doing that, he drifted away from me, He was cold outside and inside our bedroom. I couldn't deal with it, to a point where I ended up seducing my own husband, He didn't barge in. My sexual frustrations were on another level," She gulps down the water in the glass. I take notes of important information.

"I then started paying attention to the chef, he fascinated me. He was everything a woman ever needed. To my surprise, he was interested in me too. So, we started satisfying one another's needs. It was the 'no label' kind of relationship. Things changed when he started being attracted to me, more than he was at first. We would go out with Bella and sometimes without her." Bella, being her daughter.

I decided that we should take a five minutes break, seeing that she was getting overwhelmed. I decided to call Khumalo.

"MaKhumalo,"

"Khumalo,"

Both of us kept quiet.

"I'm sure that you needed call me to keep quiet." I laugh.

"I don't even know why I called you,"

"You couldn't stay away from me, just like a wife does."

"Don't flatter yourself, Khumalo."

"Oh, I don't need to."

"Bye, we will talk later."

"Ah, bye."

.

"Please continue,"

"My best friend got proposed by her two years boyfriend. Richard would beat me up without a reason

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get drunk and sleep out. When Richard found out that my best friend, Alicia, was pregnant and that she was planning on pinning the pregnancy on her fiance, he totally lost it.

I didn't involve myself in their issues. Richard got Alicia to stay with us. They would play lovey dovey in front of me, and I would do nothing about it. Until I decided that it was enough. I would go on vacations with Daniel, the chef, and my daughter."

"Mr Smith didn't mind at all?"

"No, he didn't care about what I did until Alicia happened. He then stopped me from going out, but that didn't stop me from seeing Daniel, since he is our chef. I then found out that I was pregnant,"

"With whose child?"

"Daniel,"

"Does Mr Smith know?"

"No, I kept my pregnancy a secret and it wasn't hard doing so since all his attention was on Alicia."

"What led to you filing for a divorce?"

"Daniel, he introduced me to his family as his girlfriend and the mother to his unborn baby. They welcomed me and Bella warmly. Even when Daniel is not around, they always show me love. That's when I realized that I have a choice."

"A choice?"

"Yes, of walking away from a toxic relationship and house. Why settle for less when you can have more?"

"You didn't get married in community of property, right?"

"Yes, that was the agreement between both of us."

"Besides the custody of Bella, what is your soon to be ex husband fighting you for?"

"My money, I started a business with the help of Daniel months ago, and it's booming. He didn't know about it till recently."

"Your case is strong. So relax and look after the little one."

"Ones," She corrects me.

"Wow. The little ones. We will meet in the next two coming weeks. But if you have something to let me know of, feel free to pass by."

"Thank you." We shake hands before she walks out and I bury myself in paper work.

10

Here I am encouraging Khumalo, to call his mother. Besides him confessing that he misses her, I know that Mrs Khumalo is worried about him. As a parent, it is easier for me to relate to how other parents feel, which is quite normal to me.

"Just call her, Khumalo."

"I don't want to miss her more,"

"Just to assure her that you safe."

"Okay, fine." He says before dialling Mrs Khumalo the first's cell phone number. "Ma,"

I give him some space by helping Xiluva with her homework. Helping a child that thinks that she knows too much, is hard. In conclusion, helping Xiluva with her homework is a difficult task.

"Mommy, what's this word?" That helped because, Xiluva, allowed me to help her without claiming that she 'knows', children! I made sure that she understood before I could start cooking dinner. Many parents tend to call their children 'stupid and unfocused', when they don't understand. This breaks our children from a young age. You cannot expect a child to be normal when all you do is discourage her/him. I would advise parents to stop doing so because not only are they making their children feel unloved and dumb but they are also ruining their future. The future of our country also lies in how parents raise their children.

"How do you feel, after speaking to your mother?" He shrugs. I wonder what made him be in a sour mood, I thought him speaking to his mother would make him happy.

"Can I ask you a question

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since you are a mother too?"

"Yes, feel free to ask anything."

"Would you leave Xiluva to be raised by your friend?"

"To be honest, no."

"Why?" I really don't like where this is heading.

"Because I can never trust another person raise my child, let it be a friend or family member, never."

"Why can't you trust another person with Xiluva?"

"I know that many parents don't see it this way, but I am going to say it, as much as it hurts. You can never know who hates and loves you. Family members and friends are the first thing that leads to you being doomed. Imagine giving away your child to a family member or a friend because you believe that they will treat him/her right? Why? I mean like you have no guarantee about the way they will treat your child. In some other cases, children are bewitched by those people, so can you even imagine how your child's future will be like? Plethora of

those children are emotionally and physically abused by the people that were trusted to take care of them."

"So what are you trying to say?"

"What I'm trying to say is that as much as you trust somebody, never trust them with your responsibilities."

"What if their parents passed away?"

"That's where life gets real. I won't comment on that,"

"What's your opinion then?" He asks following me around like a lost puppy.

"My opinion won't really matter in that situation, because if I were to say that they should give the children up for adoption, the response that I'm going to get is that, 'that's where children become sex slaves and are used as drug mules...'

"Another opinion?"

"A family member that wants to takes care of them should be the one taking care of them, the response I'm going to get is that, 'that's where they are mostly treated like they not human beings. If it's not emotional abuse it's physical abuse,'

"Wow," He sighs.

11

"You've been down ever since that call,"

"My mom is just too much sometimes."

"Meaning?"

"She considers everyone to be her friend. That's one of the reasons for my current mental state."

"Does she know?"

"Even if she did know, nothing is going to change what happened back there." I nod. "How I wish that I had ran away from that orphanage, that way the Khumalos wouldn't have found me."

"Are you not happy about having your family?"

"No,"

"Why?" I clear my throat as he looks at me, directly. "What I mean is that, many kids from those homes would die to be you right now..."

"They shouldn't. It's not as good as it looks." With that said he goes to sleep, leaving me to battle with my mind. I go to sleep too, alone. Xiluva has been using her room, something I thought she would have done when she was a teenager, but I was so wrong. A knock startle me, in the middle of the night. I rub my eyes before going to open the door.

"Shouldn't you be sleeping?" I question standing by the door.

"I couldn't sleep. Can I please sleep with you. I won't do anything, I just want to hold you."

"I don't know,"

"Please,"

"I hate this," I say as he spoons me.

"What?"

"What we are doing right now. I don't want to get attached to you,"

"Let's get married then."

"You full of jokes, Khumalo."

"I'm serious. Plus we not getting any younger,"

"In that case, you still have to ask me out."

"That's for teenagers," I laugh.

"Having a child doesn't simply mean that I'm old

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even grannies get asked out."

"You full of surprises, Mabasa."

"So are you," I state before laying my head on his chest. He pulls me closer to him, by my waist before kissing my forehead.

"The case,"

"MaKhumalo, you can't expect us to discuss business issues inside the bedroom."

"The date is nearing, Khumalo."

"I'm here, angithi."

"Your family?"

"I'm sure by now they know that I'm safe. MaKhumalo the first, can't keep a secret," I laugh, that's before he lands his hand on my butt.

"Mtho,"

"Shh. I won't take advantage of you, I'm not that type of a man."

"You can never know," I place my hand on his chest. "Do you have a girlfriend?" I seriously don't know where that came from! He chuckles.

"Jealous much?"

"So you have one?"

"Did you think that a man like me could be single?" Wow!

"Then this is completely disrespectful," I say trying to get out of his hold.

"To whom?" He says squeezing me.

"Your girlfriend,"

"She is not here, right?"

"I don't care, Khumalo. Get out of my room."

"Ang'funi,"

"What did I expect from you? The least you could do is to stop touching me, then."

"Not when I'm this warm!" I sigh before positioning myself in an awkward position, because of Khumalo.

12

Getting out of Khumalo's grip was hard work! Xiluva did her things slow, her teacher asking to speak to me and not having breakfast. Now I'm stuck in traffic, to top it up. 'Late' is an understatement, I'm 'EXTREMELY late!', that's more like it because I can relate to it right now. Thank God, I have no meetings scheduled for this morning.

"Good morning, Suzanne. Any messages for me?"

"I have e-mailed all of them to you due to them being important. And there's a woman waiting for you inside,"

"But I got no meeting this morning?"

"Yes, ma'am. She is not your client. Sorry to say this, but she sure does look like you."

"Do I know this woman?"

"I don't know, ma'am. But it's not the first time she came here, looking for you. Last time, she went out running."

"Thank you, Suzanne." She nods before laying attention to her laptop.

"Good morning, ma'am." I greet, as I enter my office.

"Good morning to you too," That voice. I look at the woman. It's her, the woman who vowed to never come back into my life.

"What are you doing, here?"

It's been five hours since that woman left from here. That woman ruined my day, maybe I should include weeks, which will gradually turn into months! Ever felt like your enemies are behind you, close to destroying you? That's how I feel right now. I feel like packing up and going back home. I just need to rest right now. I shouldn't think about her. I start working on Khumalo's case.

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MAKHUMALO, THE FIRST

"Why can't I track this boy!?" My husband yells.

"Myeni wam, relax."

"She is right

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relax, Khumalo." Portia says, holding my husband's shoulder.

"Hands off," I say. She doesn't hear me as she is busy running her hand up and down Khumalo's shoulder. "I said hands off, Portia!" I roar. This is not me being insecure, this is me protecting what's mine.

"Oh, sorry." Khumalo laughs pushing her out of his way.

"Portia, that's my husband. I don't care about how long we've been friends, you better stay in your lane, I don't play when it comes to my marriage." I click my tongue. "Oh, and thanks for your support, but you've overstayed your visit."

"Are you kicking me out?"

"I'm telling you what is the truth. Visitors come and go, they don't overstay their visit, just like you have."

"Mthokozisi is my son, too!"

"Is it? Did you carry him in your womb?"

"I helped you all,"

"And we showed our gratitude, didn't we do so, Mrs Dlamini?"

"Dont call me that," I chuckle, walking away.

I still can't wrap my head around the fact that there are some women out there, that ruin their marriages, with hopes of ruining other people's marriages. Women carry too much hatred towards one another and it's not even funny. This is one of the reasons why our 'rainbow nation' is not fit to be called one. Why do women have to be the ones ruining other women's lives?

"MaKhumalo?"

"I'm coming," I say, heading towards the living room.

13

Dropping Xiluva at her grandparents before going back home, got me more tired, luckily I won't have to cook tonight. I still can't believe that Xiluva loves going to her grandparents' place, because she has friends over there. If it wasn't for Khumalo, my flower would've endured the boredom here, for me.

"Look who's home," Khumalo hugs me. "What do you have there? It smells good," He says taking away the containers I had in my hands.

"Dinner, I'm not cooking tonight, I'm tired." I say, taking off my heels. "I'm going to take a nap,"

"Okay, I will wake you up when it's time for dinner."

"Thank you," I say before dragging my legs to my room.

~~~

"Run, run, Tsakani!"

"But we having so much fun," I sulk.

"He is coming, he is coming for you!"

"Who?" I asked, clearly confused.

"Just run, Tsakani!"

"I can't leave you here all alone!"

"Run, please just run." His voice fades away with each and every single word he says. Out of the blue, a lion comes running towards us. I try to run, but my legs are paralyzed. I look at my flower, that I'm holding in my arms, I kiss her forehead. I look up to see how far the lion is, only for it to snatch Xiluva away from me. The lion runs away with my flower with her calling out for me. I cry and yell.

I look around me. Many people around me, but nobody tries to help me. I try calling out to those that I know, but that also leads to nothing. Suddenly my reflection appears in front of me

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the tears that I've been crying are not there, nor are they dried up. The sadness I feel inside my heart, is reflected by happiness. The frown on my face is replaced by a smile, a genuine smile.

~~~

"MaKhumalo," He shakes me. I try opening my eyes, but it feels like hard work. He kisses me, my eyes shoot open. He laughs, joining me in bed.

"So you love my kisses?"

"Why would I, Khumalo?"

"A question on top of a question? Uya rob, Tsakani."

"I don't enjoy your kisses, Khumalo."

"Is it?" He asks, French kissing me. I respond to the kiss.

"Please get something to do,"

"Like what, MaKhumalo?"

"Call your girlfriend," I say, changing my bed position.

"Are we not jealous?"

"Keep on dreaming,"

"I don't have a girlfriend, MaKhumalo."

"But you said..."

"I lied," I turn to look at him.

"Get out of my bedroom,"

"Shouldn't you be happy, that I'm all yours?"

"All mine? You lied!"

"I'm sorry."

"Out!"

"Yhoo, women!" He says getting out of the covers. "Please freshen up, it's almost dinner time."

"Okay," I get out of my bed covers, I don't even bother fixing the bed. I take a cold shower. I wear my summer pyjamas, before going to the living room. The power supply goes off. It's dark, I don't even know where I had left my phone. "Khumalo?"

"I'm coming, sthandwa sentlitiyo yam." One would swear that Khumalo is in his early twenties!

14

°°Two weeks later°°

"Mrs Smith,"

"Please call me Blue," I nod.

"Are you ready?"

"I am more than the word, 'ready'. After all of this, my life will be in order."

"Let's go inside," We both go into the courtroom, I look at her, 'determination', I like. Both of us settle down. The daggers the Smith's are throwing at one another! Judge Robyn walks in.

"All rise in court," All of us rise and wait for the Judge to sit down before being told to settle down. "We are gathered here regarding the divorce of Blue and Richrd Smith. Mr John, you may start."

"Thank you, your honour. I would like to call my first witness, Mrs Smith, may you please take a stand." Blue swears on the bible to tell nothing but the truth while having placed her left hand on her chest. "Mrs Smith, how long have you been married to Richard Smith?"

"For five years,"

"What made you apply for divorce?"

"I have my own personal reasons, that I cannot share."

"Mrs Smith, it's necessary for you to tell the court your reasons for wanting a divorce, if not, the divorce will not take place." Judge Robyn says. Blue looks at me, she sighs, I gesture to her that it is okay.

"I've fallen out of love, my honour."

"Is it because there's another man in your life, Mrs Smith?"

"That wouldn't be enough, to divorce my husband, Mr John."
Note the sarcasm.

"That would be all, Mrs Smith, thank you. I would love to call in my second witness, Ms. Alicia Brown." She takes a stand and also swears on the bible. "Ms. Brown, I believe that you are Mrs Smith's best friend. And you must know her more than anyone,"

"Used to," She corrects him. "And yes," She adds.

"How committed was Mrs Smith to Mr Smith?"

"Very committed," He nods.

"What do you think could have been the reason for Mrs Smith to always be gone on weekends?"

"That's obvious, the girl went out to have some fun."

"Any idea with who Mrs Smith could've been having fun with?"

"Friends if not a man,"

"Thank you, Ms. Brown. That will be all," Richard Smith is called to take a stand.

"Mr Smith, what do you think could be the reason for Mrs Smith for wanting a divorce?"

"I think it's because of wanting to chow the profit she made with my money

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in her business. If that's not the reason, I think she has finally realized that she hadn't been taking her duties as a wife, seriously."

"You mentioned something about profit earned?"

"Yes, my wife over here, built a company, a company that happens to be doing good."

"And how is that your problem, Mr Smith?"

"I want the money that was used to build that company, as it is my money. If she doesn't have the money, shares are what I deserve," Blue laughs.

"Order in court,"

"I apologize for my client's behaviour, your honour." The judge nods.

"That will be all. Thank you, your honour." Mr John sits down. I guess that's my queue to do what I'm best at.

"Your honour, I don't think I have enough reasons to call my witnesses to take a stand, therefore I would like to tell you the

exact reason why my client applied for divorce and why her husband won't be able to get the money he is talking about. May I continue your honour?"

"Yes, you may, but should I feel the need to call them, I will."

"Yes, your honour. The reason that Mrs Blue Smith wants to divorce Mr Richard Smith, is because of him breaking his wedding vows."

"How did Mr Richard Smith break his vows, if I may ask?" Mr John asks, standing up.

"Your client over here, cheated on his wife with her best friend, Alicia Brown. They had sexual intercourse, which led to Ms. Brown falling pregnant, as you can see the state she is in."

"Do you have proof of what you accusing his client of, Ms. Mabasa?"

"Yes, your honour." I hand in the evidence. I notice Blue sweating, I hand her a glass of water before telling her to relax.

"Please continue, Ms. Mabasa."

"The money that was used to build Peterson's decor and dine was not Mr Richard Smith," I say handing in more evidence. I look at Richard Smith, he looks at me, fuming. I smirk at him. "That will be all, your honour." I say taking a seat. Fifteen minutes of silence in court has all of us thinking about what the outcome of this case will be.

"The Senate Court has come to its final decision, the divorce will be finalized. And Mr Smith won't be getting any money from Ms. Harrison. All rise in court!" We all rise as the Judge walks out. Blue and Richard sign the divorce papers. I and Mr John wait for them to finish up while engaging in a conversation.

"That was not hard now, was it?" I direct my question to Mr Smith, he clicks his tongue making me laugh. So the man here, is used to getting whatever he wants? We talk about Bella's custody, and Mr John really helped by convincing his client to let Bella stay with Blue, while he focuses on his unborn baby. Blue hugs me before we go our separate ways.

15

"Sthandwa sam?" I call out as I open the door.

"I'm coming," I settle on the couch before taking off my heels.

"Whooa, you look like you have been hit by a truck,"

"You don't want to know,"

"Hectic day?"

"I had a chat with Satan, himself,"

"I'll be back, okay?" I nod, I close my eyes, as soon as I feel myself getting sleepy, I'm picked up.

"I want to sleep, baby."

"I've prepared a bath for you and you still have to eat." I mumble balancing myself in his arms. He undresses me before

putting me inside the bathtub. He ties my hair and washes my face.

"I can't do this,"

"What?" I open my eyes, only for them to close.

"Your body, your body is tempting. Bath yourself, I will dish up."

"Bath me, I'm tired."

"Oh Lord, lead me not into temptations." He says before bathing me. He washed my breasts, with his eyes closed, I laughed at him until he ended up caressing them. He heavily sighs while taking off my g-string. He makes me wash my vagina. He takes me out of the bathtub and carries me to the bedroom, I feel like a baby right now. He lotions me while frequently swearing. I shoot my eyes open, I look at his small red eyes, my eyes land on his crotch, I gasp. "Look at what you did to me," He says attacking my lips with his. He caresses each and every part of my body... [

"That was," I say before getting cut off.

"Amazing?"

"More than amazing! I don't even remember the day somebody worshipped my body, just like you did."

"Can you please stop?"

"Stop what?" He looks at me before looking down at himself.

"Oh

sorry big man." He chuckles, walking away.

"Baby, I want to introduce you to my parents."

"It's still too soon, Khumalo." Yes, the one and only Khumalo that you know. The one that happens to be living with me.

"It's never too soon when you know what you want, nkosazana." I sigh.

"Can we please wait for at least three months?" He sighs, sadness takes over what used to be happiness. It's not that I don't trust Khumalo. I just don't want us to move too fast, that would ... I don't know, kill the vibe between us? "Please don't be sad,"

"I will be fine," He says, kissing my forehead. This is what I love about Khumalo, he doesn't force things and he is understanding. What more can a girl want? I actually consider myself the luckiest person right now. To have a beautiful and a loving daughter and a man that knows what he wants, by your side, is a complete mood! This is what they mean by 'God, is not only alive but he also answers your prayers at the right time.' I can't believe that my life is taking a turn this quickly, two weeks ago, I was a woman who thought that no man can ever reach out to her heart besides her late lover. People who really know the word of God, are not impatient, those that are not patient, are not God's followers. The period you have to wait for your prayers to come true, is not important, what is important is that your prayers will come true, at the end.

"Ngiyak'thanda," I say kissing his right hand.

"Nam ngiyak'thanda, MaKhumalo omuhle." A man that knows what to say to his lover, is a keeper.

16

"Thank you, nkosazana." Bab'Khumalo says hugging me. I'm shocked! Bab'Khumalo is that kind of guy that hardly smiles, in order words, he is intimidating.

"It's my work, Baba." I say, pulling out of the hug.

"How did you win that case, in just one day!? I thought that we would come back," A woman says putting her hands on her waist.

"I'm good at what I do,"

"Hayi, ang'vumi. Usebenzisa umuthi wena,"

"Portia, hay mahn!" Mrs Khumalo the first, saves me from this woman.

"But,"

"Don't stand near Tsakani," Mthokozisi directs that to Mam' Portia.

"Haibo, Khumalo." His younger brother, Mxolisi protests.

"Mana wena,"

"I still don't get the reason why you hate me, I'm your like your other mother."

"My other mother, my left foot."

"It was nice doing business with you. I need to get going,"

"Thank you for saving his arse," Bab'Khumalo's first born, Mkhuseleli, says hugging me.

"Hands off,"

"Une drama," His mother says.

"Bye-bye'ini."

"I'm driving you home."

"WHAT!?" All of us say in unison.

"What? Just to show her that I'm thankful, haw."

"Hayini!"

"You? Thankful?"

"Mcm

" Mthokozisi says, taking my suitcase into his hands.

"Khumalo," Everybody stares at me. I quickly walk away.

"See you next time, daughter-in-law." Bab' Khumalo shouts, to say I'm embarrassed, it's an understatement. I don't even turn to look at him. That makes him laugh before telling me that there's no need for me to be shy!

"Your dad," I shake my head laughing, thinking about what had transpired few hours back.

"Don't mind him, you will get used to him."

"Let's hope so,"

"Mmh," He says kissing my neck, I tilt my head giving him full access to my neck.

"Khumalo,"

"Khuluma nam', bambo lwam." How do you reply to that? I try to put words together, but no words are making up a sentence that makes sense so I decide to keep quiet. "MaKhumalo?"

"Baba?"

"Khuluma nami," His right hand goes down to my coochie, where he moves my pantie to the side and massages my clit. He kisses me, as his middle finger slides in my coochie. I moan in his mouth as my hand massages his crotch on top of a pair of sweatpants, that he is wearing. His phone rings as he is about to take off my pantie, yes he switched on his phone, how I wish that he was still using the private one.

"Don't answer, please." I beg.

"I have to, it could be important." He says putting me down on the couch. Just great! After his phone call, he kisses my lips and tells me that he will be back later on, since something apparently needs his attention. I decide to visit my daughter and her grandparents. I'm not about to stay here, all alone, never! I switch off my phone before taking a quick shower and changing into decent clothes.

Arriving at Michael's parents' house I got the biggest surprising. Seeing him there, looking all intimidating, felt like a dream. It feels like my past is trying to interfere with my present and future, and I want none of that. A man that ran away from home seven years ago has come back. Came back to his home and mostly, to disturb our process of healing. I wish that he hadn't remembered that he has a family that he left behind, as evil as it sounds, I don't care. This man once left us broken, we had to hire different agencies to look for him but nothing worked. It was like he had disappeared from the face of the earth, living no trace of him at all. I now feel like I hadn't left my house. I should've stayed behind, that way my nightmare wouldn't have come true.

"Mommy, mommy, look I have an uncle." Xiluva shouts pulling my hand.

"He is not your uncle, baby." I say, looking deep into his eyes which show no regret at all.

"But he said..."

"He lied. You never had an uncle since the day you were born, why trust him?"

"Bad man!" Xiluva shouts with her voice breaking.

"Tsakani," Michael's mother says hugging me.

"Mom, I came to fetch Xiluva."

"But Mommy you said that you would fetch me tomorrow."

"I know what I had said, I missed you."

"My daughter please don't leave because of him," Michael's dad tries reasoning with me. But I won't allow my daughter to stay behind and be brainwashed by this man. This man was nothing but pain and that's what he will be to us, he will be pain bringing us more pain. And that's something I will never recover from.

"I'm not leaving because of him. I'm leaving because I don't want to get suffocated," I say heading to Xiluva's room. I take her bag.

"Oh

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my baby, please don't do this."

"Xiluva will visit you next week, I want to spend some time with her before their school reopen."

"Don't forget that we love you, my daughter." Michael's dad says hugging me, before Michael's mother hugs me. I leave the house before that man opens his mouth.

"Where are we going, Mommy?"

"Somewhere far, where we have so much fun, together."

"Yeey!"

"Is Uncle Mtho coming too?"

"No, it will be just us." The drive will be long, but that's what I need right now, I need something that will keep me sane for now. I send Khumalo a message that states that he shouldn't bother looking for me and I declare my love for him. Knowing Khumalo he will try tracking me, luckily I left my switched off phone in my house. And I was clever enough to send Khumalo the message using a private phone. Just one week, one week away from everything and everybody.

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MTHOKOZISI KHUMALO

"What do you mean when you say that you can't track her? What do I pay you for?" I roar startling an innocent man that is trying by all means to track my wife, Tsakani.

"Hayi mahn, Mtho, calm down." That's my Mom trying to save the poor innocent investigator.

"I'm sorry," I apologize to the private investigator after calming down.

"Bhuti Mtho is whipped!" Mxolisi never lets go of a chance whereby he gets to mock me. Instead of helping me, like any sibling would do, the fool is finding all of this funny.

"Mxolisi!" There's no one that can handle the Khumalo sons beside our dads. I sit down on my office chair, scratching my head. It's been three days since Tsakani left to God knows. Our pictures and videos keep me sane, I hope that she is fine just like she had assured me in the message she had sent. If something was to happen to her, I would totally lose it.

Worrying about nothing feels good. Different type of air, vibe and place did help me in some way. Besides Limpopo's heat, there's nothing that would stop me from moving here. Being here made me wonder why my parents never brought us here. They would always lose their cool and become people we didn't know when we asked them. That didn't stop us from asking them until the unpleasant incident took place. Not only did my brother, Hlulani, suffer from that incident, but all my siblings, including me did.

"Mommy," Xiluva nudges me pulling me out of my not so good thoughts.

"Yes baby?"

"I miss Uncle Mtho," She says facing down and fiddles with her Cinderella dress.

"I thought that we had talked about this, Xiluva."

"I miss him a lot, Mommy." I sigh taking my private phone from where I had hid it before dialling his cell phone number.

"Hello?"

Silence.

"Haibo, is'khathi sok'dlala anginaso," When translated, they mean that 'i don't have time to play', I chuckle at that. "Hey-y! Wait... MaKhumalo?" His voice softens up.

"Khumalo,"

After what sounds like a heavy sigh, he asks me about my wellbeing.

"That question should be directed to you,"

"I'm not the one who's not at home,"

"In this short space, I learnt a lot about you, so please don't try to fool me."

"Let's not go there, please."

"Go where?"

"Where you will be exaggerating about things that don't need exaggeration."

"Wow..."

"Please don't forget that I was the one who missed Uncle Mtho," Xiluva says looking around the bedroom but not at me. Khumalo laughs.

"Kanti you didn't miss me, MaKhumalo?"

"I did, hawu."

"I find that hard to believe. Please give the person that missed me the phone."

"This is my phone

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I will do so when I want to."

"Mommy you being cheeky!"

"Talk to your favourite person then," I say, handing the phone over to her. I stand to be corrected, but that doesn't happen. My heart breaks, Khumalo is my daughter's favourite person! I watch Xiluva, bored as she keeps on talking to my man as if he's hers.

"I'm done, Mommy."

"I know. A whole hour watching you, thinking that you will get tired of talking. Thank you for proving me wrong, my flower."
She laughs.

"Jeje," Which is short for 'jealous' In her own words.

"I don't want you anymore, Khumalo."

Silence.

"Khumalo, did you hear me?" I say, placing my glass of juice down.

"Uthini?"

"I will not repeat myself,"

"Your vacation is driving you crazy, huh? When you come back, please come to my house and tell that to my face."

"I won't." Look at me behaving like a teenager!

"I will fuck you until you come back to your senses, ang'dlali mina, ngingu Khumalo, uyezwa?" That made me shiver. I could feel myself getting wet because of what he just said! I fan myself using my hand, I feel hot! Hotter than the heat I have been feeling here, in Limpopo.

"Bye-bye, Khumalo." I say after gulping ice cold water down my throat.

"Ngiyak'thanda, MaKhumalo."

"Ngiyak'thanda nami, Mntungwa."

"We using clan names, now?"

"Cha!" I say, as my face flushes. I hung up after blowing kisses to him.

"Somebody help!" A scream breaks. I quickly open my eyes, it goes silent for a while. Maybe, it's all in my head, I try convincing myself that before another scream fills up my ears. I'm not one to go outside after midnight, especially in a place I'm not familiar with. But here I am taking my chances, I kiss my baby's forehead getting out of the covers. I put on my robe before lighting the lights up. I go outside the house I'm currently renting with my phone in hand, Khumalo is on speed dial as I reach the gate. Somebody winces painfully making me shiver. I open the gate with my phone's torch on.

"Oh Lord, let it not be witches." I pray internally before checking who might be outside at this time. I'm about to go back to the house after checking the sides the person could possibly be, before I see a body laying just few centimetres from me. My heart breaks as my eyes land on the woman that is bleeding non-stop. Her clothing is torn, hair looks like it was close to being pulled out of her skull, her eyes look like they are about to shut down and her face is full of fingerprints and tears that are possibly close to drying up.

I quickly call the pastor that lives just next door to the house I'm currently renting, luckily he has a car. I leave Xiluva at the hands of his wife and rush to the nearest hospital we can find. Pastor Mulaudzi runs inside the hospital with the woman in his arms. Her lifeless body is taken from him and put on the stretcher, she is rushed down the hall. It all comes back that I've just helped a woman who was possibly manhandled. I shut my eyes as my body comes in contact with the cold floor. I tear up as I relate to the pain she must be feeling.

A Woman

A whole strong woman,

Possibly taken advantage of,

Possibly not given mercy

Her cries,

Her screams,

Fell into deaf ears

Her tired fighting body finally gave in to the pain,

The pain she has been feeling for long?,
Nobody knows except her and them/him

Is she strong enough to fight more?,
To fight for her life?,
Why her?,
Why us?

What reason does the opposite gender have for hating us this
much?,
Are we that unfortunate?

Where did all the love go?,
Have we failed this much, as parents?

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What happened?,
What happened to Africa?,
What happened to our rainbow nation?

Those are my thoughts as I try wiping my tears that keep on falling. Besides being a strong lawyer, I also am a human, a woman that has emotions.

"Tsakani, wake up." I groan rubbing my eyes.

"What time is it?" I ask trying to keep my heavy eyelids open.

"It's close to six am. Let's go, you need some rest. We will come back later on," I nod standing up from where I had dozed off. The drive home is silent, one could even hear the sound of a pin drop. I thank the Mulaudzis for their help before apologizing for disturbing them. I pick Xiluva up from the bed she was sleeping on, at the Mulaudzis. I hold her tightly as I walk over to my house, not wanting to wake her up. I put her on our bed, before trying to sleep. I finally give up and kneel by the bedside.

"Oh Lord,

Why have you forsaken us?

Have we become your enemies?

Where do you hide yourself when the most needy need your help?

What happened to protecting your creations?

Your world has become hell.

What happened to UBUNTU?

What happened to protecting your loved ones?

Who are we supposed to trust beside you if our loved ones are the ones responsible for our pain?

Nobody and nothing will ever change your world,

The damage is already done..."

"Khumalo,"

"MaKhumalo?" My tears fall uncontrollably at the sound of his voice. Is he one of them?

"I need you," I manage to say, with my trembling voice.

"Where are you? Can I come?"

"No, I just wanted to let you know that I will be back sooner than anticipated."

"Why you crying, MaKhumalo?"

"A woman was badly beaten up, just right out the yard I'm staying in."

"MaKhumalo, where are you?"

"I can't tell,"

"MaKhumalo, please." The sound of defeat in his voice makes me realize that he has a soft spot for women. Relieve washes over my body and mind.

"I will send you the location." I say before he tries engaging in a conversation with me even though I give him one word answers. I finally engage in the conversation after realizing that whatever I'm doing to his is unfair, as he is not at fault. I intend on waiting for him before I go back to check on that woman, at the hospital. I fall asleep on the couch when Khumalo sings for me.

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"Mommy,"

"Hm?"

"Why you sleeping on the sofa? Please wake up,"

"You hungry?" She nods. "Why didn't you wake me up?"

"I didn't want to disturb your sleep," I love how considerate my daughter is, even if it means that she has to sacrifice.

"Thank you, bhabha." I hug her. "Let's shower, okay?"

"Yes, Mommy!" Xiluva's maturity scares me sometimes. Are kids her age supposed to be this understanding? She is way too different from how I was at her age. One thing is that at her age I preferred playing more than bathing, but with her, it's different!

Xiluva is watching her favourite animated movie probably wondering why I had forbidden her to go outside and play. After what happened yesterday, I don't think I will ever allow Xiluva to play outside the yard. This is not me overreacting, but me protecting my baby before something happens to her. Parents are the only people who will understand how I'm feeling right now. Yes kids are supposed to learn the hard way, as it is said by our elders, but what if the hard way will leave an emotional scar in your children's lives?

"Baby?"

"Yes, Mommy?"

"Can I please steal you from your movie for a minute?" She nods. I pause the movie. "Leswi ni nga ku alela ku famba uya tlanga, aswi vuli kuri aniku rhandzi ani?" When translated it means that 'Only because I didn't allow you to go play, it doesn't mean that I don't love you, right?'

"I know, Mommy."

"Just that the streets are no longer safe for any child, be it a boy or a girl."

"I know, Mommy. Ma'am Khosa va hi byerile ekusuhi na loko xikolo xi ya eku pfaleni. When translated, it simply means that 'Ma'am Khosa told us when the school was close to closing.' I nod as a door knock comes through.

"Baby!" I jump on him as soon as my eyes land on him.

"The drama," Mxolisi says getting inside the house.

"Baby, why did you even bring him along?"

"You can ask that again," Mthokozisi says narrowing his eyes at Mxolisi who's now tickling Xiluva, making her laugh.

"Nkosazana yam," Xiluva faces our direction. Mxolisi stops tickling her. She runs up to us and hugs Khumalo's legs.

"Mommy, I want to hug Uncle Mtho."

"Hug him then,"

"But you are on his arms," She pouts.

"Oh, sorry." I say transferring myself from the front to his back.

"You choose well, mkhululwa." Mxolisi laughs.

"What happened?" He brushes my hands as I narrate the whole entire story, leaving nothing out.

"I missed you," I say resting my head on his lap.

"I missed you too

MaKhumalo." He says kissing my fingertips.

"You got here fast, the drive from Johannesburg to Limpopo is long."

"We used my private jet," I prepare food for both the Khumalo brothers. Mxolisi offers to take care of Xiluva without being asked, that shows his humanity or is it the love he has for children? I pack some clothes, fruits, juice and cookies for 'Blessing', that's what I will call her, since I don't know her name.

"Some more?" Mxolisi asked facing down, probably embarrassed of the way he is eating.

"Haibo, ndoda?"

"Hay Khumalo, if you don't want to eat, let your little brother eat." Khumalo raises his hands as a sigh of surrendering.

"As long as he will not get a potbelly,"

"I thought potbelly was Zulu men's pride," I say dishing out some food for Mxolisi. I really appreciate the fact that he asked for food again.

"Not all of us," Khumalo says standing behind me before grabbing my arse and kissing my neck, I tilt my head, giving him more access to my neck.

"As long as I'm full!" Mxolisi shouts from the living room.

"Don't embarrass us,"

"Don't mind him, if you want anything, you can search through the kitchen."

"Do you have some ice cream?"

"Yes,"

"Thank God!" Mxolisi's face beams up.

"Last time I checked, you hated ice cream."

"Things change, Daddy." Xiluva says as she does some signature style with Mxolisi.

"I know baby but..." He runs inside the living room.

"MaKhumalo pinch me,"

"Why would I do that?"

"Just do it," I pinch him. "Ouch," He says rubbing his shoulder, I laugh. "You evil, I didn't say that hard." I laugh it off along with Mxolisi. "Baby, what did you say?" He says kneeling before Xiluva.

"Things change, Daddy." Xiluva giggles.

"Baby, she called me 'Daddy'," He says hugging Xiluva before pulling the dumbstruck me into the hug. "She called me 'Daddy'," He repeats. After Michael's death, I had never thought that my little flower will one day call another man 'Dad'.

"She looks bad," Pastor Mulaudzi says walking closer to her. How can a human hurt another human? I hold Khumalo's hand and pull him to the left-hand side of the bed. I hold Khumalo's hand tightly as the sight of her is the sight that could lead to nightmares. Khumalo winces as I tighten my hold on his hand again.

"I'm sorry,"

"It's fine," He replies, as if what I have been doing is not hurting him.

"Tsakani Mabasa?" The doctor asks as she gets in followed by a male nurse.

"That's me," I say walking over to where she is standing, with Khumalo following me, of course.

"Can we please talk in my office, privately?" I nod. "Warren, please give the patient her injection." The male nurse, whom I

presume is Warren, walks over to Blessing. I and Khumalo follow the doctor to her office.

"Please take a seat. I'm Dr Mathebula, Lufuno Mukhari's doctor."

"She had regained her consciousness?" I ask because when I had left, she was said to be in an unconsciousness state.

"Yes. Ms. Mukhari has suffered a miscarriage."

"Did you tell her?"

"No, she found out by herself when she regained her consciousness and realized that her tummy was flat, that's when she lost it, so we had to sedate her." I nod, not liking the term that she used of 'lost'

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instead of another term.

"You said you wanted to talk about something?" Khumalo asks brushing the back of my hand before kissing it. The doctor smiles.

"Ms. Mukhari's womb is severely damaged."

"She's not going to conceive anymore?"

"Baby, let the doctor finish." I nod.

"There are less chances of her being able to conceive again. If she wants, she could let us take out her womb..." What the!?

"You must be crazy to think that I will allow that!? You know what, get those damn discharge papers ready!"

"With all due respect ma'am, as a doctor, I felt the need to let you know about this since you are the one who brought her in. Otherwise the decision is hers,"

"My wife is not going to repeat herself. You better get those discharge papers," Khumalo says looking into the doctor's eyes.

"She hasn't..."

"We got way more better doctors in Gauteng," I say.

"What are you trying to say?"

"What I'm trying to say is that we have better doctors that are not your kind. If you would excuse us, please." I say as I and Khumalo walk out of the office. Luckily I had bought some clothes on my way here. I help Lufuno with getting ready as Khumalo signs the discharge papers. The Pastor has been praying for Lufuno and God's other creations. To say I'm shocked is an understatement! How many pastors of today still do that without being asked?

°°One day later: at night°°

"Lufuno, we not forcing you to come with us. Are you sure of your decision?"

"Yes, I'm sure, the time for me to fix myself has come."

"You have got everything that important?" Khumalo asks as he takes our bags out of Pastor Mulaudzi's car.

"Yes, Bhuti."

The woman standing before me is strong. I don't think I would ever survive a miscarriage. Women, you are strong. Don't let such circumstances make you feel like you are less of a woman, cause you are not, instead you are more than less of a woman, you are a superwoman and beyond!

Being back home feels good. I prepare a room for Lufuno after eating, which she had protested against. She is my guest, and therefore, she will be treated like one. I kiss Lufuno's forehead as I watch her drift off to sleep. I gave her some sleeping pills, I hope that they will last until morning.

"Mommy, I'm a big girl now." That's Xiluva trying to refrain me from reading her a bedtime story.

"You will always be my baby," I read the story to her while making facial expressions of what is happening in the story. Before reaching the middle of the story, she falls asleep. I guess I will have to finish reading the story to her, tomorrow. I kiss her forehead, I turn off the bedside lamp before walking out of the room.

"You have your own room, what are you doing here?" Khumalo is lying inside my bedroom covers with his right hand under his head. He gets off the bed and walks towards me. He walks past me and locks the door. "What are you doing..." I do not finish my sentence as he pins me against the wall. The kiss is full of emotions and needs.

"I want you," He scoops me in his arms and walks over to the bed.

I smile, staring at Khumalo as I think of how energetic he is, in bed. The man got me reciting his clan names without trying. Learning his clan names really did come through for me, after all.

"I know I'm handsome. Stop staring."

"Why should I stop staring, Mr?" I place my hand on his crotch.

"You will be the death of me..." I laugh as his eyes open. "Didn't your mother teach you that staring is rude?"

"She did..."

"That's good,"

"I hadn't even finished my sentence, Mntungwa."

"Please forgive me, Ntokazi. You were saying?"

"Apology accepted," I run my fingers on his abs. "As I was saying, my mother also taught me that staring at what is yours is not rude at all."

"I like the sound of that

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" I giggle as he kisses my neck.

"How are you, emotionally?" I ask Lufuno once we left alone. Khumalo took Xiluva out along with the Khumalo brothers and their children.

"I don't know," She shrugs.

"I may not know the pain that you feeling now. But what I know is that, I would die if I was to experience that pain. You are

strong, Lufuno, you really are. What I really wanted to ask is if I could get you a therapist..."

"I'm already a burden as it is. I'm a big girl, I will deal with the pain the best way I know how to."

"It all starts like that,"

"What?"

"The depression, anxiety, the suicide thoughts..."

"It won't ever get to that point. I have been through a lot." I sigh taking both her hands in mine.

"You may have been through a lot. But losing a child is not like what you had gone through," She stares at me. "Especially when you had already bonded with him/her. I don't know why many people think that after a miscarriage, life goes back to being normal. It doesn't, at first, you think that you have it under control, which proves to be wrong later on. Miscarriage

is something that I would relate to the death of a loved one, but it's more scarier and worse than it."

"You wrong,"

"That's what you think, now. But when it comes back to torment you," I shake my head, standing up from the wooden chair. "You will feel as if your creator had turned your back on you."

"I don't follow,"

"Allow me to narrate a real life story to you,"

"I once had a friend in my teenage years. She got pregnant, but she didn't know, that she was pregnant. She only found out the day she miscarried, when she counted, she was five weeks pregnant. Even though she didn't know, she had bonded with him/her. As crazy as it sounds, it is the truth. For a moment, she was happy that he/she had died. For, she knew that she wouldn't have been able to take care of the child. But that was not a reason enough, to her.

Whenever she saw a child, she would think of the one that died inside of her womb. She was a loner, therefore overthinking was always the case. Through all what had happened, she never regretted having carried that child. 'I knew what I was getting myself into, when I had sex. There is no reason for me to hate my innocent baby.' That's what she had wrote with capital letters at the bottom of the letter that was given to me after she had committed suicide."

I sigh, heavily.

"After she had committed suicide, I remembered the moments whereby her eyes would become mournful after a little

laughter. I didn't know, that she was depressed. Her death broke me. Nobody noticed. And that depressed me more."

"What depressed you more?" She asks with poignant eyes.

"The fact that I had nobody to confide in. I then decided to woman up. I did everything that brought joy to my heart. I used to read thriller novels. That gave me a peace of mind. They still do. All I'm trying to say is that, talk to someone about what you going through. Keep yourself busy, in order for you to have a sober mind. If you need any help, I'm here."

"You are an amazing human being,"

"Thank you," I hug her. My phone rings, ruining our 'moment'.

"Mabasa Tsakani speaking?"

"N'wananga," I close my eyes, sighing heavily. Did she just call me her child? Now, she remembers that I'm her daughter?

Wow!

"How can I help you, Michelle?"

"Your father has been asking about you

"

"So?" I roll my eyes. I'm not perfect, that I know, but this woman just brings out the worst in me!

"Please come over?"

"I did say that I will, right?"

"I know, it's been weeks."

"Unlike you, I take care of people that I love and need. I can't just up and come there for nothing,"

"We are your parents," Like hell you are!

"Whatever," I hung up.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Thank you. Why you asking the obvious?"

"Just that, you look very tense."

"I'm fine, Funo. Thank you for caring, it really means a lot." I hug her. "I'll be in my bedroom or the lounge, if you ever need me, okay?"

"Eya, khaladzi yanga." I smile walking out of her room.

My nap was good until Khumalo came back. Sadly Xiluva is with Lufuno, otherwise I would've called her to come and take her dad.

"Yhoo yhoo yhoo, what do you want, Mntungwa?"

"Ndiqhanyelwe,"

"What does that mean?"

"I'm horny, MaKhumalo."

"I'm not a dog, Khumalo. How the hell did you even get horny?"
I cover my face with the pillow.

"What did you expect?" Lord, please save me!

"What do mean?"

"You sleeping half naked, uthi umthondo wam wenzeni?"

"Qina, ndoda, yhuu."

"You can't do this to me, MaKhumalo."

"Go take a cold shower,"

"Mxm." Whatever!

24

"N'wana mina," I close my eyes, exhaling, trying hard to block the memories whereby my biological parents threw me out of their house.

"Mrs Mabasa. Can I come in?"

"Yes, my baby." I make my way inside the house, nothing has changed much here. The house looks extended. But same home decoration style. "Everyone get out of your rooms!" I stare at her.

"Who's here?" That voice. I look up, all of my siblings are standing there, looking like they are seeing a ghost.

"Pumpkin," My brother, Hlulani, says.

"Hello, guys."

"Meet your sister-in-laws," This woman is forward! My sister-in-laws introduce themselves.

"Nice to know you," I can't believe that I missed my siblings' weddings. It doesn't matter anymore, I mean, it shows that they don't care about me. Maybe they had even forgotten about me.

"Likewise," Gugulethu, Rivoningo's wife, says.

"Where's he?" I turn to look at Mrs Mabasa.

"Don't you want to have some snacks first?" Nyiko, the oldest of us all, asks.

"I'm not staying. I came here only because I promised, I'm not the one to break my promises."

"What you trying to say?" Hlulani asks.

"I'm sorry if you felt that I was trying to say something, I was not."

"Only because you have grown up, it doesn't mean that I still can't whip you." Trust Rivoningo to feel like he has control over everyone. Some things never change.

"I could get you arrested, for that."

"He's your brother," My mother says. I roll my eyes.

"So much attitude!" Rebecca, Hlulani's wife shouts

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walking away.

"Abuse is abuse, Mrs Mabasa. Same room?"

"We need to talk," Hlulani says.

"That won't happen today. I only have few minutes left in this house. Try making an appointment," I turn on my heels and head towards Mrs and Mr Mabasa Seniors' room. He looks like he was way too sick, he now looks better. I'm relieved, I have no strength to sympathize with people who once did me wrong, big time. "Mabasa," He opens his eyes.

"Princess, I missed you."

"How are you feeling?" I ask, ignoring his statement.

"I'm getting better, as you can see."

"What made you sick?" It can't be a serious sickness, Mr Mabasa, is a healthy person. It must be old age sickness or something else...

"Witchcraft,"

"What!?" I shake my head. "Who would do that to you?"

"My family,"

"I thought you had no connection,"

"We don't," He coughs. I help him drink water. "They found out that my children are living good, they have been asking for money."

"I hope you never gave them,"

"I didn't,"

"Good," Moment of silence.

"Your child?"

"What about her?"

"She is a girl?" I nod. "Please tell me about her."

"I don't know,"

"Please," I sigh.

"Her name is Xiluva. She is an amazing soul."

"His parents are still there, for you?" I really didn't expect that question.

"As always," He looks pained by my statement. I don't feel bad, it is the truth. Why would I hide it? He needs to know that whereas my own parents were still alive, others took care of me, something they failed to do years back. I bid my farewells after Mrs Mabasa came to tell us that it was now time for Mr Mabasa to take a nap.

25

"How did it go?" Khumalo asks, carrying a sleeping Xiluva in his arms.

"Just fine,"

"That was not the answer I had expected. I guess I should have expected it. Or maybe I shouldn't have asked..."

"You love drama, motho waka. It was horrible with the other Mabasas. It was fine with Mr Mabasa."

"They are your family you know,"

"Family are people you can trust in. People who will always stand by your side. People who will tell you when you wrong. People who show you unconditional love. People who love you when is beneficial for them are not your family. In addition, I don't want toxic relationships."

"I understand, I will put Xiluva to bed."

"Thank you," I check Lufuno. She is sleeping so peacefully. I click a picture before walking out of her room. My phone rings.

"Mama,"

"How are you, baby?"

"I'm good. Thanks. How are you?"

"I'm still alive. Can you please bring Xiluva over for a sleepover,"

"We have plans. Sorry, Ma. But I thought that we had agreed that she would come over next week,"

"It's fine. I heard that you were at your parents' house,"

"True, who told you?"

"Mikhail,"

"And how does he know that?"

"That, I don't know my child."

"Okay Ma, goodbye."

"Bye,"

"Baby?"

"MaKhumalo,"

"Can I please hire your private investigator for some time. Mine is out of the country

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on a family vacation, I don't want to disturb him."

"What do you need a private investigator for?"

"Someone has been playing a very dangerous game without me knowing."

"Are you in some danger, MaKhumalo?"

"Never, Khumalo." He kisses the back of my hand.

"Please tell me when you in some kind of trouble,"

"I will, I got you another lawyer."

"Thank you, MaKhumalo. Now, I can make our relationship public."

"Not yet, Mntungwa." He sighs. "We still need to see where we are heading, first."

"Where we are heading, is inside a marriage. Followed by a group of children,"

"We will reach that certain stage, Khumalo."

"I know, sthandwa sami, I know." My mind reverses to what Khumalo has just said.

"Baby?"

"MaKhumalo,"

"Did you just say 'a group of children'?"

"You even quoted me, sthandwa sami." I laugh.

"Giving birth is no child's play."

"I will be there, holding your hand, angithi."

"I work, Khumalo. Children also need attention."

"We won't do them at the same time." I bury my face in my hands. Khumalo!

26

"Ms. Mabasa speaking." The word 'shocked' is an understatement to how I'm feeling right now. Why would Xiluva's school principal call me?

"You speaking to Mr Jacobson, principal of Greyhood for girls' school."

"Has anything happened to Xiluva?"

"Nothing to worry about, Ms. Mabasa. There's a man who claims to have been sent by Xiluva's grandmother, Mrs Lopez. Mrs Lopez has confirmed, but as a principal of this school, I found it important to let you know."

"Thank you, for calling, Mr Jacobson. Please send the man away as Xiluva's father, Mr Khumalo, is on his way to pick Xiluva up."

"Have a good afternoon, Ms. Mabasa."

"Thank you. Have a blessed one." What the hell!?

"Mama,"

"Why did you tell the principal to send John away?"

"We need to talk. You home?"

"Yes,"

"Expect me in a few," I hung up. I didn't know that he is also capable of turning people against one another. I must admit, he is good, very good, for my liking.

"How you doing?"

"We good as you can see," Mrs Lopez says.

"Great. I will say this once and I'm not going to repeat myself. I don't want your son near my daughter,"

"He is his uncle!" Dad exclaims.

"I don't mind getting an order against him."

"Xiluva has to know her family," Mrs Lopez is testing me, honestly.

"Are you not her family?"

"We are part of her family..." Mrs Lopez seems to be the one that needs prayer, mostly.

"Good. And it will remain like that. Xiluva will only visit you on weekends. No more sleepovers."

"Talk about waste of petrol," Mrs Lopez says while Dad chuckles.

"Mrs Lopez, I know that you have been good to me and I appreciate that. But one thing you should know is that Xiluva is my daughter! What I say regarding her, goes. Only because you have helped me doesn't mean that you should take advantage. All of us know that you only helped me because of Xiluva, otherwise

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you wouldn't have. I paid you the money you spent on me so basically I don't owe you anything. I hate it when people take me for granted, Mrs Lopez."

"Xiluva is going to know her uncle's family and that's final!"

"Don't force my hand. I can make sure that you never see your granddaughter again,"

"Are you threatening us?" Mrs Lopez gasps.

"No, I'm warning you. All you have to do, is to keep your toxic son away from my daughter."

"You are the toxic one, along with your boyfriend." Mikhail walks in.

"He's not my boyfriend. He's my man. Got that 'M.A.N', something you will never be." He chuckles. "I see you have done your research, which was a waste of time, honestly. I mean like, a man like you will never be able to ruin my life."

"You so full of yourself." I laugh, staring at him. Some things never change. Dad and Mom keep quiet, leaving us to argue. "I can ruin your little life and you, sweetheart."

"I love your fake confidence." I chuckle. "You? A whole killer, or should I say a murder? A murder who ran away, from the law and his family. Thinks that he can ruin me!? Never!?"

"Tsakani!"

"Veotsek, nja! I hope that your children will never follow your steps. That would be a whole disaster. I can already imagine the

title of a article, specially written by me, 'Mikhail Lopez's disastrous family.' Whuu!"

"You wouldn't dare," His faces is now red. I got him where I wanted him. Am I good!

"I have dared a lot, doggie. Move out of my way. Oh, I forgot to tell you something."

"Talk and make your way out,"

"Mrs Lopez, you breaking my heart." I touch my heart.

"Anyways, nobody from the Lopez family will be granted permission to fetch Xiluva from school."

"What do you mean?" Dad's calmness is soothing.

"Just that, Daddy. Or you want me to explain? Well, I have ticked you off from the list of people who can fetch my baby from school." People I have called my family for years are the very same people who want my head. It's a good thing that I have been attending those shooting classes.

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"Muntu wami,"

"Ufunani?"

"Wow. So I'm not allowed to call you 'muntu wami'?" He turns to look at me.

"Okay. Ngicela ifavour..."

"Get to the point, already."

"Please ask your people to watch Xiluva, the Mabasa family and the Lopez family, including Mikhail."

"Are you in trouble?"

"Not yet,"

"What do you, MaKhumalo?"

"Mikhail is a very problematic person."

"Why would he cause problems for you?"

"He's a man that fights until he gets what he wants,"

"Does Xiluva know how to pick up when something is wrong?"

"No,"

"Fuck! She needs training, fast." I smile. "You included, sisi om'dala and Lufuno."

"But," He stares at me, lifting his left eyebrow. "Fine."

"I'm glad we understand one another. Looks sure can be deceiving,"

"What you trying to say, Khumalo?" He kisses my forehead before holding my hands.

"You look so innocent

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but the troubles you come with..."

"Does your statement also refer to the bedroom?" I ask putting my hand on his thigh.

"Troubles? Hmm... Sometimes."

"What do you mean, Khumalo? Are you trying to say that..."

"I don't know what you are currently thinking. But what I'm trying to say is that you stingy in the bedroom department." I laugh pulling him by his neck before kissing him. "What were you thinking?"

"That I'm not good," He laughs.

"I disagree. The way you energetic in bed," He shakes his head making me giggle.

Here I am trying to figure out what could be the Lopez family's next move, at two am. Khumalo has been asking to help but I have been dismissing him.

"You know, they will go for our flower, Xiluva." He states.

"I doubt, she is their blood."

"And your biggest weakness,"

"I didn't think of it that way,"

"You still need a lot of teaching, sthandwa sami. Can we go to sleep now."

"Yes, please. I'm so tired."

He pulls me close to his body as soon as I get inside the bed covers. I yawn, facing the other side. He turns me around before French kissing me, while rubbing my coochie with my pantie on. I press my legs as his hand slide inside my pantie.

"I need you inside me," I hold his hand.

"Khululeka, sthandwa sami. This is all yours."

28

"Funo," I kiss her forehead. "How are you feeling?"

"I miss my family," The same family that sold you to a monster, I say to my self.

"I'm not forcing you to live here with me, but one thing I won't allow, is to let you dig your own grave."

"They won't hand me over to him. It's been days since I left home, they must be worried."

"Do you think they really are worried..."

"Yes, my little brother, Mulalo, has been blowing up my messenger."

"Or your so called monster of a boyfriend is threatening them, after all he paid them a huge amount of money." She stares at me.

"What if you not to be trusted? You asked for me to be discharged then flew be down here, soon after that!"

"What I was trying to do is to help a fellow woman who was BEING abused. A woman that lost her child due to the abuse she had been experiencing! Clearly I was wrong. You can start packing your bags, I will personally drive you to the bus station."

"Thank you for looking after me,"

"Yet you so ungrateful,"

"What!?"

"Yes, you ungrateful. I'm not going to hide that from you. If it was not for me you would have died. Do you think your family would have cared?" Tears glister in her eyes. "They wouldn't have. As long as they are living a good life. I wonder my gender is so stupid when it comes to such situations. Instead of

thinking about herself, she will think about people who don't even give a damn about her." I close the space between us.

"Only because they are your family, it doesn't mean that you they are forced to love you. Your family members are your biggest enemies. They would kill you in cold blood, as simple as that. You too innocent, baby girl. We not living in Princess Sofia's world, we living in a real world where 'sorry' is considered 'come back for more betrayal and pain'."

"You hurting me," She says as tears roll down her cheeks.

"Maybe I should do more! More than I have to. Maybe that will open your eyes. If your family are worried as you say they are, they wouldn't have let Shuga make Vele his sex machine until your return. No, they actually suggested that Vele should be the second wife. Your family is amazing

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putting money first before your blood, bravo." She shakes her head. Vele being the cousin she hates, this news will make her think twice.

"Mommy wouldn't allow that, she knows how much I hate that bitch! She wouldn't..."

"That's not the only news, sweetheart. Did you know that Shuga and Vele have been having sex right another your nose?"

"What?"

"Yes, baby."

"More reason why I should go back. I can't let that witch defeat me!"

"You more stupid than I had imagined."

"Haibo, MaKhumalo."

"She needed to hear this," I roll my eyes.

"I won't be disrespected by you, MaKhumalo. I'm the man in this relationship,"

"Yeah, right."

"I would love to finish this argument in the bedroom, MaKhumalo." I feel my eyes widening at his statement. I look at Lufuno, she looks like she's about to burst anytime from with laughter she is currently containing.

"Yhuu, I didn't mean that, Mntungwa."

"That I know, but we really have to discuss some things. But relax I'm not in a hurry. Lufuno?"

"Bhuti,"

"You want to go back to your family? Basically, to Limpopo?"

"Yes, Bhuti."

"Do you have funeral cover?"

"Yes, Bhuti."

"Good. I hope you haven't stopped paying for mortuary too. You will need a beautiful burial after killing yourself. Go well and enjoy life, Sisi." My mouth and Lufuno's mouth snap open. I keep on playing replay in my mind before making peace with what Khumalo has just said. "What? First time hearing a person being honest?" He asks after noticing that we were still staring at him after five minutes of his statement, with our mouths still open!

I need to brush my teeth. A fly could've made its way inside my mouth, stayed for few seconds before leaving. I'm sure that it has gone to call its fellow family members, thinking that I am a corpse. I hope that it has forgotten me and my smell, I can't have flies flying after me all day.

29

"I'm sorry for how I behaved earlier on," Lufuno says, serving us dessert.

"Bad behaviour is not allowed," Xiluva says with a serious face.

"Right, Mommy?"

"Yes, baby." I smile.

"She has to go to the naughty corner," I and Khumalo laugh.

"What!?" Lufuno screeches.

"After eating, go to the naughty corner." Xiluva digs in her dessert. We all wait for her to say that she's joking. Ten minutes have passed and still nothing.

"The girl has spoken," I say, laughing.

Lufuno has been standing on the naughty corner for half an hour. All of us thought that Xiluva would've spared Lufuno by now, we were proved wrong, once again.

"Our daughter is one in a million," He hugs me from behind.

"True, a rare gem." He buries his head in my neck and inhales my scent. "You smell good,"

"Thank you, Khumalo." I turn to face face him. I stare at him before pulling him by his neck and kissing him. We pull out of the kiss and head to the sitting room. Lufuno is now next to Xiluva, watching an animated movie. "All forgiven,"

"Don't mention it," Lufuno says before sighing. It must have done her good. This is one of the reason why I pick my words when I'm around Xiluva. The way people behave around us, counts. Xiluva is not afraid of telling an older person if he/she is being disrespectful, noisy, etcetera... My own creation. I raised her well, I never thought that I could have done it, as a single mother. But I proved myself wrong and I'm proud of it. Single, co- and dating/married parents should always feel proud of

their children especially parents that instill good manners in their children.

Disappointed parents are parents that see their children going out of the way, losing their manners and mostly forgetting how they were raised. I hope that I will never be one of the disappointed parents, but if it were to happen

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I would still be proud because I would've raised my children well, they would have been the ones who ruined themselves.

"Earth to khaladzi yanga," Lufuno snaps her fingers right in front of my eyes.

"Huh?"

"Which planet had your mind visited?"

"Ha ha. What do you want?"

"Bhuti M was asking which ice cream flavour you..." Khumalo walks in holding a tray. "I guess you will have to enjoy the chosen ice cream flavour."

"True, I hope it's not strawberry."

"Not at all, MaKhumalo."

"Xiluva is not supposed to have that, especially at this time."

"I know that is why I made hers different from ours."

"Thank you," Xiluva and Lufuno say in unison. I thank him with a kiss on his forehead.

"Nchooaw," Lufuno pouts. "I want a relationship like yours,"

"Which is not going to happen," Khumalo says sitting beside me.

"Why not?" Lufuno frowns.

"People are different which result to different relationships." I simply state. I mean, there's no better way to put this.

"Mommy, I'm sleepy." Xiluva says rubbing her eyes after putting her bowl in the kitchen.

"Let's get you to bed," I pick her up. Khumalo follows us. I put her to sleep. I and Khumalo kiss her cheeks and forehead before switching off the bedside lamp.

"I think I should also go to sleep, early today."

"Why?" I ask, slightly worried. Lufuno has been sleeping late ever since she got here.

"I want to start applying for a job tomorrow," Am I happy!

"That's amazing news baby. Forward me your CV on email. I would love to help."

"Thank you, Sis." She hugs me and Khumalo before heading towards her room.

"She is already trying to get her life in order," Khumalo stares at me. "I also hope that it's not a front. I need to work on some case till late. So you will have to go to bed without me, baby."

"I don't mind helping. Plus I need some legal advise regarding some business issue."

"Don't forget to send my fees," I switch off the television.

"Am I that bad in the bedroom department?" I giggle as he holds my waists.

"Definitely not,"

"I'm relieved. U thandi mali, MaKhumalo."

"Work is work, Baba."

"Damn, and here I was thinking that if things are good in the bedroom department, this would be free. I was certainly wrong. I will correct myself, sthandwa sami."

"Please do," I slightly laugh, as I sit on my leather office chair.

30

MTHOKOZISI KHUMALO

"And now he remembers that he has a home," My Mom says as soon as her eyes land on me.

"Is that a way of greeting your long lost son, Ma?" I ask, hugging her. The room goes silent. Mxolisi runs out of the room and comes back with a medical aid box.

"What's going on?" I ask as he starts playing doctor on me.

"Haibo, ndoda?"

"Uright mfana wam?" My Mom asks checking my temperature.

"I'm alright,"

"Since when do you address your mother as 'Ma'?" My father asks.

"Haibo, is she not my mother?"

"You always call her 'MaKhumalo'," Mxolisi says with his left eyebrow slightly raised.

"Oh, that." I laugh. "I have my OWN MaKhumalo now. Ma will be Ma."

"I don't remember being told about Lobola negotiations." My mother frowns.

"Umona, MaKhumalo." My father says before handshaking me. "I now totally believe that you are a man," I smile. Mxolisi hugs me. This one is my baby brother.

"When are we meeting her?" My mom asks, kissing my cheek.

"As soon as she is ready,"

"Thokozani," Portia says.

"It's 'Mthokozisi', you witch!" My Mom shouts.

"What is she still doing here?" I ask.

"She is one of those people who overstay their visits. I'm still waiting for MaKhumalo to literally kick her out." My father says, not caring that Portia is inside the room.

"You will never see that happen," Portia laughs.

"This woman is unstable. Do you all want to die. I feel sorry for Mxolisi,"

"Why me? I'm untouchable." Mxolisi says.

"The untouchable that loves eating,"

"Eish. Mommy, she needs to go. I don't want to die of food poisoning."

"Portia," My Mom says.

"Khohlwa

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" Portia says before walking away from us.

"This is too much. I'm calling her husband." My Mom says, already taking out her phone.

"Please do, she has been disturbing us when we want to have afternoon sex." My father says.

"Euwww," I and Mxolisi say in unison.

"Baba!" My Mom says trying to hide that she is blushing. My Mom calls Portia's husband, Bab'Dlamini.

"Let me speak to him," My father says. He puts the phone on speaker. "Ndoda, come get your wife."

"Which wife, Khumalo?" Bab'Dlamini asks. Lord, your children are not loyal.

"Portia, haibo you don't even know your wife." My Mom says laughing. "I don't blame you, shame."

"Oh, loyo. She disappeared from us two years back. I didn't even try looking for her. She knows her way back home. She will come back, if she wants to."

"Haibo, Ndoda. So what you trying to say is that you haven't had sex in two years!? You paid lobola for her. Inkomo zenu, bakithi. She could be receiving it from all angles, here. Wena you have been using your hand. Hayi, Ndoda." Trust my father to spice things up.

"Hayi, Khumalo."

"Your mother needs her daughter-in-law to take care of her, don't you think?" My father asks, brushing his beard.

"You have a point there. Send me your location. I will be there in a few." After dropping the call, all of us scream in unison while dancing.

"Uya hamba umthakathi! Rapist!" I scream. They keep quiet, shit!

31

"Please remind me to never get overjoyed," Khumalo sighs.

"You look... pale. I thought that you would come back in a jolly mood."

"I was, until my family interrogated me for two hours."

"Regarding?"

"Nothing important,"

"It wouldn't have made you look pale if it wasn't important,"

"Can I please tell you some other time?"

"I will hold you down to that. Xiluva missed you,"

"Pity I missed her sleeping time. I kissed her forehead before coming here."

"I'm so jealous," He laughs.

"It doesn't suit you at all, sweetheart. Oh, do you know someone by the name 'Fiona'?"

"Uhm... Yes, she is Michael's ex-girlfriend."

"Does she hate you or have something against you?"

"Funny thing that you asking me all this. That woman hates me with her all! She blamed me for her and Michael's breakup."

"You need to be ready for her,"

"What do you mean, Khumalo?" He stares at me. "No way, Khumalo! They used to hate one another."

"An enemy's enemy is a friend, MaKhumalo. Your past is your present, as it is. Xiluva and you will be starting with your training, tomorrow morning. Lufuno will train as well, but I don't think that they would harm her."

"Don't you think that Xiluva is too little for training?"

"Mama, this is important. Let's forget about the age, for now. Safety is what is important, right now." He kisses my neck.

"MaKhumalo?"

"Sthandwa sami,"

"Don't you want to get trained..."

"That is what I will be doing, moos?"

"To kill,"

"Hayi hayi, Khumalo. Hmm, I can't."

"So you prefer getting killed? Sthandwa sami

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if you want to defeat them you have to put your emotions on the side. It's either you or them. Make your choice, cause they have already made theirs."

"They were there for me,"

"I know. When are you visiting your family?"

"Which family are you talking about? 'Cause my family is under this roof,"

"The Mabasas,"

"Tomorrow at lunchtime."

"The Khumalos invited us for dinner." He caress my cheek.

"What do you say?"

"I'm in," He stares at me.

"Serious?" I nod. He hugs me before spinning me around.

"And you will have to come with me for the lunch invite,"

"Haibo, MaKhumalo."

"Please,"

"Yhoo, hayini. Okay, muntu wami. Is Lufuno tagging along?"

"No, she said that she prefers staying at home."

"To be honest, after that incident, I don't trust her therefore I installed cameras today, in the morning." He whispers.

"Khumalo,"

"I'm just protecting y'all. Something is off about her. I can't wrap my head around it, that's why I hired someone to check her background for me."

"You can't do this things, without speaking to me first."

"Would you have agreed, MaKhumalo?" I keep quiet. "Exactly, if you feel like you old enough to protect yourself, let me protect Xiluva." I sigh.

"Fine,"

"You can sulk as much as you want, I don't care. I'm not going to apologise for trying to protect y'all. Khohlwa, MaKhumalo. Ngifuna ukuk'shada." I choke on my saliva.

"WHAT!?" I scream, holding my chest.

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"Relax, MaKhumalo. I was not asking you for marriage."

"Thank God, I was not going to agree either way."

"Awung'thandi yini, MaKhumalo?" I stare at him.

"Sorry, Sthandwa sami, kodwa I never loved you."

"Ini?"

"Yebo, Mntungwa. I just wanted... fun."

"And you decided to use me?"

"If that is what you call it, then yes, I decided to use you. It also came with benefits at the end of the day," I giggle.

"MaKhumalo," My man's stern voice! I get away from him hoping that I will make it out of the bedroom without being pushed into telling the truth. "Wayi phula intliziyo yami, MaKhumalo. Waphula ithemba lami. Uyayazi ukuthi uk'thanda umuntu aksu mdlalo?"

"I'm sorry, Khumalo." I'm feeling guilty for breaking Khumalo's heart. His words are piercing through my heart. Being told that you broke his/her heart, trust. And also being told that loving a person in no play. I felt that shit! How many men out there are open about their feelings?

Dating an open person is easy because when they face hard times, they open up to you. Then there are a lot of partners that are not open to each other

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swa tika le. You cannot expect your partner to guess how shitty you feeling when you have a smile on. You cannot expect your partner to guess what's bothering you until you say it. Partners are not mind readers, and that goes for friends too. The fact that you not open to your partner shows that you have no trust whatsoever in him/her.

"I have fallen in way too deep,"

"You will get over it,"

"I'm not going to get over it, you going to continue loving me the way you have been..."

"Hayi hayi, Mntungwa. Ang'funi." Did I just say that I don't want to?

"Weh, MaKhumalo. Su uya bema yini?" Being asked whether you have started smoking by a typical modern Zulu man is so damn funny. Containing my laugh will be another mission.

"Do I look like a smoker to you, Khumalo? Huh!"

"Don't raise your voice while talking to me," He calmly says.

"What will you do, huh? This is my house, you won't tell me how to behave in my damn house."

"So you wouldn't raise your voice if we were at my house?"

"Exactly! Because that would have been your house." I shrug.

"Mlu, are your guys watching the house?"

-

"The cameras?"

-

"All good?"

-

"Dankie, njayam."

"Let's go?"

"Where to? Did you even notice what time it was?" He says nothing but picks me up. Arriving at his house we go through many different passwords gates. He picks me out of the car. He says one word in an unusual language and the door opens. His

house is spacious and the home decor is out of this world. He must have imported everything in this damn house. He goes to the kitchen where he takes out bottles of flavoured water. He stands in between my legs. He brushes my thigh. Yes, am currently sitting on top of a kitchen counter!

"Wangi user MaKhumalo,"

33

"Let's go back home," I say after kissing, Khumalo, with passion.

"We shouldn't have left her, right?" He asked holding me close to him.

"Yes, Mntungwa. I hope that Lufuno finds her feet soon,"

"She will, MaKhumalo. Let's go."

"I would love to come back here," He laughs.

"After getting married, this will be our home." He holds my hand as we walk to the car. Getting home, we check on our baby and Lufuno before taking a shower. "I love your smooth skin, your flawless body, your thick lips, your scent, I love everything about you, including your creation, our flower." He confesses.

"Please don't make me emotional,"

"Did I mention that I love your big bright eyes? One would swear that you have already seen the future," I giggle, hugging him. I close my eyes as I listen to his heart beat, the sound of the water that is hitting our bodies. "Please don't forget that I'm a man," I laugh as I continue feeling his erect crotch on my tummy.

"Let's get out of here. Tomorrow is going to be a long day."

"I agree, Mama." We get out of the shower. I look up to his face. He's smiling.

"I love your smile more,"

"Haibo, MaKhumalo?" He says drying our bodies.

"I'm just being honest,"

"I love your honesty." He dresses me in his t-shirt. He wears his boxers. My head is on top of Khumalo's chest. I'm listening to his heart beat pattern

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I love it. It calms me down. "Why do you love my smile, Mama?"

"It shows me that beyond your hard-core personality there's a sweet, amazing and fragile person."

"I'm not fragile," He sighs.

"It shows me that you are not a monster you think you are."

"MaKhumalo,"

"You need to let go of the past, it will only hurt you more. You need to forgive them and yourself."

"It's not as easy as you make it seem,"

"Then go see a therapist, I will accompany you sometimes."

"I'm not going to share my feelings with a stranger."

"But,"

"If there's a person that can help me, it's you."

"I'm not a therapist."

"But I can always confide in you. That will make me feel better,"
I run my hands through his abs. "I love you, MaKhumalo."

"I love you too, Khumalo." I play with his hair until he falls
asleep. "It wasn't your fault," I whisper before kissing his chest.

"I'm tired!" Lufuno complains as soon as we get inside the
house.

"I had fun, Mommy." My eyes widen.

"What kind of a baby are you? We ran miles! We then went to the gym."

"She's a baby that aims on making Daddy proud. Right, baby?"

"Yes, Daddy." They hug. I'm glad we all took a shower in the gym. Xiluva helps Khumalo with breakfast while I and Lufuno clean.

"This is yummy!" Lufuno exclaims after taking a bite.

"Please don't boost his ego," I cry.

"Mommy is?"

"Jealous!" Xiluva screams. Never let a Khumalo near your baby. Those ones are capable of turning your child against you.

"Oh, baby. The Khumalos postponed the dinner to tomorrow."

"I'm cool with that,"

"Thank God, thought that you would refuse to tag along."

"I will never hurt your feelings, intentionally, baby."

"I love your relationship," Lufuno says smiling. Huh? I hope that she never goes after my man. Look at my mind playing games with me. Being a lawyer!

"Thank you," I and Mthokozisi say in unison.

"I don't have a twin with the Khumalo surname," I frown.

"You boring," Khumalo says. Xiluva giggles before whispering some words in Khumalo's ear. I don't even want to know what she whispered to him!

34

"You made it," Mrs Mabasa says when she notice us standing on her doorstep.

"I'm not one to go back on my word, Mrs Mabasa." I say after she made a way for us to get in.

"These are for you, Mrs Mabasa." Khumalo says, giving Mrs Mabasa white flowers.

"My favourite," Mrs Mabasa thanks Khumalo with a hug.

"Mr Mabasa, glad to see that you even better today." I say as my eyes land on him as soon as we get inside the sitting room.

"All thanks to you, princess."

"Everyone, meet my daughter, Xiluva, and my man, Khumalo."

"Is Khumalo his name or surname?" Rivoningo asks.

"His surname. Mthokozisi is the name."

"And he's my dad." Xiluva states.

"Nobody is going to steal your dad, Xiluva." She shrugs.

"Nice meeting you all," Khumalo says.

"Wish we could say the same," Hlulani says.

"Mrs Mabasa, we didn't come here to get disrespected by your children. You don't look like a woman who has failed in raising her children, I would be disappointed if my thoughts were to be proven wrong by your selfish children."

"I'm sorry, my child." Mr Mabasa apologizes.

"I would really appreciate it if your son was to apologize by himself to my MAN."

"What!?" Rivoningo screeches. I stare at him. I mean business. If I don't even disrespect my man, who does he think he is? God? Even if he was God, he wouldn't dare to disrespect my man. "Wow, okay. I'm sorry, Mthokozisi."

"Say it like you mean it,"

"MaKhumalo

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"

"No, baby. The moment a person starts disrespecting you is the very same time that, that particular person should be stopped. I'm not going to let my husband get disrespected in front of me. The nerve!" He smirks. Haibo, he is finding this amusing!

"I'm sorry, my man." Rivoningo apologizes. Khumalo nods. He is acting all innocent now. I can't wait for him to give them his piece of my mind. My man is an actor, bathong.

"Mommy, why are we here?" Xiluva asks. I don't know how many times I have been explaining.

"Baby, please tell her maybe she prefers hearing it from you."

"We were invited to have lunch here, baby." Khumalo starts explaining.

"Why?"

"They want to thank Mommy for something good that she has done."

"When are they going to thank you?"

"For a person your age, you sure do ask a lot of questions."
Khumalo complains making us laugh. "Well bad people don't
get thanked for the bad they have done."

"You not bad, Daddy." She frowns.

"In my family, The Khumalos, we thank one another through a
big lunch or dinner."

"That's amazing!" I leave them to talk and go to Mr Mabasa.

"How you feeling?" I ask.

"I'm good thanks, to you." I shrug.

"I refuse to believe that my one visit made you better. Your
family must have played a huge role in you getting better."

"Please forgive me, my Princess." I nod.

"Can we please not talk about it?"

"My Princess,"

"I will think about it. I can't just forgive you. That's not how things work. I have forgiven you but I still need time to process your apology."

"I understand and thank you." I nod.

"Are you not going to help?" Rebecca asks. I stand up, in order to avoid arguments I should do whatever she wants me to do.

"Baby do you want to leave?" Khumalo asks. I didn't expect this question.

"What are you trying to say?" Nyiko asks.

"Since I got here, I have been observing you all. I don't like the way you treating MaKhumalo. Please don't forget that you are the ones who invited us. Sisi whenever you need help, you ask for it not demand for it. I can clearly see that nobody wants us here except the parents. Baba and Mama, I don't mind moving this lunch to our house. A toxic place is not the one for my family."

"I'm sorry for the way we have made you feel, my child." Mrs Mabasa apologizes.

"Mama!" The children exclaim.

"Shut up!" The house goes silent.

"Mommy, I want to go." I sigh. Khumalo picks her up.

"I'm sorry, okay, baby?" Khumalo says while patting her back.

MTHOKOZISI KHUMALO

After having lunch with the Mabasa's at my house, I and MaKhumalo decided to spend the weekend here. Princess Xiluva already loves the house, meaning that in the future she will manage living here.

"MaKhumalo,"

"Babe," She takes my hands into hers. Women love weird things, I must say. Tsakani once told me that she loves my rough hands, in her eyes they perfectly accommodate her.

"You said that Lufuno has gone to visit her cousin," She looks up at me. "Do you perhaps know this cousin?"

"I don't know her cousin. I was shocked when she told me about her visiting her cousin, not once did she mention her cousin to me."

"We need to look out for her. We brought her here, she is our responsibility as long as she is staying in your house."

"I will talk to her," I nod. I hold her tightly while running my hands through her flawless body. There's nothing that I don't love about this woman. I love her self-confidence, mostly. A woman with no self-confidence will make you feel discouraged as she will put doubt about good things in your mind. If your woman lacks self-confidence, self-esteem and other important things, make sure that you groom her before deciding to settle down with her, this also goes to women.

"You are beautiful, MaKhumalo."

"Thank you, Mntungwa." A woman that calls you broke your clan name will make you fall in love with her, more. We eye contact. I never believed in any of these things, but here I am imagining I and MaKhumalo's world with our children included.

"I love you," We still haven't broken eye contact.

"Na mina ndza ku rhandza, nuna wa mina." Our lips meet half way. After few minutes, we finally pull out of the kiss.

"Thank you for loving me," I whisper as I pull her more closer to my body, her head is where it always should be: my chest. I watch her fall into sleep, leaving me with my thoughts.

It takes a lot to love someone. I hope that I and MaKhumalo will always try to make our relationship work. I hope that neither of us will run away when things get tough. It took a lot for me to open my mind and heart to love. But either way, I did it. I did it for myself

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if I hadn't done that, I would have been the one who got hurt, emotionally and physically.

I close my eyes as I heave a sigh.

Having anger issues is hard. Having short temper is hard. Over thinking eats our brain little by little. When you get depressed, just know that it will always stay. You can go for therapy, it will

help but as soon as you get hurt deeply, it will be more than happy to welcome you back... home. Anxiety... dangerous mental illness one can have, does it come after bipolar or it takes the cup? Anxiety will fill your heart and mind with thoughts, a normal person wouldn't survive having. It will make you want to commit suicide, you will attempt to do so, but once you go back to your normal state, it is up to you if you want to endure the pain alone or share it with someone or better, accept that you have a problem, go for counseling and take medication. Things we go through as people, are things we shouldn't be going through. If I, an old man feel this much pain. How does a young child or a teenager feel? Life has never been fair.

°°Next day, in the evening°°

"MaKhumalo, you ready?"

"Yes, just a little bit nervous."

"Relax, they already like you. So they will definitely love you, now." She nods, looking unconvinced. I just hope that my family behaves. The Khumalos are a lot of work!

"Where are we going?" Xiluva asks as soon as we get inside the car. I look at MaKhumalo, clearly her mind is not here judging by her facial expression.

"We going to meet my family."

"Really!" She beams up.

"Yes! You will even meet new grandparents and many more family members."

"Yeeyy! Drive fast, what if they change their minds?" I love Xiluva's curiosity.

"Relax, Princess. We will be there soon."

"Okay, Daddy. Are they ever going to change their minds?"

"Never," She smiles.

I never thought that the Khumalo's would have been so welcoming towards I and Xiluva. It's true when they say that: don't judge a book by the cover it has, you have no idea what it has inside. If only I had a video of how the Khumalo's welcome us!

"Makoti, don't think too much. We don't want to be accused of impossible thing. The lobola negotiations won't be as good as we expecting them to be." Bab'Khumalo is a whole mood.

"Khululeka, Baba." He nods.

"I wouldn't mind sleeping here every night, now." I give him a dead stare. "Can you feel the fresh air?" I hope that Mthokozisi is joking. I have gotten used to sleeping next to him.

"I would love that, my child." MaKhumalo, the first!

"Can we please stay kind to one another. We all have that one warmer blanket, can we please try to respect that." I state before taking a sip of my red wine.

"Usebenzile, ndodana." Bab'Khumalo compliments Mthokozisi.

"Hayi hayi, Sisi. You not even married yet but you claiming your rights over my brother. It's been long since I shared a bed with someone. Please don't take that from me, yhu." Mxolisi comments.

"Firstly, Mxolisi you are young." We all burst out laughing.

"Secondly, you can do the lobola negotiations with me, right here, right now." The eyes around the room widen.

"You totally had too much to drink," Nomthandazo, Mthokozisi's cousin says.

"What you trying to imply?" I ask, still shocked because of Nomthandazo's comment.

"The Khumalos only negotiate with families when it comes to lobola." She states.

"Well I have no 'family'." I say after gulping my drink.

"Greedy that much?" Everyone around the room is quiet. Only I and Nomthandazo are talking. Judging from the way everyone is now seated, they love free movies.

"Sweetie

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did you want me to hire people to be my family? To prove a point? To you, even! Washa Satan." I refill my glass.

"You will never be a part of this family." She angrily says.

"Bab'Khumalo?"

"Makoti," I laugh at how he quickly replied.

"How many siblings do you have?"

"Mtho, she even forgot the great Khumalos! Please don't marry this... she even has a child! An entire albino child!"

"Ni tava sober in a second. Ni taku raha, girl. Onge seni uni tolovela ngopfu." I put my glass down before walking towards her.

"MaKhumalo, please calm down." Mthokozisi says holding me.

"I'm not going to do anything to her, relax."

"Khumalo seniors?" He says, hoping that they will stop me, only to get: Let her beat her up, uya delela uNomthandazo. If a parent can say this, it simply means that the child is dangerously out of order.

"I'm not scared of you, b!tch." She says as soon as I get closer to her. I pull her closer to my face by her neck.

"Girl, I don't care that you are a Khumalo. I will kill you if you disrespect my daughter like that. I will chop you into pieces. I won't even give you a chance to get a proper send off. I'm not your friend, I will never be one. I don't fuck with you, okay?" I tighten my hold around her neck as I whisper to her.

"Let me go, you psycho!" She exclaims trying to get out of my hold.

"Sweetie, I am capable of being bad too. Don't give all the credit to your family." I let go of her before rubbing my hands. Girl is full of shit, something I never tolerate. No one talks bad about my flower, no one!

"That was a good show!" Nomthandazo's dad says before they all burst into laughter. Nomthandazo walks away from us with tears glistening in her eyes. It's confirmed, she got nothing on me.

37LUFUNO MUKHARI

"Why am I here? I don't even know why I trusted you enough to come here?" I take a sip of the white wine I was offered.

"You had a miscarriage,"

"Are we here to discuss my private life!" I ask, annoyed. I really don't want to go back there. I have cried, it's enough. I need to move on, but how will I move on when I'm surrounded by people who don't feel my pain?

"Relax. I'm sorry about that..."

"Can you please get to the point!"

"I love fierce women." He confesses.

"From what I have observed..."

"I know. I just saw a good opportunity and took it. Naive women are easy to get through. I had to sacrifice." I nod. I feel for his wife. She is nothing but his slave. Her own biological children don't even respect her.

"Okay?"

"Well, I have seen how you behave around her. I can help you get her."

"What do you mean?"

"I can make you move far away with her. You could raise her as your own flesh and blood."

"I cannot do whatever you asking me to do,"

"Listen, baby girl. I know how much you want this. Don't let your good heart stand in the way of your happiness. Do you

enjoy going to those orphanages and hospitals only to watch new born babies?"

"I... uhm..."

"You don't have to..."

"Can I get you something else?" His wife interrupts him.

"Woman! Can't you see that we in the middle of something here!"

"I'm sorry," She tremble.

"Get out of my face! Stupid!" She walks away looking down.
Poor woman. "Sorry about that,"

"I want a new born." I say.

"I'm clean. You clean. We can have raw sex as much as you want. You will get your new born along with her."

"Why you so adamant about this?" In South Africa, many people only help you because they want to be helped too. Each and every thing has a price, simple.

"That little girl has the power to ruin me. I can't allow that."

"I need to think about it

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"Take your time. You need to choose properly, after all." He smirks.

"I need to get going. Mind accompanying me?"

"Lead the way, Princess." I walk out.

"Where are you going?" His wife, asks.

"Do I answer to you!? Huh!" A loud clap is all I hear. Their voices fade away as I walk away from the house. He comes out after few minutes looking like nothing happened, inside. Certain people out there don't deserve to live.

"Music?" I ask, bored.

"Search for a memory..."

"Got it,"

"You fast too. I like it." He licks his bottom lip. He places his hand on top of my bare thigh. I want to stop him but I can't. It feels so good! His touch is doing something to me. I feel like being submissive to him, just like a servant is to her/his employer.

"Stop," I whisper.

"Are you sure? I can see how much you want me. My touch already has that effect on you, that was not hard as I imagined that it would be."

"Too much ego," I spit.

"Do you blame me?" He chuckles. "I'm a full package, babes."
He is full of himself, too.

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"Watch how you talk to my wife, Lufuno." Mthokozisi calmly says with that intimidating voice of his.

"You mean "girlfriend". Both of you forget that you not married, just cohabiting." Lufuno spits.

"Lufuno," I warn.

"What, khaladzi? The truth hurts, Sis." Sarcasm.

"Don't make me lose it!" Mthokozisi is out of sight, by now.

"I'm not afraid of you,"

"Look here, what you are doing right now shows that you are disrespectful and ungrateful."

"How's that any of your business?"

"How I wish you stood up to that abuser like you doing right now."

"What?"

"Yes! WHO are you to tell me that men will never put up with my shit?"

"Tsakani,"

"Veotsek! You think you better than us? Worked for two months but you already have too much ego. A snake you are, sucker."

"You so bitter! I wonder which guy would want to have a child with you. No wonder your baby daddy died, you poisoned him, murderer."

"What?" I shake my head. I won't let her get to me.

"Yes, murderer! You are a murderer!"

"That's it! Get the hell out of my house! Get out! Telling me about being a murderer! I'm glad your child is not here to witness all of this. People who don't know how to pick their words will never be ready for raising children. No wonder your 'husband' wasted no time in getting your little sister pregnant. Pathetic." I shouldn't have. I shouldn't have lost control. But I can't take it. Why do good people have to go through such shit!? People are ungrateful. From this day onwards, I am not going to bring anyone into my house. I'm done with helping people.

"So I am right

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you are a murderer." I slap her across the face. She returns it. I push her until we reach the place where there are no cameras. I pull her by her hair before punching her. I throw her out after spitting on her. Nobody gonna mess with me.

"Where have you been?" I ask Mthokozisi who is packing up plates.

"I was minding my own business. I already got the footage ready, in case she decides to report you."

"Thank you."

"We in this together, MaKhumalo." We hug. "You look beautiful,"

"Unga tlangi hi mina ka."

"Ni tiyisile," Hearing your man practising to speak your lingo has to be one of the best things.

People say that us "Tsongas" don't compromise when it comes to speaking other languages. Which is totally false. Firstly, you can not expect us to speak your language properly without teaching us. Secondly, how do you expect someone to speak your language every single day but fail to do so yourself?

Selfishness makes people bitter. If you want someone to sacrifice, do so too. I don't know how many times I have heard my parents speaking different languages only to accommodate people. This doesn't only apply to "Tsongas" but to many different languages too. We are all different, you can't expect me to specialise in some thing, all people you do. That's selfish, period!

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LUFUNO MUKHARI

"What do you mean when you say that she didn't get arrested!? Can you see what she did to me! Did you want to see my dead body to get her arrested?" The word 'angry' doesn't describe how I'm feeling, right now.

"Ms. we couldn't arrest her because she had evidence in her hand when she opened the door. It was her word against yours. You also beat her up, I don't know why you causing unnecessary drama here. Next time you come to open a case, make sure that your story is valid."

"You don't know who I am!" I shout.

"Do we look like we care. Get out of here. We have real victims to help." I click my tongue as I walk away. The nerve! I'm going to make their lives miserable. Nobody talks to me like that. Tsakani, I will definitely teach you a lesson.

LUFUNO MUKHARI

"How stupid are you!? Why did you do that?" Mikhail shouts.

"How are we going to get information now?"

"You will figure it out, daddy. Prepared my room?"

"I want you out of here by tomorrow."

"Ha ha ha. Don't catch feelings... I can bring you down anytime, don't test me. Did you think that I am that naive, sweetie?" I slide my hand inside his briefs. I close my eyes.

"Kids are in the house." I open my eyes. She has been slaying since last month. I hate this woman.

"Whose problem is that?" I ask standing before Mikhail.

"She has a point." Mikhail has grown to be a softie towards her. Unbelievable. Don't get me wrong, sex with sexy married person is mind blowing. Until it gets to the part whereby you get called by the name of the wife or husband.

"Is she moving in, Mikhail?"

"Since when do you question your husband?" I am dumbstruck.

"Bitch, I ain't talking to you. Get your flat arse outta here. You be sticking your nose in my business like it includes you in any way." I'm jealous of Mikhail's wife's American accent.

"Mikhail?"

"You heard her," He says pulling me out of the sitting room. You gotta be kidding me! What the fuck is happening?

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TSAKANI MABASA

"I'm here to fetch Xiluva." I say after greeting the Lopezs.

"She is sleeping over." Michael's mother says. How I have grown to hate this woman.

"You didn't ask me. The agreement was that, she only had to spend two days here."

"Tomorrow is a public holiday. I'm taking her to a family gathering."

"Do I look like I care? We also have a family gathering to attend, Mrs Lopez. You can't keep on making decisions and plans about my daughter. She is my daughter. Not ours."

"You don't even let us fetch her from school anymore!" She groans.

"And I'm certain that you know the reason behind that, Mrs Lopez."

"But you let him fetch her!"

"Listen here. Firstly, you can't compare yourself to my man.
Secondly

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I'm the mother of Xiluva. She is not ours to have. But mine."

"She is not going anywhere," The attitude!

"Don't make stop you from seeing her."

"You wouldn't dare,"

"Try me, Mrs Lopez."

"Tsakani," I hug Michael's father. Luckily he didn't change on me. He is still the man and father he was to me. "Let the child take her daughter,"

"No way!" They start arguing. I head to Xiluva's room where I find her peacefully sleeping. I pick her up before heading into the sitting room, again.

"Father, let me know when you ready to divorce her." I and Mr Lopez laugh before he kisses Xiluva's forehead and I bid my farewell. Khumalo gets out of the car as soon as he sees me approaching.

"Baby girl is sleeping," He says as he takes her from my arms. "And is more heavy, damn!" I drive us back home since my man decided to seat on the passenger seat with Xiluva. Apparently he can't get enough of her cuteness. "MaKhumalo?"

"Khumalo,"

"The war has started,"

"I'm ready for it."

"You know what that means."

"I don't mind. As long as my flower is safe."

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"Got the papers ready?"

"Good, let's meet at the Lopezs house at 4pm."

"Stay calm when you get there," Khumalo advises.

"Haibo. Are you not accompanying me?"

"You want me to? You didn't ask..."

"You are Xiluva's dad, you deserve to be there. I need to do this with you by my side." I hug him.

"Thank you for giving me an amazing daughter like Xiluva. Nothing will change the love I have for the both of you, I promise." He sighs. He has been sighing a lot, lately. I need to have a talk with him after this meeting.

"I love you, Khumalo."

"I love you too, MaKhumalo." He sighs, again. This can't be good.

"Say your part and leave," Mrs Lopez states. What a way to be greeted with.

"I have come to know that Michael had left money for Xiluva, in order to secure her future. Therefore, I, as Xiluva's mother have the right to keep the money under my watch."

"Never!!!" She groans. "I refuse, not with my son's money. You must be mad to think that I would entertain this bull shit. Get out from here!"

"Wife, calm down. She does has a point." Mr Lopez calmly says.

"Don't touch me, Mike! I'm not going to let your foolishness ruin me. You must be mad to think that I would just give

millions away to her. How sure are you that she will not use it for her selfish desires?"

"With all due respect, Mrs Lopez. The account should be under Ms. Mabasa name. Sadly, she hadn't known this back then. You managed to hide this news from her by deceiving Mr Lopez and Ms. Mabasa. The contract late Mr Michael Lopez signed clearly states that only the parents have control over the account. In order to avoid legal action taken, I suggest that you quickly sign over here." He opens the page where they need to sign. "Keep in mind that you, Mrs Lopez, could also get arrested for bribing the lawyer to change the contract." Mr Hams, my lawyer is calm yet serious when it comes to his work. One more reason why I chose him to be my lawyer.

"You little cockroach!" She points her finger at me. Money is the root of all evil, indeed.

"Mrs Lopez, stay in your lane." Khumalo warns.

"Who are you to tell me what to do, in my house!?! I will squash this little cockroach, thinking that she has more power than me! She clearly doesn't know me."

"Monica!" Mr Lopez shouts, startling all of us except for Khumalo. Khumalo looks like he is about to burst soon.

"Shut up, Mike! What do you know about these things!?" Mr Lopez, clearly is underestimated here. How does he live with her? I feel pity for him.

"Mrs Lopez, I don't like your tone. Nor do I like the way you don't respect my soon-to-be wife and Mr Lopez." He says heading towards her.

"Big balls in my house! Don't make a fool of your self. There I have signed! Leave!" I take Mr Hams out where I thank him and wish him a good trip back home. Getting back inside I find Mrs Lopez looking all terrified, Khumalo!! We decide to take Mr Lopez back with us. He might do with different people, who won't let him feel like he is not a man. Good thing, my family had invited I and Khumalo over for dinner.

I'm a woman, but I still don't UNDERSTAND how other women's minds work. Just like women, there are certain things that men hate. We can start with the following:

Women don't like being compared to other women.

-So do men! That can easily lead one into depression.

Women like attention and being showed loved.

-So do men! You want to be spoiled? Learn to spoil others, 50/50.

Women don't like being underestimated.

-So do men! There's no one who likes being discouraged.

Women want to make the most of their lives.

-Hey wena! So do men. Only if we were able to help others as much as they do, things would have been different.

Women want someone who will always be honest with them. Someone who will tell them their wrong doings.

-So do men! Imagine making a fool of your self only because they lied to you. No matter how harsh the truth is, say it. Let them swear at you, but you would have played your part, that makes you the bigger person.

Women need emotional support.

-So do men! To hell with the 'men don't cry' shit!

I think I'm going to end it right there. One of the most important thing I feel like addressing...

Only because your partner is unemployed and you are employed. That doesn't give you the right to disrespect your partner. If the partner is job hunting, be grateful. Imagine feeding a big baby who doesn't even try to look for work? Many relationships... I'm losing it...

"BANG BANG!" I swear I almost urinated myself.

"What's going on!?" Mr Lopez.

"Just stay low," I say calmly. "Back-up. Back-up, I repeat." I search for a gun underneath the car seat. I start aiming and shooting. One doesn't think twice, in war.

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"You got shot," I say, trembling.

"This is a small injury. I will be fine in no time."

"What just happened?" Mr Lopez asks. So he didn't know about it?

"Can we trust you, Mr Lopez?" Khumalo asks with a cold, brave face on.

"You need to. For Xiluva." I say.

"What do I need to do?"

"Take Mrs Lopez out of the country." Khumalo suggests.

"She won't agree to that. You have already showed her that you are her problems. She won't leave for a vacation without

getting the money back or making you suffer." I and Khumalo look at each other.

"You knew?" I ask.

"Yes. My wife doesn't know that. I overheard her and Mikhail talking about destroying you. And knowing how the depth of their greed is..."

"They won't stop at nothing. Mr Lopez, I'm sorry but your family leaves me with no choice but to hurt them." I close my eyes.

"As long as my grandchildren don't get hurt, Khumalo. Not even a single scratch..."

"I understand, Mr Lopez."

"You need to rest," Mxolisi says. He is Khumalo's doctor when it comes to ... helping gang members when they hurt.

"I'll call to cancel." I say taking my phone out.

"Don't, MaKhumalo. I don't want to disappoint Xiluva. I rather endure this pain than see her pained by anything." I look into his eyes.

"Khumalo," He kisses my forehead.

"I'll be fine," He whispers.

"You chose well, daughter." Mr Lopez compliments.

"Thank you. Do you still want to tag along?" He nods.

"Bhuti Mtho," Mxolisi says. "Dragon is working with them. He wants to settle the scores."

"Let him settle them."

"What are you on about? Khumalo
don't endanger my daughter."

"The war doesn't end until I say it has. The war doesn't end until I'm satisfied." All of us look at him. The look on Khumalo's face, is the face I don't ever want to see, again. He fists his hands. He look heartless, merciless ... a murderer. I will never get on Mthokozisi Khumalo's bad side. I pray to never be his enemy. His handsome face can also get cold.

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LUFUNO MUKHARI

"What do you mean by you didn't manage to kill them!?" I shout.

"Baby girl," He caresses my cheek. I yank his hand off. "You don't question big dogs. We don't want you to get bitten, now do we?"

"Get away from here," Mikhail warns. Argh! I should have done this my way.

"Never involve that immature girl in our plans again. She will mess them up. And I don't trust her." He groans.

"She won't be a problem for too long ... I will take care of her." Mikhail says. Take care of me? I have never understood riddles, I still don't... Take care of me? Oh God, I need to make Mikhail fall in love with me. Considering the fact that the man can be seduced easily ... my job has proven to be easy already.

"Housewife,"

"Whatchu want?" I love troubling Mikhail's wife. But her calmness!

"Prepare food for me," I say.

"Little bitch. You got hands, right? Do what I am best at in the kitchen. I ain't your helper. You think you can order me around? Look at me wasting my time and energy on a thing that totally has no value." She walks away from me. Each and every second, my hatred grows each and every second for this woman. My desire to be her ... to have her place. I close my eyes. Finally, I know where I belong.

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I've been looking at my flower for over twenty minutes. As always, her smiles, her giggles, her laughter, her pouting and her amazing soul makes me feel better, it makes me love motherhood more, it makes me want to protect her from any harm. How years have passed.

Sigh.

It feels like yesterday when I first saw her, held her, kissed her, made promises to her, I admired her and i still do. It is true, the way our children grow is scary. Soon she will be attending high school, then university, that's if she wants to go to university, then she will be working ... get married and have her own children. Life is truly not fair, at all. As I think about how she is growing, I feel like crying, the pain in my heart and face is not hard to miss.

"You okay, babe?" Khumalo asks. I look at him but I don't answer him as questions pop up in my mind. "What's with the worried face?" He caresses my cheek. I look down. I hug him, he winces.

"I'm sorry," I whisper. He smiles at me. "You got shot because of me," I feel guilty.

"I would get shot many times and endure it for my family. Stop blaming yourself. I made a choice. I made promises, and I'm willing to keep them. I don't run away when it gets tough, instead I stand my ground." A tear falls. He kisses it. "You are my soon-to-be wife. I'm your soon-to-be husband. Therefore I shouldn't let any harm befall on my family. My dad taught me well. I'm not willing to disappoint him."

"I love you, Khumalo."

"I love you too, Khumalo." We kiss.

"Kids are in the house!" Rivoningo exclaims. We pull out of the kiss, laughing. I decide to join other women and engage in their conversations as I look at Khumalo. I, Tsakani Mabasa have never thought that my brothers will be comfortable around Khumalo. Not because he is a gangster and all, but

because Khumalo takes things to heart, and my brothers don't think before talking.

"We all know that your man is handsome, Tsakani." Mom says. I look at her before giggling. The Khumalos have that 'thing', after all.

"Did you just compliment my man? I need to settle the score now." I drink lemon water before screaming: "My Mom just complimented my man's looks! Am I jealous!" I look at Dad, he looks shocked.

"Mhani Mabasa, please, please don't make us start the fifth argument of today. Hayi mahn, I will die young and handsome." My Dad states. We all laugh. Xiluva stands by my side. I pick her up.

"Mom, is grandpa young?" She whispers, clearly shocked. I laugh, attracting people's eyes.

"He thinks so," I whisper back, ignoring the stares I'm getting.

"Rebecca, when are you planning on getting pregnant?" My mom asks.

"Mom! I prefer to talk about this matters with my husband only. Anyways I don't plan on getting married." She stands up and twirls. "I don't want to ruin my figure,"

"What do you mean by you don't want to ruin your figure? What are you implying?" Gugulethu, asks.

"I mean look at you, you have gained so much! I don't want to look like that," The disrespect!

"It's not like you look any better now." I state, making her roll her eyes. "Some fat would do you good."

"Don't you dare," She warns.

"No, don't you dare!" I warn back. "Only because you have never given birth doesn't mean that you should disrespect those that gave birth. We proud of being mothers. We had a chance of carrying a human in our womb. I wonder why God made amazing women infertile and made those that don't deserve to be mothers fertile. You also have no right to body shame others. Take a good look at yourself, first." I'm boiling! Where did Buti Hlulani get her!?

"Tsakani, moya hansisi." Dad says.

"No, Dad. She is one of the women who makes other women feel less of a woman. How could she be spared! She needs to be taught a lesson and manners."

"Tsakani!" Hlulani roars.

"Only because I'm quiet and you are MaKhumalo's brother doesn't simply mean that I will stand by and watch you disrespect her. After all, she said nothing wrong. If you don't want to be parents, that's your problem, not ours. So your wife shouldn't go around feeling herself whereas there's no her." Khumalo calmly says.

"Please don't let go of my hand," I warn as I hold on to Khumalo more tightly.

"Sthandwa sami, don't be scared. I won't let you get hurt on my watch." I nod. After walking for about five minutes, we finally get to our destination. He pull my blindfold down. "Don't open your eyes," He unexpectedly picks me up, making me screech. He puts me down before telling me to open my eyes.

"Babe," I cry out. He smiles at me before we French kiss. "A whole picnic set up," I breath out.

"Under the sky," I look up. "Hey, don't cry." He begs.

"I have never felt this special," I state.

"You will always feel unique, beautiful and lovable for the rest of our lives." I look at him, without blinking. "I promise," He kisses the back of my hand. I dip two strawberries into melted

chocolate, he put cream over them. I give him one strawberry before we feed each other. These efforts do count.

I had never thought that I would have fallen in love after so many years, but the best part of it is that I fell in love after healing. I also had never thought that I would fall in love with my client. I'm in love with an amazing guy. At this point I know that I want him for myself.

"Tsakani Mabasa," His one knee down and one up. "I never thought that I would fall in love like I have fallen. I never believed in love until I got to spend time with you. I never thought that there are parents out there who can do anything to protect their children until I observed the way you are with our flower. Thank you for giving birth to a beautiful flower. I'm willing. I'm willing to give it all up for the both of you. I want us to build a home, together. I want us to stick together, nothing against us shall prosper. Tsakani, not only are you unique, but you also strong. The second strong woman, I know. I have never paid attention to small things, but you have changed all of that. You changed me without knowing and that showed me that you love me for who I am.

I promise to eternal love you. I promise to always protect our family. I promise to put our family above anything. You have become my strength, my lover, my friend, my happiness and my sanity. Tsakani Mabasa, would you please marry me? Would you please get married to me, to be mine, to be Mrs Mthokozisi Khumalo, to be a mother to our children and I. I love you, nkosazana. MaKhumalo." I cover my face and more tears fall. He removes my hands from my face and kisses them. "I will always love you and cherish you," I pinch myself. It's happening.

"IT'S HAPPENING!" I scream while running around the garden. "GOD IS GREAT! I'M GETTING MARRIED!" I cry out.

"It's a yes!" He exclaims.

"Yes, yes, yes!" He pulls me to him, slides the ring in my left finger and pulls me into a kiss. He caresses my sides as I inhale his scent. He smells so good! Ever felt like dying in your partner's embrace?

"MaKhumalo omuhle," I heat up before pulling him into the kiss. As soon as we turn, our family members ululate. They hug us and congratulate us. After chilling together for two hours, they head to their homes, with my flower too.

"This is it," I breath out after the kiss that transpired few seconds ago.

"This is it," We kiss as he runs his hands over my body.

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LUFUNO MUKHARI

I have been staring into space. I can't tell out where I am. I can't even move due to the fact that I cannot feel my legs. The door knob turns, I pretend to be asleep.

"Is she going to stay with us?" She asks.

"It's up to you, my love." He says. I'm at Limpopo! How did I get here? I can't stay here. I can't. But where will I go?

"Where's that friend of yours? I'm sure he will be able to help her get a job." She says. My cousin already looking for ways to get rid of me, not that I want to be here, in this house, with them.

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°°One week later°°

LUFUNO MUKHARI

At this point, I don't know my worth. For a job, I had to use my body. Only if I hadn't ... Nothing can be undone now, I made my bed and I will lie on it. I have no choice but to endure each and every pain I will be experiencing from now on. Taking people for granted won't hurt the people you using but will hurt you more. He knew my weakness and decided to make false promises to me, I fell for them. All of them. I truly do use my brain for stupid things.

"When are we doing this again?" Thabelo asks.

"What's in it for me?" I question him.

"A house and a car,"

"All in my name?" He nods before caressing my cheek. He licks my neck, I tilt my head. "Say it," I record as he says it. I am not going to allow being made a fool, again. "Can I live with you for a while?"

"I don't even have to think twice. When do you want to move in?"

"Today will be just fine," He sneers.

"You in a hurry,"

"That house suffocates me, I will die if I stay with those people longer."

"Won't my house suffocate you?" I sit on top of his lap. I kiss him.

"It won't, after all, we only have a no strings attached relationship."

"You already named it. You fast,"

"We both need to get satisfied." I push him down to the bed. He flips me under him and dry humps me.

"Let's go take your bags so that I can welcome you to my house, roommate." Roommate. Not bad at all. The bad thing is having to use my body for survival. Beggars aren't choosers. I need to live with whatever I will be having and owning. I ruined my own life.

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MTHOKOZISI KHUMALO

"Baby, calm down. Talk to me, what happened?" She just kept on crying, making my heart break. I left whatever I was doing and drove to where her location took me. Getting there, I got her inside my car and got someone to send her car to our

house. Getting to our house, I helped her drink starch water before bathing her.

"They took my baby," She said

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staring into space. "They made the principal unconscious and took my baby,"

"Mr Lopez had called," She turned her head to look at me. "She is at their house. Mikhail and Mrs Lopez did it," I hug her as she cried. I can't relate to how she is feeling but I do know what she's going through, after all I went through it too. The people you trusted breaking you and their promises, is nothing new to me. "I managed to get Portia arrested for molesting me when I was staying at her orphanage," She got out of my embrace and looked into my eyes. She held my cheeks. "It happened two weeks ago," A tear fell from her eye.

°°Flashback°°

"Mthokozisi you better tell me what you meant when you said that she is a rapist!?" My Dad shouted at me. I knew that he wouldn't let it go. I knew that this topic would resurface soon.

"It was because of you! It was because of you and Mom!" I roared.

"What the hell are you talking about!? What are you blaming us for? Have you lost your mind!" He scolded me.

"She molested me! SHE MOLESTED ME! YOU LEFT A MONSTER TO LOOK AFTER ME!" At this point everyone in the house was in the study. "I GREW UP HATING MY SIBLINGS BECAUSE OF YOU!" I went down on my knees. Mom and Mxolisi were crying in each other's arms. As much as Mxolisi is fun and acts like he is tough, he is an emotional person. "They had it easy. They had a lively childhood. They never experienced what depression felt like! I had anxiety whereby i found joy in wanting to die.

I found joy in banging my head on the wall. I found joy in putting a razor and knife under my pillow every time I went to sleep. I used to have a sharp object on me each and every

second. I never had it easy. Portia broke me! She took my chance of having a happy childhood away from me!" Dad stumbled back. "You are responsible for it! You are responsible," My mouth started trembling, my body started shaking, my throat went dry, my tears kept on falling, I struggled to breath.

Dad embraced me in his arms as he cried too. He screamed until my ears went deaf for a moment. He rocked to and fro with me in his arms. It broke him. He whispers the most unpleasant words: failed you, didn't protect you, I'm not a father, I wasn't there, I took your childhood, I broke you, you didn't know how to confide in me, you kept all the pain to your self.

°°End of flashback°°

"I have started seeing a therapist,"

We held each other. No one said a thing. We cried until our tears dried out. We felt each other's pain.

EPILOGUE

"I killed her," Mr Lopez cries out as soon as he sees us. He looks at his bloody hands. My eyes lower to see Mrs Lopez's corpse. She was stabbed, directly at her heart. Mr Lopez killed his own wife who has been married to him for so long, for my child, his grandchild. Nothing I say or do will ever show my gratitude to him.

"It's okay," I hug him as he weeps soaking my dress.

"I'll get someone to clean up," I nod. "I will send Xiluva to my parents' house, I don't want her to see all of this. I'm scared it could traumatize her," He says nothing more as he heads down the passage. I tell Mr Lopez to take a bath as Khumalo's people take care of the corpse.

"What will we say she died of?" I ask Khumalo as he hugs me.

"Heart failure," I nod against his chest.

"Is it over?"

"I took down Dragon. The only person left is Mikhail."

"Don't kill him, he has kids to take care of." We pull out of the hug.

"We will just teach him a lesson, so that he doesn't come back looking for us, again."

"Thank you, for all the things you have done for me and Xiluva."

"You don't need to thank me, you are my family." I smile at him. I will forever remember what Mthokozisi Khumalo did for me. Mrs Lopez is sent to a mortuary after faking her reason of dying. Never thought things would be easy. The person giving me unlimited strength is my flower, Xiluva, she is my only hope. She is my hope and she will always be my hope, not because she is an option but because she is my eye opener and daughter.

"You done?" I ask as I my eyes land on Mr Lopez, who looks agitated.

"You welcome to come and live with us,"

"I don't want to be a burden,"

"You will never be a burden, to us." I hug him.

"Some people are on their way to take your clothes. You will show them which furniture you want to keep."

"Thank you, my son."

"What's going on here?" I tilt my head to look at where the voice is coming from. Mikhail. "Where's Mom?"

"She died," Mr Lopez says. Looking at his pale face

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he will definitely need therapy. He's not able to process what he has done and the passing of his wife. No matter how bad a person is, no one wants to see a loved one who has always been there leave this world. Death is Satan himself. Just like Satan, it manages to leave us broken and depressed. The pain of realising that you will never see or hear their voice. You never realise someone's importance until they pass away. But in this case, it's different. Mr Lopez knew Mrs Lopez's importance in his life, but due to certain circumstances he had to be the one to take his wife's life in order to save another important person in his life, his grandchild.

"What do you mean she died?" He closes his eyes and flexes his neck.

"She died of heart failure," Khumalo says. Mikhail open his eyes and heads towards Khumalo. He strangles him. Khumalo pushes him away and holds his neck. He roars. His veins on his face pop out. He walks towards Mikhail as he takes steps backwards. Mxolisi takes Mr Lopez away from the scene. Poor old man.

"Aren't you going to kill that bastard?" Mxolisi asks when he comes back. Mikhail evil laughs, making my blood go cold.

"I can't kill him." He punches Mikhail before picking him up and throwing him on top of the wooden table. "Take MaKhumalo, away from here." Mikhail evil laughs, again. I close my eyes. I know this laughter. But from where. It all comes back in a flash to me.

"Are you okay?" Mxolisi asks, shaking me. My eyes snap open.

"I'm ... I'm okay. Hand me the gun." He raises his left eyebrow. He finally gives his gun to me when he realises that I'm serious. Khumalo turns to look at us, I walk to him. "It was you," I say, holding my gaze at Mikhail's face full of blood. His blood is nothing compared to his blood. "I don't want to kill him, I just want to hurt him."

"Are you sure? I don't want you to live your life with regret,"

"She won't do anything to me," He laughs, again.

"I want you to know how it feels," He stands behind me. He helps me aim the gun on Mikhail's waist. "It was you," I say. I pull the trigger. Khumalo lets go of arms.

"We can leave now,"

"I want to settle the scores." I aim the gun on his waist and shoot again. I spit my saliva next to his foot before holding Khumalo tightly, I will never let go of this man. I heave a sigh. It was him ... If it wasn't for Xiluva, I wouldn't have survived. She is my hope, my only hope.

.....**The End**.....

I AM TSAKANI MABASA AND THIS WAS MY STORY.

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