

A romantic scene between a man and a woman in a rustic setting. The man is shirtless and has a beard, leaning towards the woman. The woman has her hair in braids and is wearing a striped tank top. They are standing in a doorway or between wooden posts. The lighting is warm and intimate.

Anelisa Ngcobo

UTHANDO:
The Stolen Kisses

Uthando: PROLOGUE

1999, the year I got out of my shell and spreaded my wings. I had always held myself back but that day I got past my fears and got over the obstacles I had set for myself. I was the best but I refused to acknowledge it, everyone else believed in me but I failed to believe in myself. That day we played against the Street Sharks F.C, a well known soccer team to beat any team they played against and score goals like the match was nothing but a breeze, they'd fly through their opponents and run around the ground like they own the soccer field. I don't doubt that for a second because I've watched them play.

But that day they were playing against, IMBASA Golden Team, we were not called gold for nothing. Even when we were playing in the under 12 category, I took my love for soccer very seriously and not once had I accepted defeat very kindly so I guess that's

why I stepped out of my comfort zone that day. The other team had underestimated our capabilities anyway so they made things easy for me. We were on a tie of 1 – 1, it was a tough game but coach told us to fight for that extra goal to win the game. The Sharks brought the same spirit to the field so it was fire against water, the game went from 14°C in the first half to 100°C in the second half.

In the last 2 minutes of the game, I had the ball under my foot and took a second or 2 to scan the field. Enzokuhle was open so I passed the ball to him, I think the other team had noticed that we were the best in our team so they covered us as much as they possibly could. Enzo moved forward through opponent's midfielders and passed the ball to me, I was playing the midfielder position that day, in every other match coach would put me on the striker position but not on that fateful day. I dribbled the ball, went past the two opponents with the ball still on my feet and passed it to the Simo the striker.

He managed to get past the defenders cautiously avoiding fouls and shot the ball to the goalkeeper. Instead of diving right, the goalkeeper dove left and GOAL! The crowd went wild at that point and I just sank down to the ground. Just then the whistle was blown by the referee to say that the game was over. It was close, we won with 2 – 1. That was a game that the Street Sharks would never forget. They played well but we played better. We stood in line and shook hands before we were awarded our Encouragement awards. Everyone got the award but only the IMBASA Golden Team got to lift up the trophy.

All my fellow team mates preferred bathing at home since the showers only had cold water and I was the odd one out because I didn't have a problem with it. People left the field including the Sharks team. I used that opportunity to slid to the showers and wash off the sweat. Let the cold water calm my nerves. I had all my essentials with me and as expected the water was cold as ice. Washing my

head, I kept on reminiscing the game – I was happy we won against the strongest team and I smiled to myself. My father is definitely going to know about this and my mother might as well cook the food I love so much.

The shower curtain opened and I turned to look back.

“Coach!” I said startled. I didn’t know what else to do so I hid my pubic area with both my hands. My heart was pumping hard against my chest and my ears went deaf for a few seconds as the adrenaline rushed through my whole body.

“Simbonga,” he said looking at my small frame naked body. “I want to see you in my office when you are done.”

Not having the ability to talk after the shock – I nodded to him and he left after closing the shower

curtain. I stood still for a full minute before I continued to wash my body and stand under the running water to remove the foam. The relaxing shower I was looking forward to turned to a nerve wrecking experience. I don't know who I was expecting but it was not the coach and I don't know why but the way he looked at me made me feel uncomfortable. Before leaving the shower, I shook off the negative thoughts and got dressed in clean clothes that my mother packed for me.

"That was a good game, I'm very proud of you son. You have really proven to be the best in the team. You see what you did in that last 2 minutes is something even I myself wouldn't have thought," coach spoke up after I took a sit opposite him in his office.

"I just did what I thought was right at the time," I told him.

“You are too mature for your age. Your quick thinking and creativity will take you places,” he leaned forward on his desk with his hands linked together and said, “I saw that the boots you play with have worn out and I can’t have my best player be held back from being better because he is running in the field barefoot. That is why –” he went under his desk and placed a pair of new soccer boots on top of the desk. “– I bought these for you.”

My lips curled into a wide smile, looking at the soccer boots I could hear them calling my name – “Simbonga! Simbonga! Simbonga!” like when the audience in the field would call my name when I headed towards the net ready to kick the ball past the keeper and into the net. Like most kids, I didn’t have soccer boots that were in good condition. In fact the ones I had should have never been allowed in the field that’s how bad they were. But I understood that my father couldn’t afford to buy me a new pair since he was still struggling to make means meet at that time.

“Really?” I asked excitedly.

“Yes,” he stood up, walked around the desk and sat on the edge of the desk right in front me. “You can have them BUT if I scratch your back then you’d have to scratch mine,” he said adjusting his hard cock that I didn’t notice was so visible under his pants. I swallowed hard looking at it.

“What do you mean?” I shot my eyes to his face.

“If I give you these boots, you will have to do something for me as well.”

He stood up, unbuckled his belt and unzipped his pants. I shot my eyes close at the sight of his hard rock cock, I held on to my seat like I was afraid a whirlwind would come and take me away from that chair. It was big, dark with veins around it – its tip was covered with the extra skin.

“Simbonga,” he called out and as I opened my eyes he was busy stroking it. Because I was sitting down, his cock was directly on the level of face should he have stepped closer it’d have touched the tip of my nose. “You lick it like when you lick your popsicle, that large swirls ice cream to prevent it from melting to your tiny little hands,” he said pulling the skin back to reveal the pink head. At that time men didn’t circumcise – it made them less of a man, they said.

I shook my head raising my eyes from his cock to his face.

“If you won’t do it then fine but I’m sure Enzokuhle would love the new boots for the next practice and for the next game match,” he looked at me. Only then I noticed that his eyes were smaller and red – they weren’t as they normally would be.

I knew Enzo and I were good at playing soccer but I was still the best. If he would get the boots then he’d play well and be at my level but if I get the boots

then I'd be the greatest. I swallowed and shifted on my seat. Coach stepped closer to me, fear engulfed me but I kept reminding myself of the new soccer boots on top of the table. They were on the tip of my hands and the only thing standing between me and them is this cock.

"Yes...don't let that ice cream melt onto your hands, keep on licking...good boy," he said patting my head and groaning in pleasure.

My parents were over the moon to find out that we won the match and top of that I was not only rewarded with an award but I was also given soccer boots to top of the prize. I never said anything about what took place after the match or what I had to do to get those boots because the coach and my father were great friends. The coach would help us when things were really hard during the month, if I said anything, no one would have believed me and worse we would've lost our helping hand.

Two weeks from that day, we heard the news that the coach was attacked in his home and he was stabbed 23 times all over his body. The attackers even went as far as cutting off his penis, the dog in his yard was found playing with it – imagining that was horrific. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't stop thinking about what he had done to me and I couldn't stop but wonder why he was killed. I didn't know if I should've been happy or sad, him being dead meant I was not going to be forced to do anything I didn't want to do but on the other hand, it meant we had lost the helping hand I was afraid we'd lose.

He was buried soon after the incident and my father was devastated – he had lost a good friend. And the team had lost a good coach, so another coach was appointed but I stopped attending practice. I let go of my dreams of becoming a soccer star. My parents thought maybe it was because of the change of coaches but it was more than that. Three years later, I went back to the field and I was trained by the new coach. He was just as good as my first

coach so adjusted very quickly, Enzo was made captain of the team and I was the deputy. My love for soccer came back just as strong as it was before that incident.

Through the coach's connections we got the opportunity to play with teams in and around Durban. We were still playing for the under 15 but the team's spirit was overwhelming. We prepared for the trip to Durban, we had to contribute equal shares of money for the accommodation, transportation and food. We practiced almost every day preparing ourselves to be able to play with the best. We didn't see ourselves as the best compared to the soccer teams in the city, we were a team from a small village and we were still struggling to get soccer boots that fit and are in good condition.

In Durban, we won 2 out of 3 matches that we played in. That boosted our confidence and it really restored my belief that I was the best in the game because most goals were scored by me though I wouldn't have done it without the rest of the team.

While we were sleeping in the room provided, I felt a tap on my shoulder I opened my eyes only to find the coach standing over me. Everyone else was still sleeping, it was a long day and rest was what we all needed.

“Come share a bed with me, that way you won’t be squashed up with no place to stretch your limbs – come.”

I followed after him and we both got in under covers. Five minutes passed, I was close to drifting off to sleep when I felt the coach's body against my back. He was too close so I shifted forward to create space between us but he came closer.

“Ungasabi mfana wami I won’t do anything you don’t want me to do,” he whispered into my ear.

“Can I please sleep in peace, I’m tired.” I told him,

fear was already crawling all over my body as a thought of history repeating itself crossed my mind.

“Listen,” he turned to lie on his back. “There are people who want to come to select a few players from our team – only the best and I want you to be part of that lot.” He got my attention so I listened in still with my back on him. “You are the best Simbonga, even better than Enzokuhle that captain position should be yours. With your skill, you are destined only for the best and you can go places. That’s why I’m prepared to put in a good word for you. I have connections and in the next 4 to 5 years you can play for and against the best professional football teams in Johannesburg.”

That was my dream, I aspired to play for the best team amongst the greatest and that's why I pushed myself.

“Scratch my back so I can scratch yours – izandla

ziyagezana.” I remembered those words like the last incident happened yesterday, it was still fresh in my memory like it happened even in my sleep. “You want this?” he asked.

“Yes.” I exhaled and pulled the blanket to my neck.

“You can have it, the ball is in your court.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Turn around and I'll show you,” he said already pulling the blanket off my upper body. I turned to sleep on my back and he took my hand and placed it on top of his already hard cock. I swallowed the lump on my throat and touched him like I knew what I was doing. “Stroke it,” he said heaving through his mouth.

I did as told for a minute or two until he got tired of my hand and told me to get on my knees. He wasn't kind about it and the sweet kind coach I knew was gone. He pulled my shorts down to my knees and brushed the tip of his cock on my anal entrance before inserting himself in without any lubrication. He warned me not to scream so I cried silently as he pleased himself. I bled that day, the next day I was limping but I managed to pretend like I wasn't in pain. We went back home and then a few days before the people in charge of the selection came, the coach had his way with me whispering sweet nothings against my ear.

I felt dirty and less of a male but I still didn't say anything and remained to suffer in silence. It was by God's grace that the coach kept his word and I was selected. Many years went by, my career in soccer grew and I was a well-known soccer player amongst the best. From a village boy to a celebrity winning awards at every Football Awards ceremony. As the years went by, that more daunting my dreams

became and my body started changing. At first I thought it was nothing but that was until I realised that I had to do something about it.

“When did you realise you had a problem?” my therapist enquired.

I sighed and sank my body into the couch that I was sitting on. I knew the answer to the question but I had lost my voice. Tina, my therapist, closed her notepad and looked at me without saying a word or pushing me to answer the question. She has been really patient with me. I rubbed the palms of my hands against my pants and exhaled sharply.

“I realised I had a problem when I couldn’t look at my son for more than 2 minutes without getting a boner.”

Uthando: One

Simbonga

The sound of running water jerked me out of my sleep and my eyes opened wide. I was feeling tired and less energized, for a 32 year old I felt like a 62 year old every morning. My body feels overworked maybe the years of hard work of being a champion is taking its toll on my body after 2 years since my retirement. I retired early because of Kwandokuhle, my son, he was 8 years old when his mother died so he became my full responsibility from there on. I couldn't juggle moving from one province to the next while he was still that young – I had to step up and make sacrifices. Now my son is my first priority before anything else.

I slid out of the bed and followed the sound of the water coming from the bathroom 2 doors away from my room. When it was just the two of us left, I saw it

right that I get us a smaller house just to eliminate that lonely feeling in a big house filled with more empty rooms than not. It also gives us less room to mess since everything and every room is on sight so we don't get away easily from tidying up after ourselves. The small house forces us not to be lazy as the rest of the boys – Mme Radebe would have a fit if she'd find the house up side down. She is the one who looks after Kwando when things get a bit rough on my end.

The bathroom door is slightly open so peeped in and Kwando is standing next to the bathtub wearing his pyjama shorts only. He has his back on me so he can't see me and his mind is focused on the temperature of the water. He kept his hand in the water as the tap continued to run, he was slightly bending over so his butt came into view – I felt a ticklish feeling deep inside my belly as I looked at him. My body was getting excited so my heart started beating faster, the excitement went straight to my groin since I liked what I saw in front of me.

When the water was at his desired temperature and amount, he turned off the tap and got ready to get inside the tub. He removed his flip flops while his hands worked on his shorts – I made my way in and he turned to look at me.

“Dad what are you doing here?” he asked clearly confused.

For a 10 year old, he had a mouthful to say about why Mme Radebe should stop bathing him and that he can bath himself. He is a bright lad so I had no doubt that he’d manage on his own but only on a condition that Mme would wash his back at least once a week and we sealed the deal with a handshake.

“Let me help you with that,” I said reaching for his shorts.

“No I can do it myself.” He pushed my hands off and that only made me upset.

“Stop fighting it – I know you want this as much as I do!”

I forcefully turned him around and he started crying as confusion befell on his mind. My cock was already pointing out of my boxers, pulsing and getting more hard with each passing second. He held onto the edge of the bathtub while I prepared to fill him and pleasure myself. He pleaded for me to stop, his sobs echoed inside the room and he fought to turn around but my hold was tight on his small waist. I pushed in and he screamed in pain but I quickly covered his mouth with one hand before I started moving inside him. Because he was much shorter I bended over and put all my weight on him. It felt so good being inside him, in and out I moved while he silently cried and sniffed under my palm.

I felt body tensing up, the pleasure was too much but I was still not ready to release. I humped hard, heaving on his back – he shook his head and his grip on the edge tightened – he was in pain. “Daddy will be done now-now, okay?” I whispered into his ear. Finally my whole body jerked up, my mind went blank as electrifying waves that made me shiver covered my whole body and then I exploded inside him. I tightly shut my eyes close, groaning loud in pleasure. I felt like a whole part of me left my body at that moment and it was the best orgasm I’ve ever had in years.

After that rejuvenating feeling, I open my eyes and I am met with a white ceiling. My hand felt wet so I removed the covers in one swing – my hand is in my boxers, I jerked off in my hand! I huffed in frustration and slid off the bed. I felt disgusted in myself when I saw my load in my hand. I hate the person I have become in the last 2 years, even though my therapist said the dreams are normal and I shouldn't stress much about it – I just can't help it but be angry with

myself because this is my son. I shouldn't be having wet dreams about him, never should I find myself attracted to him or have sinister thoughts of how good it'd feel to be inside him.

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In the kitchen I found Kwando busy doing his homework with his breakfast not far from his exercise book. He is multitasking, he throws in a mouthful spoon of oats in his mouth and goes back to writing on his book. While I was looking at him, I got startled by the pan hitting the stove and I broke off the stare just in time without getting hard. My therapist put me on a task a few days ago, to see how long I could look at him without getting a boner – we were in a safe space in her office. She timed me for 3 minutes and 16 seconds which was better than every other time.

“Your breakfast will be ready in a few minutes,” Mme

Radebe said after I had greeted her.

She stays with us full time, day in and day out. I don't trust myself around Kwando. I know he's my son, I never want to do anything bad to him or hurt him but it's better to be safe than sorry even Tina thinks it's best this way. I don't even get to spend much time with him, he has warmed up to the idea but it still doesn't feel right. I wish to play with him, have boy to man talks and those father and son day or night outs but it's different with us. He regards me as his father but I feel less than that – I can't even drive him to school.

“Bye dad, Mme I will see you guys later,” he says hanging his bag over his shoulders and running towards the door – his transport has arrived to take him to school.

“Have a nice day,” I say waving my hand to him as he closes the door behind him.

I sighed and took the almost empty bowl of oats to the sink. As much as we have help in the house – I make it a necessity that we also clean up after ourselves. I regard myself as a stay-at-home dad, as much as I don't do much in that department, it's only fair I lift off some weight off Mme Radebe's shoulders. If I knew I would encounter such post trauma as Tina calls it, then I wouldn't have left my soccer career. Tina says only 1% of her patients come with such trauma, she doesn't deal with it as much but also it's not something she is not familiar with.

Knowing I need help is the first step, getting help is the second step and working towards helping and bettering myself is the third step – a step that most people don't reach often. No one knows about this except for my therapist, Mme Radebe believes she's here because being a single dad is hard for me and I need a pair of extra hands. I'd never get myself to tell her anything, the last thing I want is for her to call me a rapist, turn my son against me or worse have

him taken away from me. She will never understand. That's why I'm getting help, it's because I don't want to be separated from my son.

While I went through my e-mails I came across an e-mail from Dingani Mavuso, a Technical director of the soccer committee – also an old friends of mine. I clicked on the e-mail and Mme Radebe placed a plate with full English breakfast on the table. I thanked her and sipped on the cup of coffee. The e-mail is actually an invite to a meeting that is taking place in two hours, he didn't say what it is about but I accepted anyway. He is the only man I've ever trusted in my entire soccer career because he had my back, not only that, he also had good intentions and not once did he ever try to cross the boundaries of our relationship. I got a friend and a second father in him.

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After breakfast, I drove straight to Dingani's office. We are still in Johannesburg I couldn't move from here, I had grown to love it here and most games took place here in Gauteng so I couldn't move to another province when all my team mates had relocated here. When I finally earned enough money, I extended my father's house because they both refused to leave the village. If it was for me they'd be staying Umhlanga, living in luxury. My father even went as far as saying he doesn't want to be separated from his roots and forget who he is, my mother only agreed for me to extend only if she'd be in charge of the plan and design – women!

I parked outside the building and made my way in. The Secretary knew that I was coming so she let me into Dingani's office.

“Mehlo madala!” he said as soon as I stepped inside his office.

“It's only been a few months,” I said taking his hand for a handshake.

As much as I refer to him as a friend more times than I refer to him as my mentor – I have too much respect for the man. I treat him as I'd treat my father so I know when to be overboard and when not to cross the boundaries and be professional like today.

“Take a sit.” He doesn't waste time that's what I like about him.

“So what is this about?”

“I have a team in Durban that needs a coach,” he says leaning forward.

“Okay,” it comes out quietly as I don't understand what that has to do with me.

“I heard that you are attending therapy,” he looks at me and I look everywhere else besides him looking for a place to hide except there was no way I could hide from him, wherever I am he’d find me like he found out about therapy. “They need a coach and you need some time out. Time away from ‘everything’.”

By everything he means Kwandokuhle, now I’m convinced that he didn’t do the digging but instead Tina came to him. I have mentioned him quite a few times, or maybe a lot during my sessions so I think she has a hand in this and she knew that I’d never say no to Dingani that’s why she came to him instead of telling me the news herself.

“But I don’t have the qualifications to be a coach.”

“You are already registered to do a course online.” He came prepared. He really knows what he is doing and worked hard to make it hard for me to say no.

“I can’t leave my son alone.”

“He won’t be alone. Parkfield Boys Boarding School in Durban is willing to take him,” he tossed a piece of paper to me and I took it – it’s an acceptance letter from Parkfield. “And don’t worry about travelling with him, my wife will take care of his things like clothes – his essentials. All you have to do is get down to Durban and leave the rest to me.”

I put the paper down and exhaled sharply, “What do you know about the team?” he smiled convinced that I am actually considering this.

“Female team, all seniors and it's a amateur team in KwaMashu,” he smirks like he just read my mind.

“I have to start from scratch – the basics?” He is unbelievable!

“I trust you Simbonga. They don’t know much but you know everything about soccer. I have someone that side who will keep an eye on the girls and you. It’s a female team and we can’t afford any sexual harassment scandals.”

“I don’t think I can do this.” Couldn't Tina find something else?

“You will. If you don’t want to do it for yourself then do it for those women who are aspiring for the same dream you had as a child. Help them build a career in sport, grow their love for soccer and most of all do this for Kwando. This is what you need Simbonga.” His face has relaxed like he is pleading with me on this one.

“Okay.” I exhaled and watched him as he widened his smile.

Now how will I break the news to Kwandokuhle. We are not spending much time together as it is and now I’m moving away. And he will be stuck in

boarding school – he is not going to take these news very kindly. I'm also not happy with this but it is to work on myself and have something else to focus on – I'm doing this for him, I kept on reminding myself.

Uthando: Two

Zobuhle

My mother came back from the hospital, looking tired and drained. She had been having trips to and from the hospital everyday of the week and whenever she came back, she had the same expression every time – nothing had changed. My father was admitted in hospital because his diabetes had gone out of control, he needed to be in the hospital close to the doctors so they'd monitor his sugar levels but for the whole week nothing had change. My gut told me, things were only getting worse, not that I could understand anything at that age but I could see from my mother's sadness.

“Your father wants to see you over the weekend,” she told me.

It was a Tuesday, a school day and my father never liked it when I missed school so I understood why he wanted to see me on the weekend. I was looking forward to it but I couldn't imagine at what state he was, the last time I saw him – he was weak, he couldn't walk nor feed himself. My mother had to do everything for him. She spent a lot of time in the kitchen and in their bedroom, if she wasn't preparing his next meal then she'd have been keeping him company and attending to his needs. I didn't see much of him at that time, he just laid on his bed, most of the time naked with just a fleece covering his privates.

I would peeped in the slight open door to get to see him, my heart ached I didn't understand why he had to be like that, look so lifeless and so thin. My mother had changed his diet, all his food was boiled – nothing was fried so that contributed to him losing weight. His ribs and cheek bones were very much visible under his skin. He looked dead on that bed and my mother kept the door closed as much as

possible. Another thing he complained about was the heat, he said it was too hot in the room so that's why he spent more time naked than not and the door was slightly open to let more fresh air into the room.

With him being at the hospital I thought he was going to get better, he had the nurses and professional doctors looking after him so they knew what to do and what would make him better unlike my mother. I was counting down the days, Saturday looked so far but yet so close. On a Thursday, around 7pm in the afternoon – I remember that day very perfectly, I was in the lounge watching the News while I had my homework book on my lap. My mother was busy with something in the other room and then her phone rang. She answered on the second ring but I couldn't hear what she said so I turned my attention to the tv.

“NO!” she screamed in her bedroom. Soon after that a piercing wail shook the whole house.

I didn't know what to do, I just froze and listened to my heart beating against my chest like a war drum. My ears were buzzing and my head was filled with more questions than confusion as she continued to wail. I remained glued to my seat, stunned and then it dawned to me and a tear escaped from my eye. In a few minutes, my aunt whose house was close to ours barged inside the house and headed to where my mother was crying. I closed the homework book and held it on my chest as more tears fell on my cheeks – couldn't he hold on a little while longer, just until I had seen him?

More relatives got in from my cousins, my uncles, aunts to my grandmother, who also wailed when she found out about the news that her eldest son was no more. No one had to tell me, I sensed it and I felt it. That night I couldn't sleep, the picture of my mother sitting on that mattress with her head under that blanket was stuck in my head. I could see by her posture and the way her body was shaking that she was crying. The aunts took up the whole space on

that mattress and I couldn't sit next to my mother nor did I get a hug of comfort from her, everyone was just too busy wanting to do everything the right way and forgot about our feelings.

The next day I got to see my mother's eyes and they were puffy and red, she looked broken and lost. I was too young to understand the pain but I lost my father and I'd never see him again that's what my brain kept on reminding me. The casket was brought home a few days later, I watched from my bedroom window as the men brought it inside and the church women sang welcoming him home. I cried because that's not the picture I had in mind for when he came back home. I wished to see him walking in on his own two feet, looking strong and healthy with a smile on his face.

I didn't know if I should've been angry at him for not waiting to see me for the last time. A part of me believed that he knew I was coming but he let go

before that happened and then another part of me said 'no one knows their day' he also didn't know that's why he said Saturday instead of Wednesday. I cried myself to sleep and then later I was woken up by my aunt. She led me to the dining area which had been turned into...I don't know, it had a mattress that my mother was sitting on and a few feet away was a casket that had my father inside.

My aunt pulled me inside the room but I pulled back and restrained from taking another step towards that already opened casket. They wanted me to see him for the last time but I refused. I screamed no as she forcefully pulled me towards it.

"Muyeke!" (Leave her!) I heard one of the other aunts say as I wailed on the floor.

She let go of my arm, I quickly stood up and ran to my room. I cried again, as much as it was true – I didn't want to accept it. He couldn't be dead, no he

wouldn't leave me like that, I knew that the whole thing was a joke – my father was going to come back to me, to us. But those were empty promises, I tried convincing myself anything else but the truth, but that was short-lived because the next day was his funeral. I woke up lighter that morning and prepared myself for the service with one of my aunts' help. The family from my mother's side had come and the uncles that lived in further side of the country came as well for the funeral.

A king had died so everything was done as per our custom. I don't know what happened but that day I didn't feel any longing or pain – it felt like a normal day. I was laughing and talking with my cousins like I'd do every other day. We chased each other around the yard, laughed at everything like all kids would do and during that time I forgot it was my father's funeral. It was his last day above the surface, from thereon he'd be under. The men took out the casket from the house and started chanting, cheering and praising. The Thabethe clan names were recited and

the women ululated. It looked more like a celebration than it was a funeral.

I watched the whole thing from a few metres away. They picked up and placed his casket down all over yard while still chanting and praising him of how a good king he was. The way they were so rough with the casket I thought he'd be laying on his stomach by the time we laid him to rest. The funeral resumed and he was buried in the yard just a few metres away from our house. Again, I couldn't sleep that night because I was thinking he would come out and walk inside the house, that'd have been inhumane and dead people shouldn't be buried so close to people who are still living, I thought to myself.

The following week, my mother sat me down and my uncle, my father's brother, sat next to her. The atmosphere was intense and tension filled the air. They were too serious for my liking, whatever they wanted to tell me was surely not good news and that

made me more curious.

“Zobuhle, you know that your father is gone right?”

I nodded.

“He is never coming back.”

I nodded again.

“Since your father is gone, your mother needs someone else to take care of her,” my uncle spoke up and I looked from my mother to him.

“We are going to get married Buhle, that’s what our custom says since your father died your uncle here will take his place as king and he will be staying with us.”

“I will no longer be your uncle – I am your father hereon.”

I looked at him as tears welled in my eyes, I shot my eyes to my mother and she didn't dispute any word he said. I could see that she was still broken, she didn't want to do this but obviously who would want to defy the elders and the ancestors. Though that didn't make me feel any better, I was angry that my uncle wanted to replace my father only after a week since we laid him to rest, he had no respect or whatsoever for my father, me and my mother. We were still mourning for heaven's sake!

My anger and resentment for my uncle didn't perish over the years instead it was restored and became more stronger when he turned my mother against me. I had just finished matric and chose to take a gap year. During my free time, which was everyday, I would go to the grounds to play soccer. I fell in love with it because it took my mind off a lot of things. I

spent a lot of time away from home so I was less angry, less depressed and more free in the field. Our coach saw my capabilities and told me to push hard and never stop playing because I had something real. I was happy with that, that someone believed in me but that was short-lived.

“Soccer is for boys and you are a girl! If you don’t want to further your studies then you might as well get married like every other girl at your age!” he shouted.

My mother was standing quietly next to him, she was shaking like a leaf in fear and not once had she ever looked at him in the eye. I knew they thought I couldn't see it but I knew that he mistreated my mother behind closed doors and it made me more angry that she saw nothing wrong with how he beat her for every little thing she did wrong. Though I hated my uncle, I had thought he’d make the loss of my father less painful and more bearable but he only

made it worse and twice or thrice as painful. I wished for my father to come back more than ever.

“Listen to your father Zobuhle, I never want to see you dressed like that ever again,” she said pulling me by ear to my room.

I was wearing the soccer jersey and shorts. I was going out for practice but my uncle saw me before I could step out of the house.

“He's not my father, mother. Never have and never will be. I hate him!” I said as soon as we stepped inside my room.

“What is wrong with you?”

“What is wrong with you?” I pointed to her. She had changed, she had become more of a slave and less

of a mother and queen. I couldn't see my mother in that woman who stood in front of me.

“Girly you will respect your father or leave my house, uyangizwa ukuthi ngithini?” (am I making myself clear?), she said pointing towards the door.

I remained silence but my chest was heaving.

“Change and meet me in the kitchen so we can prepare supper.” She had a straight intimidating face that I wished she’d have every time she had to come face to face with my uncle.

After she had left, instead of changing I packed my clothes in a small bag and took out my savings from the bottom shelve underneath the clothes I last wore 2 or 3 years ago. I packed everything and stashed the bag under my bed, changed and made my way to the kitchen. I ran forward that night without looking

back. It was quiet on the roads and that made my escape very easy. I made it out of my village a few hours later and ran to the main road where I managed to get a taxi to town. I rode with that taxi and not once did I regret my decision. The further it moved away the more lighter I felt and then I was convinced that I was doing the right thing for me.

“It's been hours ilokhe uhambe emini,” Phila my neighbour informs me. Eskom is at it again with load shedding and I wouldn't be surprised if the electricity comes back tomorrow afternoon. I'm speaking from experience. There was a time where we lost power for 2 weeks and they span us the excuse of 'stolen cables'.

I thanked Phila and made my way to my room. I am renting a backroom, that looks like a shack with a door that is slanting more to the left and it's by a miracle that the whole thing is still standing. I have been here in KwaMashu for 7 years now and still I

haven't levelled up in life. I am trying and at least I can afford rent, food and my essentials. I work hard to make means meet – from hero to zero I tell you. I had everything but now I have nothing. There is no electricity so I'm not going to cook nor bath.

I threw myself on the bed and looked up to the roof which had a few holes that let the water come in whenever it rained. There are a lot of thoughts that flood my mind whenever I find myself in a quiet and empty space. The ones I have today are not friendly to mind so turn to lay on the side, closed my eyes and let sleep take over me.

Uthando: Three

Simbonga

I looked at my wardrobe and it looked almost empty. I packed as much clothes as I can because I don't know for how long I will be that side. Durban had always been the place I always wanted to go to when I was still just a boy, I knew nothing about Johannesburg except that that it is where most dreams come to life and not by any chance you wouldn't be able to come out of the place as a new person – it's up to you if you choose to grow and follow your dreams or let this place take away your dreams and be left with nothing but a lost soul. Everyone makes it here even if you are business man or iphara what matters is – you made it.

“There's something that I have to tell you,” I say to both Kwando and Mme Radebe.

I didn't say anything to Mme because I wanted to break the news to both of them at the same time. We are in the kitchen sitting around the table.

"I know it's short notice but uh I am leaving Joburg and I am going to Durban tomorrow," I look at both of them.

"I'm coming too?" Kwando asks excitedly.

"Yes but not with me, you will go to a boarding school and I will be somewhere else." His face fell and that broke my heart. I knew it wasn't going to be the best news but I didn't imagine it'd be this bad.

"What is the point of having a dad when I can't even stay with him? You are always here dad but it's like you are not here – why?" his voice is higher than necessary and I'm shocked to hear him talk like that.

Mme opens her mouth to say something possibly to reprimand him but I stop her. It's all my fault and I have to take the heat. I can't expect him to understand when he is just a child, he had to deal with his mother's death and my absence in his life – alone. I feel bad, selfish.

“Kwando?” I extended my hand to touch him but I quickly remembered not to.

He noticed and stormed out of the room. I rubbed my face furiously and exhaled sharply. This hurts. I don't know why I had to be the one in this situation, my life is messed up and now I'm messing up my son's life. I used that time to fill Mme Radebe in on what would happen with her while I'm gone, Dingani was thoughtful to arrange something for her in his friend's house. They won't be paying her much but it's better than sitting at home and not getting anything. At least she understood and was happy that I won't leave her stranded.

Now I have to deal with that son of mine.

Maybe it's about time I got to find out how he really feels without me doing the thinking for him. What he said earlier really proved that I had neglected him, I was too focused on myself and restraining myself from hurting him forgetting that he also has feelings. No child deserves this treatment. I'm sure he is old enough to see that a father isn't suppose to act like this, he sure knows that my behaviour isn't normal and that is confusing him. Maybe he thinks he's the problem when I am the one with the problem.

"Son," I knocked on the door before I pushed it open.

I walked in and made sure to leave the door open. He laid in bed with his head under the pillow. He remained still and made sure that he didn't show any signs of life. Then his nose betrayed him because he sniffed and then he sighed feeling betrayed by his own body. I took the chair next to his study desk and

sat on it facing his direction. I know he knows that I'm here but he is too stubborn to give in and give me his attention.

"I'm sorry for dropping that bomb on you like that," I spoke loud enough for him to hear me. I sighed before continuing, "it's not you, it's me. I have issues that I'm currently dealing with right now and those issues are forcing me to go away for a little while – without you."

I paused for a while because there was movement on the bed.

"I'd tell if I thought you'd understand but you're too young and this thing might mess up with your head. I don't want you to hate me or resent me."

"That's what you are doing, do you hate me?" he spoke up still with the pillow over his head.

“What? No, I love you Kwando. More than anything in the world.”

“So why you never touch me or look at me?”

He raised his head and turned to look at me. His eyes were red and still teary – I have hurt my boy thinking that I’m protecting him. I got the urge to go to him so I can comfort him so I stood up only to sit back down before I could take a step towards him.

“See, you are doing it again.” A tear fell on his cheek.

“I’m sorry,” I said dropping my eyes to look at the floor instead. I bit the inside of my cheek to stop myself from shedding a tear. “One day you will understand. I will make it up to you, okay?” I looked up but he had gone back to hiding under the pillow.

I stood up and walked out of the door. I dialled Tina’s number and she answered on the first ring like she

was waiting for my call. When I told her that, she said she deals with a lot of people with depression so she keeps her phone close because she never knows when they'd need her and she'd never forgive herself if one of her patients feels neglected because she missed their calls. It is different with depressed patients because they have suicidal thoughts almost every time when things get too hard for them to handle or whatever led them to depression triggers their mind again.

After she was done with her speech, I got a chance to say my piece – I'm really worried about Kwando. All that anger he had bottled up inside him, can't be good for him now and in the long run. Tina says I should let him cool off for now, he will talk when he is ready and she doesn't understand that I'm leaving tomorrow so I only have a few hours with him and after that we will part ways. Who knows when I'll get to see him again after this? She tells me not to worry – she is the doctor and I'm just a patient.

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He cried again this morning when I said goodbye to him. I don't even think he is looking forward to going to Durban anymore and that boarding school is the last thing he needs right now. Mme Radebe picked him up and went with him to his room. I never wanted things to go this far. I took my suitcases and pulled them to the door. Dingani's wife will come in later to check up on him. It's close to the final year end so he will start at his new school early next year. In the meantime, he will stay with Mme Radebe, I trust her with him.

I drove to OR Tambo Airport with a heavy heart. I wish there was another way and maybe if Sisanda was still here none of this would've happened. Oh Sisanda intombi yaseMbumbulu. I don't know how it happened but me and my boys ended up in a hospital in Mbumbulu, we were actually in Durban for a game that took place in Princess Magogo

Stadium. I have such a short memory I can't even remember the team we played against. I was hungover, I didn't remember the events from the day before and all my friend were just as confused when we woke up at the reception of that hospital.

“Bobhuti nginganisiza ngani?” (How can I help you?), a female voice chirped in as we were busy arguing about who got us there.

I looked from her high heeled black shoes, to her firm muscled legs – I thought maybe her legs were mistakenly put on her body because the voice didn't match the size of those calves, then my eyes rose up to her knee length white uniform and finally to her face. God she was beautiful, I even forgot I had a hangover and rose up from my seat. She looked at me confused and took a step back. My friends were being idiotic behind me but I didn't pay them any attention, the lady that stood in front of me had taken all my attention.

“I think I have a migraine. Do you know what would help me?”

“You think or you know?”

The gents laughed behind me and I cussed under my breath. Why did she have to be so difficult when she could have just played along and left those idiots with nothing to laugh or talk about.

“I know,” I said placing my hand over my forehead.

She eyed me before shooting her eyes to the guys behind me.

“Anyone else who is hungover?” More laughter erupted behind me.

I exhaled feeling more embarrassed.

“No,” they all said still laughing.

She looked at me and told me to follow her. She swayed down the passage and led me into a small room that had a small bed and a desk just a step away, it was a public hospital deep in the bundus so I wasn't surprised. I grew up in the village so I was used to things like that but not the woman who touched my head to check my temperature. She could've just given me painkillers to get rid of the pain but she had to drag me all the way to the other side of the clinic.

“What is your name?”

“Sisanda,” she said without any hesitation.

I didn't understand what I felt about being that close to her but I felt drawn to her. She was close but not

too close. The space between us was bigger than it should have been.

“Umuhle,” I told her and damn she pulled that gorgeous smile that made me weak on my knees. If I had stayed longer a headache wouldn't have been the only thing that would've needed healing.

We talked for those few minutes we had to each other and we clicked. I got to find out that she was actually a very active person, she ran a lot and participated in marathons and local races. That was the reason behind her firm calves and that slim body. I was taken by that, she was not afraid to say who she was and what she was. I managed to get her number and we started talking. Soon after that we dated, because of the distance between us things got rough but we got over those obstacles that's how we went as far as conceiving Kwando.

Before she gave birth, she moved from Mbumbulu

and moved in with me in my flat in Hyde Park but later she convinced me that a house would be a better place to raise a baby. Not even a month later, it was a week later when I gave her the keys to our new home and to say she was happy would be an understatement, she was over the moon and beyond herself. I loved that woman with every fibre in me, my parents loved her and everyone around her loved her. She was like light in a dark room and she definitely brought light into my life. She made life look easy because she wasn't afraid of the unknown nor would she stress about things she had no control over.

The night she took her last breath was the day I realised that I lived for her. My life had no meaning before her and after I lost her only Kwando kept me sane. Since from then it's been just me and him, I have had a few people that I used to take out my frustrations and I'm not proud to say the word 'used' but that's just the honest truth of the situation. I have opened my heart to love again but it's just that I

haven't found the right person who is fit to be mine and a mother to Kwando.

After touching down at King Shaka Airport, I took the hired car and drove to Glen Ashley, in Durban North, that is where I will be staying – in the suburb filled with white people. I parked on the driveway and got out of the car. At least the house is not too big so I won't feel lonely just that I will have to drive every morning to work and back in the afternoon. I took the suitcases inside the house and from the upstairs window I could see the view of the beach. This is going to be an amazing stay. I hope Durban will heal the wounds that need healing.

Uthando: Four

Simbonga

I am not a perfectionist, but I like to feel that things need to be done well. Most important than that, I feel

an endless need to learn, to improve, to evolve, not only to please the coach and the fans but also to feel satisfied with myself. It is my conviction that there are no limits to learning, and that it can never stop, no matter what how old we are. – Cristiano Ronaldo.

After being selected out of my team mates back in 2002, I was sent to a football academy which allowed me to attend school whilst practicing to become a professional soccer player. I had limited time to myself since both school and soccer demanded every little time I had. I had to put as much effort I put on soccer on my studies as well. After finishing matric, I was able to focus on one thing and that is soccer. And I improved. I grew up with the ball at my feet and not once do I want to take that away from me or anyone else who aspires for the same dream.

That's why I started a NGO, Akwande Football

Scheme, that helps children who love soccer as I do with soccer jerseys and soccer boots. We focus more on the children back in the villages, the ones most people overlook because they think they won't make it forgetting that that's where everyone starts. Hard work leads to success and those boys work very hard everyday, working towards the dream in their hearts – it's not about the skills, it's about the love affair between the boy and the ball. I don't want them to go through what I went through. Emotional scars are more permanent than physical scars.

My father is handling the organization branch in my village, where I come from, he is not one who loves soccer – he doesn't even know where my love for soccer comes from because not even one of my relatives from both families share the same sentiment as mine. But he never stood between me and my dream, he allowed me to work towards my goals and dreams, and cheered me on together with my mother. They have been my biggest supporters since the very beginning, when I was still playing

with the ball made of plastic bags in the streets barefoot. When the goal post was in between two rocks, we had no referee, no coach but just players and fans.

Like I mentioned before, it's all about the love affair between the boy and the ball. It's hard for most to understand as they may think soccer is not a guaranteed career, there are major injuries that one may encounter and that'd be the end of their career in the field – that's true, we can never dispute that. But everyone has to fight to reach their dreams, they have to sacrifice and work hard for it – nothing comes easy. If you believe in yourself then no one can stand in your way. There a lot of people looking up to you, you may not know it but one day when you are not looking or expecting it someone will walk up to you and say,

“...what you have is real. You've got talent.”

That's what Dingani said to me when I first met him.

I didn't even know that he was watching us practice. He had come to check up on the players, our coach and manager as part of his job. He placed his hand on my shoulder and we shared a moment looking into each other's eyes as he voiced out those words. I felt something move deep inside my heart, not once was doubt inflicted inside my mind and I believed every word that he said because he also believed that those words were true, not only to me but to himself as well.

That's when our relationship started, we moved from mentor and player to being friends. Though I never got to tell him and be honest of how I got where I was – he was the number one person I could confide in. He was there, still is, everyday and at any time of the night. Having a person like him made me let go of my fears I had about what happened or what was going on in the soccer industry especially

to those who are still growing. The sexual abuse. It happened then but it is still affecting me even now and it breaks my heart to learn there are still people who do these kind of things to young boys.

There are people who lure children by selling them dreams but only to take those dreams away from them by taking advantage of them – sexual abuse and assault is real. If it hasn't happened to you, your child or anyone else around you, it doesn't mean it's not happening. There are fake football academies all over the country, mostly they target the boys from the villages who aspire to play for the professional soccer teams in Johannesburg. They sell the dream and we buy it, only for those "coaches" to scam parents and sexually assault the young boys.

Not only do they take away their innocence – some let go of their dreams of becoming a soccer player because they are afraid, they trusted a man they looked up to, their mentor and role model, only for

him to take advantage of the power he had in their minds. The post trauma of any sort of abuse is a very hard thing to deal with, many hide it, they bury it deep down in their chests only for it to eat them kancane-kancane. Pain changes people, the emotional pain is the one that is the toughest to deal with because it stays engraved deeper than any physical pain.

A wound heals and leaves a scar but a betrayed heart never heals.

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They are running around the field chasing after the ball. I check on each side of the field and there are no goal keepers. I keep my hands buried deep inside my pockets and look at them, they haven't noticed me and I'm not complaining because this give me time to see exactly what I'm going to be dealing with. There's is a girl, excuse me it's a woman, with short dark hair, she is wearing a yellow jersey with number

20 on the back – she is good. I can see that she knows what she’s doing but it is kind of confusing because it looks like she is playing all positions – striker, midfielder and defender, all at once.

There’s about 26 of them in the field still chasing after the ball, I thought there should be 22 players in the field including the goalkeepers – there’s a lot of work that needs to be done here. I blow the whistle and everyone stops. The other girl had kicked the ball in the air, it goes throw everyone and hits the other girl on the head – my bad. I signalled for them to come forward, to where I was standing and they looked tired. I don’t blame them, chasing is much more tiring than attacking.

“Sanibonani,” I greet scanning the crowd before me.

After replying, one of them puts up their hand and I humour her.

“Who are you?” she asks and I chuckle.

“That's the first and for a soccer player it is actually quite surprising that you don't know me,” I say pointing to myself and folding my arms to my chest.

“Should we know you?” she shoots back.

Before I reply to her, the girl with short dark hair wearing a yellow jersey raises her hand and says, “I know who you are.” I give her all my attention and so do the other girls. “You are Simbonga Masuku, striker and number 16 on the Bic Urban F.C., awarded the best football player of the year award in 2012 and retired in 2018. The only thing I want to know is why are you here,” she says tilting her head to the side with her hands on her waist.

She is giving me the bad girl vibes, you know those ones who come at you with the ‘I-know-it-all’ attitude

and always become defensive whenever you touch any part of their personal lives. I know she is giving me a brave face right now but behind that mask there's a young girl who is running away from the pain of the past.

“Looks like someone did their homework,” I dipped my hands into my pockets again. “And who are you?”

“I am Zobuhle Thabethe, and that over there –” she points to the girl who asked who I am, “that is Slindile. And then the rest will introduce themselves.” She looks at me deep into my eyes and I feel compelled to do the same.

“So you are a celebrity?” a squeaky voice chirped in and I broke off the gaze. Slindile steps forward and looks at me like she’s going to eat me alive. At first I didn’t realise she was chewing that chappies so hard and loud, from where I was standing I could see her uvula.

“It depends who you are and if you want to see me as one but I’m just an ordinary person. Okay, as Zobuhle mentioned I am Simbonga Masuku, former soccer player and from hereon I will be your coach.” I announced.

Some gasped and the rest started talking amongst each other like I’m not there. I see that Zobuhle is their go to person when they have questions because right now they are grilling her with questions that they could just ask me. There’s only one person who is currently happy with the news and that is Slindile, she is going to be handful. I have to set the ground rules early before she jumps and crosses the boundaries because right now the girl is having trouble with fighting to keep her hands to herself.

“Okay that’s enough!” silence – good. “If you have any questions come to me. But right now I’m the one with questions, Zobuhle which position are you

playing on your team?”

She opens her mouth only to close it before she utters any words. I tilt my head to the side and she is having trouble with finding her position in her head. I looked at the rest and they were either looking at the left, right, up or down – no one looked at me.

“Practice is over. Make sure you get enough rest for tomorrow. You are dismissed.”

I watch them as they move away to the other side to get their belongings. I need this time to draw up a plan of how to train them, I don't even know what I'm training them for but for them to be here at this time of the day when they could be doing anything else, shows that their love for the ball is real and some are using this as an escape so I can't take it away from them.

Uthando: Five

Zobuhle

Between La Lucia and Glen Ashley, down on the far south side of Sunningdale Private Hospital lies the four rectangular walls of GlenLands Mental Health Facility. From the full length glass window you can see the view of the small park with green grass always cut to a small length and a rivulet just a stone throw away from the wooden bench that is occupied more by birds than humans. Then further away there's an electric fence that separates the facility and the dark forest that looks more scary in daylight than in night time. If you look further down the forest, you can see the ocean – blue like the sky, you can even feel the sea cold breeze in the early hours of the morning.

GlenLands is the home of the people we consider not 'normal', the ones who have more sense of

humour than the rest, the ones who see more than what meets the eyes, the ones who believe they can read minds and can fly to Mars and back without a spaceship. Families of many have grown tired of them, 'they can't live with maniacs' they often say and some it's because they are better off here than out there since they are a danger to themselves more than to those around them. Like the man in room 1, he has been here for only a year but has about 102 suicide attempts next to his name.

No one knows the reason behind it, I also don't understand why they stop him from escaping because to me death seems like the easier way out than to live in such torture. He knows what he is running away from and maybe it's too big for us to understand. Some spend more time asleep than awake, Sister Martha says the secret is in the pudding. They trick the patients into taking the drugs by putting them in their desserts, it makes it easier than forcing the drugs down their throats. Martha has been working here for 23 years, and what I have

seen in my 3 years of working here is nothing compared to her.

“These people don’t get better, they only get worse,” she often says.

I have seen it with my own eyes too, there was a man who spent time playing chess alone all the time, I’d start my shift he’d be sitting in front of the board and I’d leave in the afternoon and he’d still be stuck on that chair staring at the chess board. The events of the next day, shocked me to death, he was running up and down the hall butt naked saying that he has a message from Jesus, a message that’d save the world – the security tried to stop him. They chased him out of the building with him saying “Lord save me from these vultures, they want nothing else but my soul – take me now!”.

He arrived walking on his own two feet but that day he was strapped on the stretcher while swimming in

the drugs that were flushed into his system. He was put inside the back of the ambulance and a few minutes later the siren faded towards north. That is what most of these people here fear the most, you never want yourself to be labelled as the worst case and be part of the statistics of those who didn't make it out alive. Some you can laugh at them, not that their situation is funny but because their sense of humour is insane. Then there are some that when you look at them, you can reflect and relate to their pain.

Like the woman in room 3, 53 year old mother of 3 children. I don't know much about her but what I know is that she was physically and emotionally abused by her husband – the father of her children. One night it was so bad that he banged her head against the wall, he wanted to kill her and he did. The doctors did the CT scans, the MRIs and they got the same results – brain damage. Because of the trauma, she is suffering from Split Personality Disorder – she lives with different personalities to

escape the pain that she went through. Sometimes she'd speak to herself and have arguments with people which used to be there but we can't see them.

Some days are worse than the others and the pudding really does the trick. When I look at her, I usually think of my mother at the time when I found her laying on the floor, too weak to even lift a finger. I had heard them arguing the night before and I couldn't sleep, they were too loud – I kept on tossing and turning. That morning I found her on the floor, I knew what had happened but she had no bruises on her face so I lifted her pyjama top because I believed the bruises had to be somewhere. I gasped in shock at the sight of a dark purple mark on the side of her stomach.

After treating her, the doctor said she had an internal bleeding and the blood had dried up which created clotting on her veins, it blocked her blood supply to the other parts of her body so that's why she fainted

and they had to operate her to remove the clotting. When asked, my uncle said she fell – the lame excuse that all abusers use to hide their dirt. I tried convincing my mother to report him but she refused, she also backed up his excuse by agreeing that indeed she fell, she slipped and hit the edge of the bathtub while trying to step out of it. The doctor couldn't do anything because if there's no victim then there is no crime.

I usually stand by the window and watch the birds as they fly in and out of their nests. Checking up on their eggs before flying out to hustle for food for supper. It is a story I can relate to, I hustle every day to survive and beggars can't be choosers – that's how I ended up as a cleaner at GlenLands Mental Health Facility. It takes me three taxis to get here if I go via town and two taxis if I go via Gateway Mall in Umhlanga. If it wasn't for the staff taxi that takes me at my gate every morning then all the money I get would be spent on transport. In the afternoon, I take a taxi because I always leave early before everyone

else.

Getting a taxi or any sort of transport around here is difficult since people stay away from the facility as much as possible. The building is surrounded by land and trees, security is really tight and not once since I started working here had I heard that one of the patients had escaped. The doctors and nurses are really good with the patients and you can see that they really want to help them. The cleaning job is not easy since some patients forget which way is the toilet, some go as far and relieving themselves in the flower pots. Every morning the smell of pee covers every inch square of the building and goes straight to my gut, when I first started I used to gag and go as far as throwing up but now I'm getting used to it.

Arriving in KwaMashu it's 4pm in the afternoon, juggling work and practice on a Friday is a nightmare. The practice usually starts when I arrive and that

would be at 3pm on every other day besides Friday and today I'm sure they have started without me. At least the walk from my stop to the grounds is warming me up and by the time I get to the field I'd be fired up. As expected they have started and as I approach coach Simbonga blows the whistle. He puts up his hands to signal time out. I walk up to him, he turns to look at me and grunts walking away leaving me standing there.

The girls come to where I was standing with chest heaving, sweaty bodies and shaking knees.

"If I knew having a coach would be such slavery then I would've stayed away from this thing you call soccer," Slindile says laying down on the ground with her back and knees up.

"Where have you been?"

“Work. You know how hard it is to get transport on a Friday.”

“You were saved. I thought charmer boy would go easy on us since it’s his first day here. Yoh he voor vai-d us like there’s no tomorrow, I wonder if he's the same animal in bed like he is on the field,” she says laying on her stomach and biting her bottom. I wouldn't expect anything less than that from Slindile, she is like a vulture – she wants every man that she sets her eyes on. Even the rest of the girls know to keep their men away from her for the sake of their own sanity.

“You better go see him, he has been asking about you every chance he got – ‘where is Zobuhle?’ ‘what time does she come for practice?’ ‘why is she not here?’ whoa I know we don’t usually start practicing without you but I didn't think Mr former soccer player couldn't function without you as well,” she looks up to me and I chuckle.

“Let me go and find out.”

I walked away with Slindile shouting after me to make sure that I at least come back with his tens. This girl is too desperate for some dick and she is not afraid to show it. I walked to the coach's office and the door is closed. By the looks of things, I think he is done for the day and I missed my first practice, what a bad impression. I knocked on the door and he told me to come in. I was not expecting that, I hoped he'd have left already. I walked in and he was busy writing on a piece of paper he had in front of him.

“Coach,” he shot his eyes to me and went back writing.

“Why are you here?”

“I came to apologize for being late.” I said taking another step towards his desk.

He stood up and walked to stand in front of the desk and me. I fixed the bag hanging on my shoulder and swallowed hard. I don't know why but he looks angry or upset but maybe I'm over thinking this, I mean why would he be angry. The whole team was here so it wasn't such a big deal, right? I don't even know why he noticed that I wasn't there when he had 25 girls to focus on in front of him.

"Why?"

"I was at work. On Fridays it is very hard to –"

He put up his hand and cuts me short.

"I want you here Zobuhle at 12pm every day for practice. If you want to play soccer then you will be here and if you don't then don't bother to come." His voice is too stern, commanding and I can't even trace his anger because he is too calm as well.

He leans to the edge of the desk with his arms folded to his chest. He is too serious. Whatever anger he had when he noticed I wasn't here for practice, he has inflicted it on me because really, I can't believe he came from whatever hole he crawled out of and came here to tell me to choose between soccer, what I love and my job – that pays the bills.

“I have to work to put food on the table, for rent to have a roof over my head and for clothes to be warm at night. So no I can't choose between the two,” I tell him.

“Zobuhle, I'm not here to play with anyone. I want people who are serious about growing a career in sport. Success requires people to make sacrifices, are you willing to make those sacrifices?”

Him spewing that nonsense about sacrifices doesn't help me at all. Isn't running away from home to be

who I want to be, a sacrifice? Haven't I been sacrificing all my life since I came here? The fact that I'm here for practice and not at my room on my bed after a long day of hard work is a sacrifice. I have sacrificed a lot to be here, I don't even know how my mother is because I chose this life over my own family. I don't need him or anyone else to tell me about sacrificing because they don't know shit about me!

"Keep your 'career in sport' and whatever shit you've just said because I'm leaving –"

"For good?" he asked before I could finish what I wanted to say.

"Yes," I said and turned to walk out of the door.

So much anger is brewing inside of me, there is a stabbing pain in my heart and tears are threatening

to come out. I have put in so much work into this, I used this place as my escape when my thoughts got too much for me to handle and not only did I see it as an escape but I had developed love for soccer. I know I'm good at it because even the coach I had before told me so and that pushed me even more. It's just unfortunate that I came here and didn't have a coach to groom me into being better. Then he came along, but my chance has been taken away from me before I could even taste it.

"I will pay you!" he exclaimed as I stepped out of the door.

I thought I heard him wrong so I took another step forward then he repeated what he said and then I stopped.

"I will pay you," he says for the third time and I turn to look at him. His expression hasn't changed, he still has that straight and serious face.

“Why?”

“Because you are the best player out of that whole lot Zobuhle and I’d be a fool to let you go just like that so I will pay you to come for practice at 12pm everyday.”

“What about my job?” I took a step forward towards the open door.

“Just tell me how much you’d lose to make it here at 12pm and then I will cover it,” he says moving from the front of the desk to sit back on his chair behind the desk and I walked in.

“For real?” I can’t believe it, wasn’t he the same person who wanted me to choose between soccer and my job?

“Yes. Now please go out there and get everyone's jersey. Make sure that they are washed for tomorrow,” he said without looking at me. He is busy looking through a pile of papers that are in his hands.

“But I –” he shot his eyes to me and I swallow the rest of my words.

I nodded and mouthed a thank you. I walked out of the door and closed the door behind me then leaned on it. I took a deep breath and exhaled with my eyes closed. I can't believe what just happened, it's not everyday that someone just pitches to pay you for something they don't have to so – who is this guy?

Uthando: Six

Simbonga

I make my way inside my office and I find Disky sitting on top of my desk facing the door. My chest tightens up instantly and blocks the air from reaching my lungs – I can't breathe. He looks up and smiles when his eyes land on me. I'm shivering like the temperature has dropped to -1°C and I stay glued on the ground by the doorway. He can't be real, I was there when they buried him but he looks alive. He stands up when he notices that I've suddenly lost my consciousness.

"Don't just stand there, come in," his voice echoes inside the room and like a good boy I stepped inside.

He bangs the door close behind me as I walked further into the room, I feel like I'm 11 years old

again, I left the older Simbonga outside the door as soon as I stepped inside this office. I feel vulnerable and powerless. He still has that hold over me and it makes me weak on my knees with fear. I can't even breathe, his presence is too heavy and suffocating. He comes behind me and stands very close against my back. I stepped forward with him on my heels following me until I was standing in front of the desk with no way to get to the other side unless I step over it.

“Be a good boy and bend over,” he whispered against my ear in a voice that says ‘do as I say or face the consequences’.

Even though I know what he plans to do to me, I still have respect for him. I bent over slowly with my hands on the edge of the desk but he lost his patience and pinned my head down while his other hand worked to loosen my pants. The power he has over me drained all the power I had in me to fight

him, I just couldn't and I let him do as he pleased. I whimper as he inserts himself in my anus. When he moves it's like he is taking my breath away. His thrusts are deep and hard, he is hitting it in all the corners and judging by his grunts and groans – he is enjoying it.

By the time he fills me with his load, my legs feel numb and my face is flooded with snort and tears. My heart has sank lower than it has before. He pulls out and exhales sharply before mouthing how hot and tight my hole is. My back is so painful and my hole feels like someone rubbed it with hot sauce. I feel dirty and disgusted. I know he is done but I stay in that position with my butt in the air like I'm waiting for a second serving. I don't hear him walking away so I know he is still standing behind me and I can feel his eyes on my butt cheeks.

He spanks my butt so hard it stings and I'm jerked back to reality – I gasped for air before fully opening

my eyes. I am panting and heaving, and my heart is beating painfully.

Laying on the pillow with my eyes on the ceiling, I can feel the tears welling inside my eyes, my chest still feels heavy and I'm struggling to breath. I pinch my butt quite a few times just to make sure that the whole ordeal was a nightmare. I sighed and rolled to sleep on the side. The clock on the side of my bed says 03:43 am and I know I won't be able to sleep after this. I don't know what triggered this dream because Disky never when as far as touching my behind. He only let...forced...lured me to suck his cock. My mind is becoming messed up, and right now I don't know if I'm getting better or worse.

I'm so deep in my thoughts that the sound of my ringing phone startles me and I roughly rubbed my face to clear my head. I grab the phone and answer without looking at the caller's name or number.

“Hello,” my voice is still low and husky.

The caller remains silent on the other side of the line.

“Hello,” I say again louder this time around. I don’t know why but I stay on the line for the next 40 seconds waiting for the person to speak.

“Dad.”

I jumped to sit up at the sound of his voice. I looked at the time and its 04:01 am, he doesn't sound sleepy at all so I guess he had trouble with sleeping. I don’t know my son in such a way that I don’t even know what he does or where he goes to when he is woken up in the middle of the night by a nightmare. But I guess the distance between us now gives him the courage to call me, or yearn to talk to me.

“I missed you too son.”

“But you never call,” he scolds with his tiny squeaky voice and I chuckle because he is trying by all means to sound low and whisper so that Mme won’t wake up and find him on the phone when he should be sleeping.

I have been busy these past two weeks. I had to get new jerseys, balls and training equipment, goalposts nets and train the girls for the match we have in 3 days. Yes, I managed to pull some strings to make the match happen, I know I have just started coaching them but I want to see where they are at. Even if they lose, it doesn’t matter, I just want to challenge them and make sure they grow from it. But I don’t have an excuse for not calling Kwando to check up on him everyday – I’m plain guilty.

“I’m sorry, I will do better from now on. How are things over there?” I ask and he sighs like my question has made a few unfavourable events resurface. I know with Mme around he doesn't get away with anything, she always keeps a close eye on him and she reprimands him for every little thing he

does wrong.

And as expected, he starts to complain about how he is not allowed to watch tv after 6pm, Mme washing his back twice a week instead of twice a month and now he is not allowed to talk back, he says it was better when I was around because he got to say a piece of his mind every now and again but now he doesn't get a chance, the only thing he says is 'yes ma'am' to everything that she says. By the time he is done, he is breathless and I have been doing a lot of laughing than listening. I'm glad he called, he has just made my day and I have long forgotten about the nightmare.

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I looked through the pile of papers for the new training schedule and I think I must have misplaced it because it's not on my desk or in any of the drawers. I sighed and sat back down on the chair. In

that moment there's a knock on the door and I tell whoever it is to come in. Slindile walks in, I thought everyone has left for the day since we are done with practice but she is here now so I guess not everyone has left. She comes around the desk and sit on the desk. I sit back on my chair and turned to look at her.

"I like you," that's the first thing she says and I'm surprised, more shocked of how blunt she is.

"Okay," I say holding back the shock and any emotions that may confuse her.

I thought I had made myself clear to everyone that our relationship will be professional, not that any girl beside her has given me any 'I want you' vibes but I just wanted to be on the same page with all of them. Clearly she wasn't listening to me when I was talking because she wouldn't be here proclaiming her feelings for me and I don't think it goes that deep, we all know what she wants and that is sex.

“So I was thinking that maybe we could take this to my place, yours is fine too but I also don’t mind getting it down on this desk,” she says licking her lips and leaning back on the desk balancing with her elbows.

She looks at me with half open eyes, I don’t know if she’s high or is already horny without me even touching her. Her hand goes from touching her boob right down to touching her sacred place while chewing off her bottom lip. I froze as a soft moan swept out of her lips. I cleared my throat, and after regaining my conscious I shifted on my chair then a soft knock came through. The door opened before I could tell the person to come in and Zobuhle peeped her head in with a smile on her face which quickly disappeared at the sight of Slindile on my desk.

I found my feet in seconds and I’m glad my member didn’t react at the sight of Slindile’s exposed thighs

and that porn stunt she just pulled there. She also gets on her feet and turns to the door. She sighs more annoyed than in relief. I looked between her and Zobuhle who just made her way in.

“Slindile, please make sure to wear tights under your shorts next time. No one wants to see your jiggle ass every time they look your way,” Zobuhle says looking at her.

Slindile turns to look at me like I’d say otherwise, I didn’t even notice she wasn’t wearing a tight because I don’t look at her or any of the girls like that. I don’t know what she expects me to say so I just gave her a blank look and shrugged. She scoffs and stomps her way to the door, not forgetting to push Zobuhle out of the way and she gets out of the office without saying another word.

“I don’t know if I should say you should get used to it or get rid of her,” she says taking a sit on the chair

opposite me.

She doesn't look affected, I can't sense any emotions from her and she is so damn calm. I knew Slindile was capable of such, I saw it the first day I came here but I don't know, a part of me wished she wouldn't even try to cross the boundaries and what happened just now took me by surprise.

"You know I can't get rid of her, she is just as good."
I sit back on my chair.

"Then you must know that this is only just the beginning. There is more that's coming," she says and we both laugh.

"Is that a warning?" I leaned forward and looked at her.

“She just pulled a red flag now so I don’t think what I say would change anything. Wena just do what feels right for you.”

I don’t know how to feel about that so I just change the topic to something else.

“So when are you moving in?” I ask and she squirms excitedly.

“This afternoon, I will get the rest of my stuff tomorrow.”

After I had bought the training equipment, we had to have someone who will keep an eye on them and since we are keeping them here, we needed someone who will stay here and Zobuhle volunteered. She won’t be paying rent so she will save that money for something else. We have security here so I’m not really worried about her safety and there are houses close by so it’s a

secured area. She also says this place is much better than the place she was staying in so it's a win-win situation.

"Great. Tomorrow there's a soccer committee meeting in the afternoon so I was hoping you could come with me as my plus one."

"It's a meeting, not a party." She shoots back.

"It's not a meeting-meeting," I tried to explain but she gave me the 'are you for real' look and I sighed.

"Okay you can come as my bodyguard ke," I say and she laughs.

I smile as I look at her. Her face looks different when she laughs, I would see her laughing in a group with the other girls and she'd look beautiful. I have also noticed she doesn't laugh a lot but when she does she uses the opportunity very well. That brave face hides her beauty and I wish she could just see how

beautiful she is when she is so carefree with a smile on her face. After a few seconds, she collects herself and exhales.

“What are you trying to say? Do I look manly, masculine maybe?”

“No,” I smile widely. “I was just pointing out that you can come with me as anything else besides a plus one or partner,” I shrug.

“Okay then. I will come with you,” she smiles.

I'd look at that smile all day long but it doesn't stay on her face as long as I want it to because she moves on to talking about the match between Kaizer and Sundowns, where Kaizer lost by 1 – 3. I have even forgotten to ask what she came here for in the first place and I think she forgot as well. I have laughed senselessly two times in one day. The laughter with Kwando brought joy into my heart and

this one with Zobuhle I'm still trying to make sense of how exactly it makes me feel.

Uthando: Seven

Simbonga

Zobuhle disappeared in the crowd. She said she's going to get us drinks but a waiter with a tray with glasses of champagne, orange juice and beer makes his way to my direction and I take the large glass of beer. I gulp half of it in one go and raise my eyes to scan the crowd. There aren't any professional soccer teams' coaches here, just amateurs and those who are striving to climb up the ladder. You know what they say about bull dogs in boardroom meetings, right? Well we have them as well in the soccer industry. The ones who think they know everything and everyone else should listen to them when they are talking, like this woman who is walking towards me.

She is in her black Adidas trackpants and a green 'Amazulu' soccer jersey on top, white Nike sneakers

on both her feet and she definitely didn't forget to add that gold chain, that looks like a dog leash around her neck. She has a small smile on her face and she is looking at me from head to toe probably wondering why I am here if she knows who I am. She steps closer to me and I return her smile, just to be polite and show respect because I am young enough to be her son even though she is not giving me those motherly vibes.

"Simbonga Masuku," she says and I nod.

"Nomagugu Mthethwa," she extends her hand for a handshake and I take it.

"Nice to meet you ma," I smile and her jaw drops.

"Who are you calling ma? I'm too young to be your mother or anyone else's mother," she scoffs and I laugh.

This woman looks like she is 47 years old, if not older but maybe it's my eyes and in deed tried to look young by putting a lot of make-up on her face to hide her wrinkles. She has an almost empty glass of beer in her hand and she sips of the last content as the waiter approaches to our side, she takes full glass replacing it with the empty one. At that moment she burps and forgets to say sorry but I let it slide. She stands quietly next to me and we are both facing the crowd just minding our business.

"The last time I checked, you were retired?" she finally breaks off the silence between us.

"Yes that is correct, I am a coach now."

A sound of laughter rumbles up from deep inside her huge belly right up to her mouth. She laughed so hard, people turned to look at us and I just downed my beer not minding the eyes and attention she had brought to our direction. I looked around wondering

where Zobuhle disappeared to, I'm sure she noticed that we have waiters around here so what's taking her so long. The woman besides me finally collects herself, she stretches her arms and exhales sharply like she has done the hardest exercise.

"That was really funny, I see they brought you here for entertainment," she laughs again but not too loud this time. I am looking at her through the corner of my eye and thinking, she is one of the bull dogs, always underestimate and belittle everyone who doesn't fit in the 'cool coaches club'. And I bet she has never played soccer in her life. I gulp the rest of the content in my glass and place it on the table next to us.

"I'm sure they did." I'm not angry nor annoyed, I don't want to give her the satisfaction of knowing that whatever she's spewing is getting to me.

"I was once your age and I had dreams –"

“And I’m sure you have accomplished them,” I cut her off and turn to look at her. So my suspicions were right, she is as old as she looks and right now she’s seeing a child who is in a place he shouldn’t be in.

“Pretty much,” she shrugs. “Many have paid their way to the top,” she nods towards a group of men who are laughing the loudest with big bellies and the finest whiskey in their hands. “Him too,” I follow her eyes to the man speaking with a woman but I couldn't see his face because he had his back on us. It looks like she knows a lot of people here maybe that’s why she’s here instead of mingling with the big shots.

I just kept quiet because really, I didn’t have anything to add – I don’t know any of them, not even her.

“You were serious about being a coach?” she glares at me and I nod.

“Female team in KwaMashu,” I inform her. “You?” she narrows her eyebrows before turning to look ahead again.

“Founder and coach of Mangosuthu Female Football Academy.”

I nod like she can see me.

“A female team?” she chuckles. “You are looking for trouble aren’t you?” she steals a glance at me. She doesn’t wait for me to reply before she continues, “I don’t see this working out, you left the game to do what? To babysit your son?” she chuckles again, she has a weird sense of humour because nothing she has said or I have said is funny but she has laughed at everything.

“You won’t understand.”

“Here's what you don't understand. You are in the wrong place, you shouldn't be here in the first place – this place is not for weaklings like you. Maybe you should go back to babysitting or whatever that you have been doing the last two years.”

I feel attacked for some reason, it could be that she is intimidated by me and my presence here doesn't sit well with her or she is trying to scare me off because this place is really not for people like me. But I will take the first reason, this woman doesn't know me, all that she knows about me is what she read in the papers and tabloids. No one would understand why I am here and I'm not prepared to explain myself to her. The one thing I'm happy about is how she is underestimating me. I know I don't have the same years of experience in coaching as her but like I've mentioned before – all that matters is the love affair between the boy and the ball. Without love, she is not going anywhere.

“I have my reasons for being here,” I say quietly. Zobuhle is really taking her sweet time. Maybe something has happened to her, the thought goes through my mind as I scan the crowd again trying my luck to catch a glimpse of her face in the crowd of a hundred faces.

“Pussy?” I shoot my eyes to her and she is smirking. I don’t know what she is implying but I don’t like it already. “See boy, take this as a warning, leave this course before it shows you flames and cripples you. And after that you won't have name to throw around and have people bowing to you,” she says looking at me and all of a sudden there’s a dark aura around her. She looks like she is ready to pounce on me but I stand my ground and give her a blank expression.

After realising I am not prepared to chicken out and leave before the meeting even starts, she flashes a smile and pats my shoulder like we are good old friends. I don’t return her smile, I don’t like her and I

am not afraid to show her. Maybe Dingani knows her and I should ask him to fill me in because she wouldn't warn me for nothing. Zobuhle pitches up out of nowhere with a smile plastered on her and Nomagugu looks between me and her, yeah her false accusations have been justified because she is smiling like she has won a jackpot.

“I’m sorry I got held up,” Zobuhle says pointing to the other side of the room with her thumb.

“It was nice to meet you Simbonga Masuku, you too young lady.” Nomagugu says looking at me then Zobuhle and then she leaves.

Zobuhle’s smile falls as she watches the woman leave. I guess she also felt that something wasn’t right about her.

“Who was that?” she nods towards Nomagugu’s direction. She has went to talk with those big shots

she was badmouthing just a few minutes ago.

“Where have you been?”

“Hey don’t answer a question with another question, that’s just plain rude.” She hits me on my arm playfully.

“You came with me but you were with other people since we got here and see I attracted bad company to myself because my plus one decided to ditch me,” she laughs like I’ve just shared a joke but I’m actually serious.

She stops laughing the moment she sees my face, “I’m sorry, I was speaking with a few female coaches and I got a bit carried away. We ended talking about a lot of other things besides soccer.”

I just nod, what’s done is done. The meeting/event continues and there are a few matches announced

that will take place in a few weeks from now. Mangosuthu is mentioned more times than I can count and Nomagugu keeps on looking my way every time her team is announced. I just raised my glass and smiled in her way, and went with the flow. Zobuhle has been drinking more than she can stomach and I have opted to give her a glass of water to flush out the alcohol in her system. I enjoy her company so I don't regret coming with her.

"You should send him to his grandparents for the December holidays. That will sure make him feel like he belongs somewhere, the poor child sounds lost and home sick but doesn't even know where home is," she says without even looking at me.

I don't know how we ended up talking about Kwando but what she has just said made a lot of sense. I drove from the venue to the grounds to drop her off before I drive back home. We are sitting in the car, she doesn't look like she is prepared to leave

anytime soon so I don't pressure her. I'm enjoying this anyway.

"He has never been there without me so I didn't think he'd want to."

"Dude you have just said you don't spend much time with him and I'm sure he wouldn't even notice that you are not there, I'm not saying it in a bad way but just take the child to ugogo nomkhulu and let him be a child."

"Okay I will talk to my father tomorrow morning."

"I highly doubt he'd say no. Better yet they should hit your big head and spank your stupid ass for keeping the child away from them," she says that and I'm in stitches with laughter. It's just the way she said it.

"Where is this stupid thing..." she is still a bit tipsy so now she is fiddling with the door probably trying to

open it.

“Let me help you with that.”

I leaned over to her side and opened the door for her. I reverse to sit back on my seat but I freeze when my face is right in front of hers. I look at her and she looks at me, and she doesn't move. I could feel her breath on my face, that's how close I was to her and I leaned closer to kiss her but she pushed me back with her hand on my chest. I blink rapidly and shut my eyes close.

“I'm sorry,” I murmur and sit back on my seat.

I look towards her and she is not moving. Her eyes are on the dashboard and her breathing is steady but short.

“I'm so sorry, I know I said we should have a strictly professional relationship. Not just you but everyone

in the team. But at that moment I couldn't hold myself, I think I like you, no scratch that – I do like you. I know we haven't spent much time together but the little time I have shared with you has been amazing. Do believe me, my feelings for you are truly genuine and I..." I looked at her direction and I realised that I have said too much. Now I have to apologize again?

I sat back on my seat feeling like an idiot, I should've found another way to confess my feelings and right now feels like I'm taking an advantage of her since she is a little bit intoxicated. She is still silent – I have messed up big time. I opened my mouth to say something but she beat me to it and said,

"I am lesbian."

Uthando: Eight

Zobuhle

After I confessed my sexuality, the atmosphere became thick instantly and then I knew I had to leave him alone. I got out of the car and went straight to my room. I laid on my bed still fully dressed and only after a few minutes I heard his car driving out. I knew after telling him that he won't take it well but I didn't know it'd be so bad. We are in the field, practicing and preparing for tomorrow's match and Simbonga has been shouting everyone else's name for them to take position and not once did he look my way or voiced out my name or an instruction to my direction.

Confusion has befallen on the other girls because right now I'm like an unwanted extra player in the field. They are told to pass to the other side when I'm even open and all I'm doing is chasing after the ball, I'm so tired and his behaviour is making it worse – it's

so draining. He sounds and looks angry. I don't know what he wants from me because it's better to be honest than lead him further down the road which I won't be able to travel with him. If I knew being friends with him would lead us here then I wouldn't have looked in his way from the get go.

"Zobuhle!" he calls out my name and I freeze.

I look at his direction.

"What are doing with the ball?" I have the ball under my foot and I'm looking at him.

"I want to pass it." I point out the obvious.

He tilts his head to the side. He always does that to make feel and look stupid.

“Then why is it still on your feet?!”

“But I –” if he didn’t call out my name then I would've passed the ball seconds ago!

He signals for me to go on and pass the ball. I kick it forward to the goalkeeper and he blows the whistle. I huff in frustration and sink to sit down on the grass. The other girls walk out of the field following each other to the water bank and Slindile comes to me. I know what she wants to ask and its too bad because even I, myself, don’t know what the hell is wrong with him. I looked in the direction of where he is standing and our eyes lock but Slindile quickly blocks his view and sits down next to me.

“We are done with practice so do you want to go out for drinks, let loose before we tackle whatever tomorrow has for us?” I turn to look at her, “it's on me,” she quickly adds.

“Alright,” I gave in and she gasped like she wasn't expecting me to say yes. Drinking before the game is the last thing we should be doing but I need this to digest Simbonga's tantrums. I don't know why he had to choose acting like this when we could've talked like civil adults. I really don't mind us being friends.

I am not really open about being homosexual. It's something I found out about myself in my late years in high school, it was really confusing since I hadn't met anyone who had experienced the same thing. I also thought it was something that was there for a short while, I was in denial because I am a female and I should find the opposite gender attractive. I should've dated a boy and maybe got married one day like my mother had always preached to me but I was different. I tried escaping by keeping myself busy, the situation at home wasn't the only thing that pushed me to play soccer and use it as my escape. I was also dealing with my inner self.

By the time I leave my room after freshening up, Simbonga has already left – I know not everything is about me but I think he is avoiding me. As much as I have hurt him, I can't change who I am to make him happy and it'd be so unfair of him to expect something like that. Coming out is the worst part because not everyone reacts the same way and some don't accept you but I want him to accept me for me, so we can work together and for the sake of the rest of the girls. He is so angry right now, I don't even know what would happen if I were to approach him, he might say some mean stuff and that is the last I want, especially from him.

“So you told him?” Sli asks quietly and I nod.

She exhales, downs her drink and turns to look at me with eyes filled with pity. She knows about my sexuality because she grew curious of why she had never saw me with a guy, a boyfriend or better yet a husband. I don't know if she was genuine, judging by

her history of taking people's men I can only think my nonexistence bae was her next target but she was never judgemental nor made fun of me. With her loose mouth, everyone in the team knew before we went for the next practice, them too, accepted me and they've known ever since.

"You should have told me this earlier. I could've got him to take me home with him so he could take out his frustrations on me," she says, pointing to herself.

"That's the only thing you can think of? The guy needs to talk, not sex!"

"Whuu loya! I could tell from the first day he got here that he was dealing with some serious sexual tension, he doesn't need to talk, the only thing he needs right now is for me to ride his dick until he speaks in tongues." I look at her, shaking my head.

I've always known that she is crazy and I feel sorry for the guy who would fall in love with her. I'm saying the guy would fall in love with her because I don't see Slindile falling for anyone. I don't even think she dreams of getting married one day, the only thing she dreams of is who she is going to ride next or whose man to snatch after the current one. Life never favours her kind but it looks like she knows what she is doing.

"But judging by how he is angry right now, I can tell you one thing for sure – he really likes you," she looks at me and I sigh.

"I know," I said turning the glass around with my fingertips.

I wish him knowing we can't be, would make him like me less or make his feelings vanish but that is just a stupid thing to even think about. If I was frank with him in the first place then we wouldn't be here. We

really had a good thing going, I could tell by the time he spoke to me about his son that he was getting comfortable with me. I was also getting comfortable with him and who knows, if I didn't drop that nuclear bomb on him, maybe I would've confessed all my lifetime's problems to him. We could be counselling each other and nursing each other's feelings right now.

Everyone has a story to tell and just like me, he has his own to tell.

I left Slindile after she offered me a second round when I only agreed for one drink. I know she's paying and if it was any other day I would've drunk all her money but I have to be sober and clear minded for tomorrow. Things between me and Simbonga are rough as it is and I don't want to add on it. I don't want to ruin what is left of our friendship, if I can call it that. When I step inside my room, I lock the door and kick my shoes off while making my way to the bed. I get in between the sheets and the blanket still fully dressed. My heart is too heavy to allow me to

move an inch of my body.

I stared into the darkness with thoughts running wild in my head. I retrieved my phone in my back pocket and switched the screen on. I blinked rapidly to adjust to the brightness of the screen then I went to my contacts. I scrolled down and pressed on his number before typing,

'I won't apologize for being gay but I'm sorry for not being frank with you from the beginning and I'm sorry for leading you on, that was never my intention. I do love you as a brother and I hope we can be friends.'

I read the text for 3 times, checking the spelling and the mood I portrayed before I sent it. I pressed the send button, holding my breath. I'm not expecting him to reply but at least he knows how I feel.

Uthando: Nine

Simbonga

I woke up in the morning with a text from Zobuhle, I wasn't expecting everything that she said. A part of me hoped that she'd say it was a joke and she wanted to see how I'd react or she wouldn't say anything at all because it was her way of turning me down and playing hard to get. Her saying she loves me like a brother, puts a stamp that she is in deed gay – I'm not homophobic so I don't have anything against her but what do I do with the feelings I have for her? There's no way I could make them vanish, I don't see her as a sister so I don't know how this thing is going to work.

I decide to take my mind off that part of my life and dialled Dingani's number. He doesn't answer when I first call but he sure does when I call him again. He says he was out of the office that's why he missed my call. I don't dwell on that and go straight to ask

him about Nomagugu Mthethwa, that woman was too creepy and made my skin crawl with her threats. I'm not scared of fighting fair, I can take her and her team down with just one match but what worries me is the look I saw in her eyes, they were dark and that told me she is someone who fights dirty if needs to be. But I don't understand why she'd want to fight me when I have nothing against her.

Dingani says I have nothing to worry about, she is harmless as far as he knows and the only people I can worry about are her associates, it could be those men she called big shots who paid their way up but if she knows that that means she is in it too. I take Dingani's word but I won't let my guard down, I know what I saw and I won't relax until she proves herself otherwise. He asks how is the work with the team going and I give him my honest feedback which is – it's not as bad as I thought. He is glad it is helping and that the work is keeping me busy. I wish I could say the same but the dreams have become more daunting than before.

Tina says my mind is reflecting my thoughts, if I think of the worst, my mind will show me exactly that and that I must focus on the positive instead of the negative. I really miss Kwando, being here and not with him is putting me under a lot of strain. I'm blaming myself, if I wasn't assaulted nor raped, then I wouldn't be a danger to him! My past has robbed my son a father and that is affecting me a lot. Just thinking of how much this is affecting me, it makes me wonder how exactly he feels about the distance between us. I end the call with Dingani, after he wished me well and I called my father like I promised Zobuhle the other day. I couldn't call yesterday morning because I was too upset.

“Bonga, unjani ndodana?” (how are you son?) He asks as soon as he answers the phone. Only my father calls me Bonga, I don't know why because my name is not even that long.

“I’m good baba, how are you and mom?”

“We are well. Though your mother is very upset, she has been crying about how much she misses you and complaining of how her grandson will grow up not knowing his grandparents. He hasn’t visited us since we buried his mother Bonga and I also agree with your mother. You should come and visit us. Sibadala as it is, do you want us to die without seeing our grandson?”

“Actually baba that’s why I called. Kwando will come to visit you for the whole festive season.”

“Hawu izindaba ezinhle lezo but why is he coming alone?”

“I am in Durban, I got a new job. I didn’t want to say anything before I see if things are going to work out or not.” I tell him and I hear my mother in the background asking who it is that is on the phone, my

father tells her that is me and she asks what I said – they are having their own conversation right now and I smile when I hear my mother cheer happily after my father had told her Kwando will be with them for the holidays.

“Kuhle ke ndodana, call me when umfana is at the bus station. I don’t want him getting lost or get stolen so I will fetch him. And Bonga,” he says quietly and I hold my breath because I don’t know why there’s a sudden change in the tone of his voice, “do call us ndodana if things get too hard for you. We are your parents and we are here for a reason. Don’t just keep things bottled up inside you, they will kill you – talk to me if you need to talk, I’ll always be there nomawakho ukhona mfana wami.”

I wipe the nonexistence sweat on my forehead and sigh.

“Ngiyakuzwa baba, ngizokwenza njalo. Please tell

ma that I love her.”

“And you don’t love me?” is that jealousy I sense in my father's voice?

I chuckle before saying, “I love you too dad.”

“Siyakuthanda nathi. I wish you well on your new job there in Durban.”

“Ngiyabonga, I will call you guys soon.”

He says his goodbyes and I hang up. I have a good relationship with both my parents, they didn’t have much when I was still growing up but they always made sure I didn’t feel like I lacked on anything and I have been working hard ever since to make them proud. I know my father told me I can talk to him but there are things one is never comfortable to talk about with their parents, like the sensitive issue I’m dealing with right now and it's not like I can walk up to him and say “baba I was raped by your friend”, I

just can't.

“Hustle. I don't care if you win or lose, what I want is to see you hustling in that field – attacking instead of chasing. I want to see results but don't forget to play the ball and don't concentrate much on winning and scoring. Have fun.”

They start cheering and clapping their hands. We are in the field, ready to start playing and the other team is here as well, amateurs like us but I know very well never to judge a book by it's cover. The team is fired up and very excited to get on the field. Zobuhle is not entirely herself so when our eyes meet, I give her a smile to assure her that we are cool and that she should relax. I see her shoulders falling already, I want her head to be in the game and for her not to worry about us not being cool. Players from both teams take position and the referee blows the whistle to start the game.

Things are going good, it's still early so things

haven't become intense and the players are still shy towards each other. We get to the half time with both teams still at 0 – 0. They get back in the game for the second half and I realise Zobuhle is looking distracted, she is losing focus and I don't know what exactly she is doing. Right now, we should be attacking so we can win the game, I know that's not our end goal but we stand a chance. I keep shouting for her to concentrate but it falls into deaf ears and I can't keep her on the field if her mind is not there so I substitute her with another player.

“Where is your head at?” I ask her as soon as she reaches me.

She catches her breath first before turning to look towards the crowd and point to a woman who is old enough to be her mother, she looks really rural with how she is dressed and she has her handbag held really tight against her chest. I guess she took the warnings about how bad the robbery is here in

KwaMashu very seriously.

“That's my aunt, she wouldn't be here if it wasn't important. I haven't seen her in years so when I saw her, I just kind of lost my mind and focus.”

“Fine. Go and find out why she is here, and come back Zobuhle because the game isn't over and I might need you.”

She nods and runs off to the direction where the woman is standing. I turn my attention back to the field and the girls are really playing hard. Minutes go by and Zobuhle is still not back, I look over to the direction she went to and she is not on sight. The woman is still there, looking back at me with pleading eyes and her eyes are glittery like she is on the verge of crying. I glance over to the field and they won't need me for a few minutes so I rush over to the woman.

I tell her I'm Zobuhle's coach and she tells me she is her aunt which confirms what Zobuhle told me.

There's a lot of pain in her voice and her face reflects the same pain so now I'm really worried. What happened and where is Zobuhle?

"Her mother is no more," the woman tells me and I take a step back.

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Zobuhle

"He killed her."

Those words kept on echoing inside my head. The

more they ring in my head, the more shots hit the back of my throat. I knew she didn't come all the way here for a social visit, that's why I felt so uneasy this morning something just didn't feel right. I knew I was anxious about today's game and that I was still worried about what happened between Simbonga and I but the feeling was deeper than that. And that made me more confused but Aunt Nomsa just dropped the bomb on me. I knew it was never going to end well with my mother, she was too dependent on that man and I failed to protect her.

I take another shot and it burns the back of my throat, I flinch. Mbuzane's Spot, is filled more with business men from the city wearing expensive suits and all. They come to this place to talk about the business deals that are not so legal and deal with lump sums of money that are usually passed under the table. They get the other customers to shut their mouths and act like they don't see them by buying them drinks. It happens a lot on Wednesdays, when the spot is not full and they get to save a few Rands

for their next deal.

I told the bartender to keep the shots coming. It's getting louder now since the people are getting more drunk and it won't be long before they fight about who gets to drink the last quart when they could share it. Someone catches my eye, through the corner of my eye, I turn to my right and our eyes lock. I quickly look ahead with heart pounding against my chest. I'm sitting by the bar table so it's easier for the bartender to keep my glass full. I feel eyes burning the one side of my face and I know that she is staring at me so I turn to look at her. Her dark aura is drawing me to her and it makes me look at her longer than I intended.

She looks away when the staring contest gets to her and I also look away. I am already feeling tipsy, the pain in my heart feels like it's slowly fading away but the thoughts are still roaming inside my head. They are the reason why I'm not taking a break on

downing a shot after another. After a few minutes I feel her presence behind me and I see her disappearing to the door through the corner of my right eye. My phone has been ringing since I came here, Simbonga, Slindile and a number I don't know has been blowing my phone ever since, so I decided to switch it off.

Five minutes has passed and she hasn't come back. I stood up, stumbled backwards and forward but quickly collected myself and found my way to the door. The cold air hits my face hard and I shiver. I thought with the alcohol in my system, even the cold wouldn't get to me but I feel cold to the bone. Movement in the dark corner caught my attention and walked over there.

“What took you so long?” She says pulling me into the darkness and pinning me against the wall.

Before I could say anything, she smashed her lips on

mine and kissed me with so much hunger. I pushed her back and she smirked.

“Who said I am gay?”

“You wouldn't have given me the ‘I want you’ look and you wouldn't be out here in search for a girl you don't even know if you weren't gay.”

Again before I could say anything, she attacks me with her lips to shut me up and this time I kiss her back. Her fire is turning me on and it is making my heart accelerate in excitement. She cups both my breasts, I moan in her mouth – she is taking all the control and her hand sneaks inside my t-shirt for a skin to skin feel. Blood rushes through my veins and I feel hot. Her hands worked on my jeans and before I knew it, she was rubbing my throbbing clit then she moved her head to neck and gave me wet kisses while I moaned in pleasure.

With my back against the wall, I was so wet and lost in the moment. She started finger fucking me and I lost it. She raised her head to look at me and she smiled loving what she saw. As she finger fucked me, her thumb was busy rubbing against my clit and I could feel that I was getting close. The more she did it, the more I felt myself slipping away and I felt powerless. I hate feeling powerless, something twitched inside me and I switched sides. I pinned her against the wall and she looked shocked and surprised by my actions, like who would want to let go of orgasm when they are that close.

Like she did to me, I shut her up with a kiss and took control of the situation. I pulled out and looked at her.

“Do you want to take this to my place?” She grinned with her bottom lip in between her teeth. Maybe she is just what I need tonight and I'd be stupid to let her go.

Uthando: Ten

Inganathi

'Dear mama,

By the time you read this, I'd either be happy or dead – there is no in between...'

The door opens and I pause. I am sitting on a chair by my study desk with the pen and a notebook under my palm, and I am facing the wall. The lavender shower gel scent fills my nostrils, instead of it going to my head and make me all excited – it goes deep inside my gut and urges me to gag. I know she has just come out of the shower but her scent disgusts me, she doesn't smell clean to me because her cleanliness overrides how clean I feel about myself. In seconds, I feel her heavy presence behind me and I hold my breath when she places her hand on my

shoulder.

It's not a social visit, I know why she is here because I have been in this position before. Because I don't want to get myself in trouble and pay a harsh price for it, I stand up and turn to look at her. She has a mischievous smile on her face, she has worked really hard to get me to being submissive, if that's what you can call it because to me it is the same as feeling powerless. I don't argue with her when she pulls me to sit on top of the bed while she stood over me with only a towel wrapped around her body. Before she does anything else, she reveals a playtoy that she had behind her back. Lust is very much evident in her eyes, she feeds over my fear because the dildo she has in her hand is much larger than the one she had the last time.

She loosen the towel and it falls to her feet, she doesn't have the most attractive body but there is nothing I or anyone can say to make her lose the

confident she has to show off her wrinkled curves. If it wasn't for the wedding band on her left finger then I would've been convinced the first time she complimented me for having a nice butt and genetic area, that in deed she is gay. I remove all my clothing when she has signalled for me to do so. She used to use words to communicate but I guess she got tired of small talks and I prefer it this way because there's really nothing we can talk about. I, for one, don't have anything to say to her.

Before laying on my back, I looked over to the closed door, a part of me wished that Nozipho my roommate, would just walk in and save me from her but I know better now. I can't even scream because I'd be expelled from the Academy and that would be the end of my soccer career. When I first walked into this place I thought I had found my second home, I loved being home with my parents but I loved soccer more. She lubricates my fold with her saliva and I swallow my disgust. I feel the dildo stretching my vaginal entrance and she doesn't wait for me to

adjust to it before she starts moving it in and out.

She moans with her head in between my legs and I bit the inside of my cheek to hold back my sobs or any sounds. Apparently watching the live show turns her on, and judging by how she is moaning, panting and heaving – she is also touching herself. Never in my life have I wished for death like the time she introduced this life to me. I am surprised by how fast she pulls the dildo out because at any other day she'd go on for about 40 minutes max. She stands on her feet and I sit up wincing because of the burning sensation in the place in between my legs. She opens her legs while still standing and her bicycle saddle was levelled with my face.

She pulls me to her and I fall on my knees. I know what I need to do so I go into that saddle that hasn't been shaved for at least a week. Her leg is over my shoulder while she is leaning on the small bedside cabinet for balance. Her extra belly fat was on top of

my head and my lips were sulking on her clit. The more I sucked, the louder she moaned and asked for more. I have perfected muffing because of her, she is my first in everything and I only know her. I don't even know if I'm gay or straight because of her. I came here clear minded but now I'm confused like a small child in their first grade.

My parents would do anything to make me happy and as the only child, I was spoilt rotten and got everything that I wanted. When I said I wanted to play soccer after I had completed my matric, my father looked for the best Football Academy in KZN and Mangosuthu Female Football Academy came highly recommended. He applied for me, I was accepted and he registered me right away but my mother wanted me to further my studies and that was the condition she put up for me – it was either school and soccer or just plain school. I had no choice but to register for a Diploma in Mechanical Engineering at MUT.

I left UMzimkhulu with so much excitement that finally I was going start living my life independently and go on a new virtue without my parents holding my hand. I boarded on the bus after bidding endless goodbyes to my parents, it was a new experience since I had never been anywhere without either one of them. The joy inside me overrode the fear and anxiety of entering a new chapter of my life blindly. It was the greatest dream to be in Durban, from a not so rural girl to a city girl was a real achievement for me. I have never lacked on anything in my life and moving here was proof of that.

The taxi dropped in front of the big building of MFFA and I was in awe. I pulled my two big suitcases inside and I got the warmest welcome from the staff, and that is what made me loosen up and let my guard down. The place felt homely and warm, safe would be the best way to describe it and I saw myself growing in a place like that. I admired everything, the furniture and the art on the wall, for a second I thought it was too much for a football

academy but that was until I saw the woman behind all the work.

I am jerked back to reality by her loud moans, more like screaming and her body was tensing up. Her legs are shaking and she is heaving like a dog under the scorching hot sun. I suck harder and finally she groans as she explodes in my mouth but I tilt my head back because I refuse to swallow her cum. She heavily breathes in and out, and looks down to me with a smile on her face like the day she welcomed me into the academy and introduced herself as,

“I am Nomagugu Mthethwa, your coach.”

Uthando: Eleven

Zobuhle

As I open the door I hear an engine running and it shuts down as soon as we step outside. I have Malindi's hand in mine and her small overnight bag on the other. It's still early in the morning so I'm still engulfed by sleep and I have a huge headache because of the hangover. If it was up to me, I'd still be in bed and probably stay there forever but Malindi has to go somewhere and she had to cut her stay short. It really helped to have her here with me, she made me forget and avoid the thoughts for a while and at least I got a break from the pain. The alcohol also helped but she takes the cup, during the few days I spent with her I got to let loose and allowed myself to feel vulnerable and not once did she make me regret it – I had the best countless orgasms of my life.

We walked side by side to her worn out Toyota Yaris, that has a bonnet darker than the rest of its parts and each rim is different from the other, don't get me started on the tires of the car, if a traffic officer was to come and inspect this car, he'd sure declare it not road worthy – it's that bad but at least she has something to take her from point A to point B without depending on anyone or the reckless taxi drivers. The engine I heard running was Simbonga's car. He's parked next to Malindi's car and is now walking towards us looking between Malindi and I like he is looking for something. I haven't seen him in a while now, I have been avoiding everyone who is going to preach to me about 'feelings', pain and...death.

I greet but he doesn't reply, instead he stops on his track and looks at us as we walked past him to the Yaris.

"I hope I'll see you soon," I said and perked her lips.

“I miss you already,” she says with a small sad smile as I opened the door for her.

I will miss her too but I have to face what I have been running away from and hopefully get over it. I close the door when she is seated on her seat, she brings the engine to life and reverses out. She hoots before disappearing and I wave. She was the light in my life in the last few days, with her gone it is like I'm in a dark hole filled with only sorrows and sadness.

When I turn back, Simbonga is still standing where I left him and I walk towards him because the way to my room forces me to face him again. He has pity reflected on his face and that is something I don't need or want to see right now and I wouldn't have looked his way if he didn't call out to me.

“The funeral is tomorrow –”

“I know.” I cut him short and attempt to walk away from him but he speaks up again.

“I can go with you if you need me to. As a friend, I’m here for you Zobuhle.”

“I don’t need you – I’m fine!” my voice was higher than necessary, I realised too late because I can’t take it back now. I sighed and folded my arms to my chest with my fingers covered with the sleeves of the sweater that I’m wearing. I have been feeling really cold since I heard the news that she is...uhm dead.

“Let me take you to the taxi rank then.” He sounds so calm and soft, very welcoming and I’m tempted to run to him and cry my lungs out in his arms but I decide against it – I’m stronger than this.

He lets me go back to my room so I can get ready to go, he didn’t give me a chance to decline his offer so he is taking to the rank whether I like it or not. I sit on the unmade bed, I don’t even remember when was the last time I had a made bed to sleep on every

night. I bent over, patted the floor and retrieved the bottle of vodka I saw when I was walking in. I took a full swing and flinched as the liquid hit my tongue and the back of my throat. This pain is nothing compared to the pain throbbing in my heart, it is so physical and with each beat the pain gets more painful. The emptiness in my heart is...a tear escapes from my eye and I quickly wipe it and sniffled.

It has piled up to a thousand blocks, it's swinging from left to right and wherever the emotions are blowing it to, it won't be long until it comes crashing down and that will be the end of me. My father died and I wasn't allowed to feel any emotions, feeling emotions is equivalent to showing and acting on how you are feeling but I never got that chance. I was forced to be understanding and nurse my own broken heart as young as I was, and now this blockage is on me – it's like a blocked pipe waiting to blow up and burst into pieces to relief the pressure. I'm putting so much pressure on myself to

not feel the pain but I can also feel that I'm near my breaking point – it's close.

I put the small bag with my clothes in the backseat and went to seat in the front passenger seat. Simbonga drove out immediately after I had settled on my seat. He is silent and I'm grateful for it because I don't feel like talking. I'm brewing inside like umqombothi in a large bowel ready to be served but I'm not ready for what awaits for me on the other side. If anyone had told me that one day I'd run away from home and go back home under such circumstances with this amount of pain in my heart then I wouldn't have left home in the first place. I look outside the window the whole way to town and I could feel my throat was getting dry – I could use another sip of that vodka but with Simbonga on my side, I don't think he'd let me get away with it so sit back and suffer in silent.

"I didn't get a chance to say this but I'm really sorry

for your loss. And this is not the time to put up a brave face Zobuhle, allow yourself to feel the pain – don't try hiding it, we are humans and we are allowed to feel and reflect our emotions. I'd rather have you crying, yelling, screaming, breaking things or whatever than have to look at that face. I want to help, let me in, please." He reached out to touch the hand that was resting on my thigh but I yanked it off before he could reach it.

"Thank you for the ride."

I opened the door and got out. After taking my bag from the backseat, I walked away from his car without looking back or saying goodbye and crossed the road and walked to the taxi rank on the other side. Simbonga is a really good man, very emotional and is too attached to people around him – if you are good to him then he'd be good to you. He is exactly what I need right now but not what I want at the moment. I found the taxi half empty and I was

lucky to find a seat next to the window in the backseat, I will be the last passenger to get off so this is perfect and it will give me enough privacy since people would see who I am just by seeing a glimpse of my face and I won't hear the end of how selfish I was to run away from home.

I already blame myself for that so I don't need to hear it from anyone else. I was selfish to leave my mother alone in that house with that monster knowing very well what he is capable of and now she is dead – I could've saved her but I was too selfish, I hated who she was but she didn't deserve to die like this. By the time the taxi is full and ready to drive out the taxi rank, the bottle I had transferred the vodka into for a disguise was less than a quarter empty. The content was too low to last me till I get to UMzimkhulu, I may be tipsy already but I'd need more alcohol to get rid of this heartache.

A howling sound of a car hoot jerks me out of my sleep, I open my eyes and the bright light of the sun rays is blinding. I yawned and stretched my arms

and legs. The taxi is empty so I look around, the taxi is parked right outside the gate and there are too many cars inside and outside the yard. The taxi doesn't usually get to this side of the village, it should've dropped me off two miles from here and I'd have had to walk all the way to my house but this taxi driver drove me exactly to the gate of my house. I shot my eyes to the front where he was seated and he was looking at me through the rear view mirror.

“Nkosazana sesifikile ekhaya, I really need to get back to Durban and I have already wasted time trying to wake you up. Cha uyalala bo,” he says with a light chuckle. At least he is not angry at me but that doesn't stop me from rolling my eyes. He could have got off his seat and came to shake off the devil we call sleep.

I get off the taxi and before I close the door the driver passes his condolences for the loss of my mother and I gave him a nod to show that I heard

him. He drives off as soon as I reach the gate, if he saw who I am then I'm sure the woman I was sitting next to saw me and told the person who was sitting next to her, that person told the next until the whole taxi passengers got to know that a princess was in their presence. I am glad they let me have that little privacy until I got off the taxi, my mother's death might have had an impact on that and they were probably feeling sorry for me. I am officially an orphan.

I walked through the yard to the house with people turning their heads to look at me, they stopped talking and being busy to look at me – the prodigal daughter who finally remembered her way home. I headed to the house with my head held high, the pain in my heart didn't get me down and I'd be damned to allow their gossip to get to me. In the house, it was just as busy as it was outside – the same way like it was when they were preparing for my father's funeral. I replied to a few greetings and went down the passage to my room. When opened

the door, there were kids playing inside, they were probably my cousins' kids because my aunts and uncles are too old to be popping babies at their age.

I could feel anger brewing inside me as I looked at them touching and ripping what they could rip. Jumping on top on my bed, on my pink floral cover that my mother bought for my 16th birthday, they stepped on it with their dirty unholy feet.

“Get out!” I exclaimed and the room fell dead silent. They turned to look towards the open door and saw me standing on the doorway. They just froze with their eyes popped out, fear was evident in their faces and I don't know if they fear me or their mothers because they were told not to step outside this room unless they are told otherwise but I don't care – I want them out! What happened to respect and privacy? Just because I wasn't here it doesn't mean I'm dead.

“Zobuhle,” a female voice with a high pitch chirped in behind me and I turned to find aunt Nomsa standing behind me. She had the same eyes she had the day she came to tell me about...my mother. “I heard you just came in, you should have told me you were coming so I could prepare for your arrival.” She gives me a small smile as she rubs my arm up and down.

The sound of laughter and giggles inside my bedroom caught my attention and reminded me of the little devils who have invaded my space. I huffed in frustration and turned back. “Didn't you hear me the first time – I said get out! All of you out!” I shouted and felt aunt Nomsa’s hand around my arm.

“Don't shout, we are mourning,” she said calmly and the kids went out of the room one by one, following each other in a line and I stepped inside my room.

I picked up what I could with aunt Nomsa following my every move. “You need to calm down Zobuhle, you don’t need so much anger inside you and please

stop running away from the pain.”

I turned to look at her, has she been talking to Simbonga? Because what she just said sounds exactly like what Simbonga had said and would say. She doesn't say anything more when I looked at her in the eye, all I could see was pain, she was reflecting exactly what I was feeling and I couldn't look at her – it was too draining. I got rid of the pink cover and retrieved a black one from the top of my wardrobe – besides the things that the kids messed with, everything else was still the same – my mother kept my room the same way as I had left it. I covered the bed and laid on top. Aunt Nomsa stepped closer to the bed and removed my shoes.

“I will get you something to eat and let your father know that you are here.”

“Don't call him that.”

“He is your father Zobuhle, your mother died married to him so that makes him your father.”

“He is not my father, never have and never will be, my mother knew that when she died. My father is dead and that man is nothing of mine!” I said already sitting up. Nomsa is really testing my patience, he killed her, that’s what she told me that day and now she has the audacity to call him my father?

She opened her mouth to say something but she swallowed whatever she wanted to say when the door cracked open and he appeared. The devil is really working over time, not once will he allow me to have peace – no, I’m being tested in every way and if I give in I can’t even imagine the damage I’d do to this person. My heart is twitching in anger, hatred is overflowing, I trusted him but he brought nothing but pain into my life and took away my mother while at it – I hate him!

With tears welling inside my eyes, I turned to look at my aunt and found her looking at me.

“Auntie,” I said quietly, silently pleading with her with my eyes and she swallowed before turning to the door. I watched her approaching him and pushing him back. I threw myself on the bed and turned to sleep on my stomach.

“I just want to talk to her,” he argued.

“She doesn't want to talk to you,” my aunt points out the obvious.

“I have the right to talk to her, you know, and she doesn't have to say anything – I will do all the talking!”

“No Bheka you have done enough. Leave the child alone or –”

“Or what? This is my house for heaven's sake, and who is she to tell me that she doesn't want to talk to me? She left home and went who knows where, and now she is back here, for what? This is my house – my house, my rules. Move away from the door Nomsa!”

“No!...”

I didn't hear the rest of their argument because I took the pillow and placed it over my head. And blocked the world of the living with my thoughts, the same way I used to escape my pain of losing my father but it was slightly different this time because I had to work twice as hard to make the thoughts more effective because I had twice the pain to cover up.

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I woke up in the morning, I slept for the whole afternoon and throughout the night. There was a lot of noise outside and the women were singing a gospel song inside the house. The room was dark, I stood up and walked to the window, the weather was gloomy so it was in deed going to rain. It reminds me of the time after we buried my father, it rained so hard it flooded the whole village, the tent outside was blown away by the strong wind and all the plastic chairs were destroyed. We woke up the next morning and the soil on my father's grave was washed off, not all of it but nearly half of it was washed away by the heavy rain and the wooden polished cross was slanted with just by one touch it'd have fell down to the ground.

Whoever was here the last time, knows that I won't allow myself to see my mother for the last time and I'm sure that is why they didn't bother to get me to see her yesterday. Her place besides my father had already been prepared and they took out her casket to the tent. Nomsa is crying hysterically as the

pastor proceeds with the service. I could feel his eyes on me but I didn't look up, I don't trust myself with him and if I look at him I might do something I'd regret so I'm saving us both the trouble. I listened to the pastor as he proceeded to reading a verse about heaven, I don't really listen in because all of this feels like deja vu.

The casket sank down to the ground six feet below the level I was standing on, I looked down on it until it reached the ground. They covered it with me watching, the more they filled the hole with soil, the more I felt myself sinking into the empty space – the emptiness in my heart became more unbearable. I have no one now, it has been stamped and filed that I am an orphan. They do all the necessities and I am cleansed, so is the rest of the family members. The villagers are already eating and feasting on the alcohol provided, I don't know who came up with this idea but it feels wrong in so many ways. We should be mourning but people are here to get drunk instead.

When I get inside the lounge, the family is gathered there and it looks like there are planning to discuss something. No one says anything so I find my way to the space left on a three seater couch which now has 5 people sitting on it. Both my mother's side of the family and my father's side of the family are here.

"I think we are all here," my uncle from my mother's side speaks up. "You can proceed," he looks at my supposed father.

"I will cut through the chase and be brief. We all have lost someone dear to our hearts," I scoff and roll my eyes. I feel everyone looking at me but I don't care – he never loved my mother and the only thing he loved or made him agree to marrying her in the first place is the power that came with being with her. He married her because of the family custom and not because he loved her! "Since we have lost our queen, someone else needs to take her place and continue with her duties." I looked at him and he was serious,

I scanned the room and no one objected but instead they sat with anticipation for whatever he has to say next. “Nomsa, as the second born, and unmarried – you have to take your sister's place.” He looked over to aunt Nomsa and I too shot my eyes to her then back to him.

“We have just buried my mother and akakabandi nokubanda, and you want to replace her already?!”

“This is nothing different from what your mother did when your father died, she couldn't wait to replace your father and a week later after your father was buried, she went to bed sleeping on this hard broad chest,” he says rubbing and patting his chest.

Bastard!

My eyes fell on the knife on isithebe that was on the floor filled with meat and dumplings. I didn't think twice before taking the knife and running towards him with the knife held up to my ear and pointing towards him. People in the room gasped in shock,

terror and whatever noise that they were making. I reached him and had my other hand on his neck. His eyes popped out, fear evident on his face and I loved seeing his face like that. I lowered the knife with so much force and,

“Zobuhle no!”

Uthando: Twelve

Simbonga

I am on a call with Dingani, I called to tell him that Kwando will be with my parents for the December holidays so he shouldn't worry himself about having him over his house because Mme Radebe will be visiting her family this year – you should have the joy in the old woman's voice when I told her the news. I know she never said anything in the past two years, I mean she never complained about spending the holidays with us but when I heard how happy she was to go home this year really made me feel bad.

“At least I will have my wife all to myself now, don't get me wrong, Kwando is a good boy but he has been getting all the attention. ‘All my children are old now and know how to take care of themselves, Kwando needs me’ – that's what Ndoni uses as an excuse to leave the house,” he sighs in frustration

and I chuckle. "Mme Radebe is always there but she wants to be there as well and I never hear the end of what they gossip about everyday!" I laughed as he complains. The man is having a real hard time and I don't wish to take his place. I know how Ndoni can be when it comes to gossip so no thank you.

"She gets lonely too, you know."

"And obsessed!" he adds with a bang on the table and I laugh at his exaggeration. "I would lock her inside the house but you know as much as I know that I wouldn't succeed even if I try, God that woman."

"She's your wife and umthanda enjalo."

"You got that right son." He goes silent for a few seconds and speaks up again. "There is something that I need to talk to you about," he sounds serious

so I sit up and turned into being professional. “At the game you played last week, you had visitors – SAFA representatives and they are looking to put you on into the SAB Regional League.”

“You are joking right?”

“How can I joke about something like this? You won the game and your team played well because they have you as their coach.”

“But that was just a game, they had fun – the team is not ready to play on the League.” I pushed my chair back and stood up to my feet. Dingani better say he's pulling a leg because the team is not there yet, I know they have potential but we still need to do a lot of work before they can take part in serious games like the League matches. “Did you have a hand in this?”

“What? No, I didn’t even know that you were playing. I got a call yesterday morning from one of the representatives, well it’s even worse because they know that you are the coach of the team so maybe that’s why they are considering your team too.”

“This was supposed to be therapeutic but with what you are telling me, I am foreseeing stress only.” I sigh. It’s not only me that I’m thinking of, I’m also thinking about the girls, this is going to be overwhelming for them and I’d have to push them harder for them to win more games. And hopefully none of them will break.

“You are there for a reason Simbonga, I have always told you that you are more than what you think and I know you can do this. There are a few matches for you next week, you don’t have much time to get your team ready but I trust you.”

“Yeah what else would you say and I have no say or

whatsoever. I can't say no when I haven't talked to the team either so Dingani, we will talk and I hope you know what you are doing."

He laughs, "You need to learn to trust me more. Good luck son."

I thanked him and we both hanged up. This is the last thing I expected, we played well last week and won with 1 goal against the other team.

Unfortunately Zobuhle wasn't there to rejoice with her team mates, speaking of her, I haven't seen her since I gave her a lift to the rank. I couldn't even reach her on her cell phone because it took me straight to voicemail each time I dialled her number, it could be that there was was no reception or she was avoiding me. I failed to get through her, she is taking her mother's death real hard and I wish she could just trust me with her feelings – open up to me because I'm here to help.

I stepped out of my office and the old Toyota Yaris parks right next to my car. I don't know how this thing can still move, it's too old and needs more than just maintenance – I wouldn't get on it even if my life depended on it. Zobuhle and the driver get out of the car. I never got the name of this girl, I don't know her but she is giving me bad vibes – the too good to be true kind of vibes because Zobuhle looks to have grown really close to her. And I don't know how to feel when I see her with another woman, I don't know if it'd have made me feel better if she was dating another guy or it would have been just the same because in both alternative situations – she still wouldn't be mine.

“Zobuhle can we talk? Alone,” I say looking at the girl standing by her side. They both look tired like they haven't been getting enough sleep and sure do reek of alcohol. Zobuhle nods and hands over her small bag to the girl then I notice she also has her own small bag. The girl doesn't leave before she perks Zobuhle lips and I looked away for those few

seconds.

“She lives here too now?” I point to the direction in which the girl disappeared to.

“I live here and she is my guest,” she says like it's obvious and I'm too dumb for not seeing things the way she does.

“I don't trust her and neither should you.” I warn her and she takes a step back, looking at me from head to toe like she is asking herself ‘who am I to detect things for her?’. She is a mess and definitely isn't thinking straight, she needs someone with a clear mind to show her the way and I'm not afraid to do that for her because I love her!

“Simbonga please, I had a long night and I stink of alcohol and sex. The only thing I need right now is a bath and some good sleep – this...” she points to me

up and down with an open hand, “is the last thing I need.”

“I’m only doing this because I care Zobuhle,” I pull her back by her arm as she attempts to walk away. “I want to help, please, we can talk about anything you want but don’t shut me out,” my voice is calm and I think it is the right way to approach this because with her, things can go left real fast if I ever raise my voice at her. She looks to be relaxing and I think I saw a glimpse of guilt on her face.

“I-I uh...” she covers her mouth with the other hand, she is going to cry, I can see her eyes watering.

“Talk to me, I want to help.” She sniffles and takes a deep breath.

“I don’t need your help,” she says loosening my hand off her arm. That mask is on again – that was a

quick U-turn, she was ready to open up not so long ago – why is she doing this?

Before I could say anything, she rushed to the direction to her room without looking back. She is dealing with a lot on her own and is doing the wrong things thinking that she is helping herself when she is actually destroying herself. I doubt she talks to that dodgy girl about her feelings and Jesus would come back should the girl listening to her or anyone's feelings, she is with Zobuhle for the free booze and sex. She is just taking advantage of her and that makes me want to help Zobuhle even more before she finds herself in too deep. Heartache can drive people to do crazy things, I know because I have been there as well when I lost Sisanda.

I find the team stretching on the field, some are out jogging around the field and Slindile as always is in charge of the warm up session but she is doing it all wrong because she should be warming up with them

and not standing there and watching the other girls go on like she is the coach and not part of the team. I tap her on the shoulder and she blows the whistle. Everyone rushes to where we were standing and she joins the crowd standing in front of me. I didn't even get a chance to tell Zobuhle about this last minute meeting but I trust Slindile will fill her in.

"I have news and it will depend on how you look at it to determine if it is good news or bad news. We had SAFA representatives on the day we played last week and they want us to fight our way up to the Regional League," I say all of this holding my breath so when I'm done I exhaled and shot my eyes up to scan their faces.

"Us?" she asks pointing to herself and the rest of her team mates.

"Yes." I nod and they start screaming on top of their lungs, it is so noisy, I close my ears with my hands –

this is not the reaction I was expecting.

They are hugging each other, someone starts a song and now they are singing along. Some are doing their happy dance, I don't know what to call it because I have never seen anything like that before. The look on their faces puts a smile on my face, at least I'm getting a positive response from them and hopefully they won't complain about how much I will be pushing them during training. I need them physically, mentally and emotionally ready because I don't know who we are going to be playing against, which reminds me – I should ask for the names of the teams we are going to be playing with but for now we are going all in blindly.

“Okay!” I blow the whistle to get them to calm down. “I need 5 laps from you before we start with training.”

There are complaints and grunts coming from the

crowd but I'm not going to back down. I tell them to put on a smile but that only makes things worse, they start moving anyway and Slindile remains standing – she is one tough nut to crack, she does her own thing around here – you'd swear I'm the player and she is the coach.

“Where is Zobuhle?” she asks taking a few steps towards me.

“She is in her room with her ‘friend’.” I tell her and looked over to the group that is jogging around the field.

“I have never liked that friend of hers,” she says and I look at her. She sounds more jealous to me than worried. “You should talk to her, I did my part and she is not listening to me.”

“Trust me I tried but she is not opening up. It's part

of her healing process, I guess.”

“Yeah she is really taking her mother's death really hard. Too bad she doesn't ever talk about her family, I had to find out when I heard the news that she still has a family. That girl is too stubborn, it makes me mad crazy.” She huffs in frustration and I can see that she is genuinely worried.

“You and I both.” I sigh and lift up my eyes again – they are on their second lap.

After the moment of silence, she steps closer to me and before I knew it, she had her hand on my chest and tilted her head up to look at me.

“You have been frustrated for a long time Mr Masuku,” she says drawing circles on my chest. “I am also frustrated, so I think we could help each other and loosen the tied knots. This sexual tension between us is draining – my place or your place?” I

look at her and chuckle before I remove her hand from me, she is invading my personal space and she better get used to sitting on the fence because I'd rather die than sleep with her.

“Move along Slindile – you still have your full five laps to do.” Her mouth hangs open with her eyes gobbling out. She should just give up already and stop wasting my time with her one sided sexual tension, me and her are never going to happen. I shushed her to move along and she threw a fit before turning back and leave me standing there.

Just when I was thinking that we are starting to get along as civil individuals, she goes on to pull that stunt on me and something in me tells me we still have a long way to go before she finally gets it through her thick skull that I'm never going to hit on that.

Uthando: Thirteen

Zobuhle

“Zobuhle, no!”

The tip of the knife had already sank into his skin, his shirt was stained with blood and with one more push I would have flushed it all in but I felt aunt Nomsa’s hand on top of mine. Her teary eyes locked with mine and she shook her head – that wasn’t the right way to deal with my anger. She took the knife from my hand and I took a step back from him. He gasped for air like he was denied oxygen for a full minute, the room went silent, you would have heard the sound of a pin hitting the floor and my heart was pumping against my chest. I could have done it, I could have killed him and save more women that he is going to kill like he killed my mother and who knows if he hasn't done the same thing in the past. My mother might not have been the first of his

victims.

The shock on everyone's face and the disappointment made me wish the ground would just open up and swallow me because I was also embarrassed and disappointed on how I reacted. He collected himself and became twice the monster he is, and told me to leave his house and never come back – “You are banished from here!”, those were his words and if I ever set my foot in the Thabethe yard then he'd have my head. And he wouldn't take the fall for it because it'd be on me. No one fought for me, Nomsa just looked at me with pity in her eyes and the rest just wanted me gone as much as he did. I don't know if I should be happy that he doesn't want me there because I have no reason to be there anyway or I should be sad because that's the only place I call home.

I blew off the steam and took a sip of the black coffee. I have a huge headache because of the

hangover, it'd be gone for the time being but I know that I'd start drinking vodka again – I can't live without it anymore.

“The sunrise view is one of my favourite,” a female's voice chirps in behind me and turn to look back

“Weren't you supposed to be out there – fishing?” I ask her.

The whole building is empty, the patients went out for a mini trip to the beach to do fishing, I don't know how they'll get them all to do it right – sister Martha says they need some fresh air from time to time but I believe fresh air is every where else where fish isn't, that thing stinks.

“I chose not to,” she says silently. I really thought I was alone, I wonder how long she has been standing there but she looks much better now – therapy must be helping her a lot.

“I also wouldn't have gone even if they paid me to, I think I'm phobic to the sea. To me that thing looks angry,” I say and laugh as I think about it. Well I'm the opposite of my mother because she loved everything that I didn't like, I am more like my father – a photocopy of him, if you look at me, you are looking at him and maybe that's why I'm this ugly.

I turn the cup around in my hands and take another sip.

“Let's take a walk in the garden, I need the fresh air that I denied myself and once they come back, I wouldn't be able to leave.”

I look at her with a small smile, it would be rude of me to say no to my elder and maybe the fresh air is what I need too. We exit the building and walked to the small stream that I always look at from that full length window. The breeze is really refreshing and I can feel my senses loosening up as I take in a full deep breath. I don't get why no one ever comes out here and why it took me so long to scroll here. It's so

peaceful, I can hear myself think – this is definitely my new favourite thinking spot.

“I have been angry, angry with myself a lot,” she speaks up beside me and I remain silent so that she can continue. “I blamed myself for the abuse I had to endure and for now that my children are left alone in that house without a mother or a father,” she sighs deeply.

I am guessing the father was arrested for what he did to her, I would have clapped once if she didn't get any justice – he deserves it, no one beats up a person to a point where they lose their marbles – that's plain evil.

“He always said it is my fault, I am the one who pushed him to beat me. What frustrates me even more is that I saw the signs, he hit me once and I chose to stay in the name of love. But that was only the start, he hit me again until it became a casual thing – I couldn't leave then because of my kids and

I didn't have any where else to go." She is tearing up, I can hear her voice breaking. All victims have almost the same reasons for them to stay with the abuser, it is love, it was for my children, I didn't have anywhere else to go or he threatened to kill me – one would think that is just as an excuse but you will never know until you find yourself in that situation.

"What happened that night, the night he nearly killed you?" I ask still looking ahead. I'm still wondering what my mother's reason was for her to stay with that abusive husband of hers, I wasn't there so surely it wasn't for me, it couldn't have been love because she didn't love him – she was afraid of him and she had her family that she could've gone to but she chose to stay and he killed her!

"That's what I'm struggling with now, I have blocked that night to a point where I don't remember any details about it," I steal a glance at her and she is shaking her head. "My psychologist says I should be

patient but the more time I spend not remembering, the more time I'd have to spend in this place.”

She looks better to me now, I wonder if they could move her to a much better place, living with those kind of people 24/7 might just pull her back into that hell hole she just crawled out of. And seeing her husband might trigger her to remember everything, and I hope he is getting what he deserves behind bars and hopefully will stay in there for a long time. She is a strong woman, I have no doubt that she will be able to pick herself up and claim her life back – she doesn't need him and I hope she realises that.

“Hey,” I feel her hand on my forearm, the cup of coffee is still in my hands probably ice cold by now and I'm no longer in the mood to drink more of it. “By that look in your face I guess you didn't hear a word that I said,” she has a smile on her face which is soft and her touch is...it reminds of my mother.

“Maybe we should go back inside, I still need to finish up cleaning before they come back.” She nods and we both walked back inside.

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Running around the field feels so foreign all of a sudden, I don't know if it's my body or mind that doesn't want to be here but I'm doing my utmost best to get my head in the game. We are practicing but Simbonga preached that we should take it as a serious game because the time to fool around is no more. I can't keep up with these people, I have been missing a lot of practices and my body feels stiff. Even Slindile is doing much better than me, I can't concentrate, my mind keeps going in and out. “Zobuhle focus on the ball!”, Simbonga would say from time to time and I bet he has been keeping an eye on me more than the rest of the girls.

Even my dribbles and passes are drunk, I feel my

stomach turning and I gag, I shouldn't have because vomit reaches my mouth within seconds. It is by luck that I reached the other side of the field without spewing it in the middle of the field. Everything I ate came back up, it smells horrible because of the vodka that I drank an hour ago – just like I mentioned earlier, I can't live without that thing. A lot of memories were triggered yesterday and I needed it to numb the pain. I gagged until nothing came out, I felt dizzy afterwards and weak, my knees were shaking but I won't let it get me down, I am much stronger than this.

“Take this,” Slindile hands me a bottle of water as I walked back to where the girls have gathered.

“Thanks,” I say and gulped half of the content in one go. My throat felt dry so I really needed the water.

“Simbonga has been looking at you as you were vomiting and if you weren't lesbian then girl, I would have said you are pregnant. Are you alright though?”

“I am fine.” I say sternly and she leaves me alone.

Simbonga is briefing the team about what he is expecting from us, we are doing great so far but he wants us to be better than that and he wouldn't be pushing us like this if we didn't need to be pushed. Funny because I believe everything that he says about us having potential to get into the Regional League. He doesn't look at my direction for long, he is upset I know, I really sucked today and worse I got on the field knowing very well that I was intoxicated. A minute later, a guy who has 6, no it is 7 Debonairs pizza boxes, walks towards us.

“This is your reward for being this great and always pushing to be the best.” He hands out the six boxes and keeps one for himself. I'd have said this is too much food because all were triple deckers but knowing these girls – they eat like men and are not ashamed of it. And they started digging in immediately when the boxes reached their hands.

There are a lot of happy faces, we were fine before Simbonga but now we are much better, more happier. He is really doing the most and I can see the determination in his eyes. I wish my ambition matched his. Because I had lost my appetite, I left them there and walked past Slindile who had three 2 litres of cool drink with her, one under her arm and two in her hands. She denied my help when I offered to help so I continued walking to my room. I know he is following me because I could feel his presence behind me and I couldn't miss his scent. I stopped and turned to look at him.

“What?”

“Really Zobuhle? You came to practice drunk – what is wrong with you?”

“What is wrong with you? How is it your problem that I came to practice drunk or not?”

“Oh so I’m just a statue, you don’t know who I am now? I am your coach Zobuhle and you know very well that you are not supposed to be in the field whilst intoxicated. Don't be selfish Zobuhle, you were not playing alone out there – you have a team of 25 girls behind you and you need a clear mind to play ball, if you aren’t alright then the whole team will fall apart.”

“Okay.” I said throwing my hands in the air and turned to walk away but he calls out my name.

“I understand that you are going through a lot but don’t let that cloud your mind, end up forgetting why you are here in the first place. Yes it hurts and I understand –”

“You don’t understand anything – you’re on the outside, looking in!” I shouted and stomped my foot. I am tired of people saying they understand what I am going through when they have no idea of the

amount of pain I am feeling. He has both of his parents, I have none and he can't seriously compare the loss of my parents with the loss of his baby mama – he can't!

I left him standing there and ran to my room. I stepped inside and banged the door behind me. Why can't they just leave me alone? I sank down to the floor with tears running down my face – mama why did you choose him over me? – I wailed with my body shaking. I wish the pain would leave my heart like the tears welling out of my eyes, at least then it wouldn't be so bad and I'd cry just enough to get rid of all of it.

There is one person that can take the pain away, I take my phone and dialled her number, and she answered just immediately.

“Malindi, I need you.”

Uthando: Fourteen

Simbonga

We have won one match out of three matches this week and I am not quite surprised because the competition is tough. The girls are trying, they are doing their best – I don't want to lie and we are still standing strong. I believe we can do this. In games like these, I'm only looking at how they're playing – are they attacking or chasing – things like that and if it was a judged competition then we would have won most games. We won't give up though, our hearts are still in this, we are all in and there is no way we are getting out without getting what we got in here for in the first place. The person I am worried about is Zobuhle, just as I am thinking about her, I lift my eyes up and she has her back on me with a bottle in her hand which she immediately takes a sip out of – I hope it's not what I think it is.

I stood up and approached her, and yanked the bottle from her hand before she managed to hide it from me. Guilt is already washing all over her face, her eyes are lazily open and she looks tired as hell. I brought the opened bottle up to my nose and it's vodka, just as I suspected!

“You will sit on the bench.”

“But –”

“This is not up for discussion Zobuhle!” I shout and the room falls quiet. “You should have thought about the consequences before you even bought this thing.” I closed the bottle and put it away. “You will drink this,” I give her a two litre bottle of water. “All of it and you better be ready to be on the field in the second half.” She nods with her eyes dropped.

I am very disappointed in her, I don't know if she has

a death wish but the way she is drinking now is unhealthy and by the time she realises that she'd be an alcoholic – this is not the way to deal with her pain. I hope she wakes up before it's too late. The time has come for our forth match, we are playing against the Mangosuthu Ladies F.C, the team spirit is high and I love their confidence and positive attitude. The other team has been in this game for a long time, so they are good but I'm looking forward to see how things play out. We are in our field, in KwaMashu, so the other team travelled all the way from Umlazi to come and play with us. We even have a lot of audiences today – azishe!

We walk to the field and the other team is busy stretching so I get my team to warm up as well. I scan the field measuring our opponents then there's a girl sitting on the grass and it looks like she is struggling to fasten her soccer boots laces. I look around again and no one comes up to help her so I took it upon myself to go and help her. Her one knee is up and she is busy cussing under her breath –

someone must have woken up on the wrong side of the bed.

“Can I help you with that?” I say, crouching down in front of her and she lifts up her head.

Whoa!

I feel an invisible force pushing me back and I fell on my butt, balancing with my hands on the ground. She batted her doe-eyes, looking straight at me, who is this creature? Her skin is flawless, smooth like if I were to touch her it'd be like dipping my finger into a bowl of melted caramel, she plaited her hair into two neat cornrows and the texture of her hair tells me that she might be a mixed race – it's curly like she's coloured. She just froze like I am as I sink into her big brown eyes, God damn, I swear I am being bewitched here, her sombre gaze is alluring – probably because she isn't aware of how attractive it is.

I quickly collected myself and went to the crouching position. She hasn't said anything yet and I am getting impatient to hear her angelic voice, 'how would you know it's angelic?!', my mind screams and I frown. She doesn't object when I reach out to tie her laces so I guess she has no problem with it and I went on to tying the other shoe. Once I'm done, I stand up and hold out my hand to help her to stand up. She takes it and I immediately regret why I offered in the first place. Her touch is electrifying or maybe I am thinking too much about this but I feel drown to her, more and more and I can't control it. She pulls her hand from mine and I snap out of it.

There is fear in her eyes and now she is looking everywhere else besides me, it makes me wonder if she felt what I felt. She looks young – cute is the right word to describe her.

“Good luck.” The words slip out of my mouth before I could consent it – she is playing to the other team.

Jesus, how can I wish her luck when she is playing against us? Already I am going crazy.

“Mr Masuku,” a voice chirps in from behind me and quickly turn back. “We meet again,” she says looking at me and over my shoulder – to the girl behind me.

“Nyambose, long time, no see. I wish I could say it is good to see you again but under the circumstances we meet on, I don’t think that would be the right thing to say.”

“I am surprised you even got this far, judging by the amount of time you have been in that position.” She points to me with a frown.

“It doesn’t go by how many years – it’s about the love and skill.” I pat my chest with a smirk on my face. She is not really happy about this, she is sour like I have already won the game when we haven’t even started.

“Whatever.” She waves dismissively and goes past me. I turn and she is standing between me and the girl.

The fear I saw in her a while ago has doubled, no it has tripled and the poor girl is shaking like a leaf. Nomagugu looks like she is reprimanding her about something, I can't hear anything because she is whispering and the crowd is making a lot of noise. She keeps on nodding until Nomagugu pulls her to plant a kiss on her forehead – I didn't know she had that motherly, soft side in her. The girl runs along to the crowd of her teammates and Nomagugu turns to look at me – this woman is bitter.

“Stay away from my girls Simbonga. You have had enough of own now you are crawling into my territory?” her head is filled with so much sick theory, not all coaches sleep with their players – I'm not sick like the rest of them.

“I don’t know what you are talking, I was just helping her with...” I took a deep breath and thought, I don’t have to explain myself to her. “The battle is on the field, not out here.”

She went more sour like she just sucked a slice of lemon and bitter like she just swallowed a bar of soap. Everything about her makes me sick, I don’t know her that well but with every thing that she is spewing, just tells me what kind of a person she is – she looks down on other people and uses the ‘I have been in this game for a long time’ line to get to dance on top of other people’s head well now she has met her match. She doesn’t scare me. I left her there and went to brief my players.

“Remember to –”

“ATTACK!” they exclaim at the same time. My work is done here.

The necessities are done before the game and then all players enter the field and take position. That bug-eyed girl is in the field as well. I turn to look back, Zobuhle is drinking her water and she looks up with a fake smile on her face. I give her a straight face and she exhales sharply – I'm done playing games, she better pull herself together. The game starts, it's still early to tell which direction we are going and it still looks promising. Twenty minutes in the game, bug-eyes scores the first goal that left me glued to the ground with my mouth hanging open. I didn't see it coming. She is good, alright, really good and I'm impressed. I cleared my throat and focused on my own team.

Half time, the score is 2 – 0, we are losing so far but we still have another 45 minutes to make up for the lost goals.

“Zobuhle, are you ready?” she gives me a bored look and stands up.

“I’m ready,” she takes a deep breathe and starts stretching, talk about late timing.

Second half, the teams take position and it is game time. The opponent is playing really well but my girls are also playing at their best. Nomagugu is a good coach, I give her that but she lacks something. Ten minutes later, she takes out the wide-eyed girl, she is good so I guess she is saving her for the other matches. Zobuhle is...I don’t know, she just got a yellow card for absolute nonsense – she could have avoided that foul! I keep her on for a few minutes. When I turn to my left, I find the girl looking at me but she quickly looks away. I tell my substitute to warm up so long and I went back to scanning the field. Another yellow card – Zobuhle!

I take her out and she runs up to me.

“I’m sorry,” she murmurs and goes to sit on the bench.

Now I have lost a good player because of her stupidity, I put my hopes into Slindile – I pray she will step up and close the gap. Fifteen minutes, my team scores! I clapped my hands as they cheered, we are doing well and I am proud of them.

“Where are you going?” I ask Zobuhle as she stands up to walk away.

“I have drank two litres of water so I need to go to the toilet – I need to pee.”

“I told you not to leave my sight.”

“So what do you want me to do? Squat here and pee in front of these people, or you want to accompany me to the toilet?”

“Don't be crazy, you can go but 2 minutes Zobuhle

and I have started counting.”

She scoffs and leaves my sight. As I turn, buggie is looking my way with a smile on her face, she must have heard my conversation with Zobuhle – that girl is going to drive me crazy but not like this one that is staring right back at me. Her smile is just as beautiful. Focus Simbonga, I slap myself internally and put my head back in the game. The match ends with, 2 – 1, the other team won but we did well for ourselves. It was the toughest competition, Nomagugu couldn't be happier and I'm sure she yearns to rub it on my face. I speak with the girls one last time, to give them feedback on how they played, pointed out their weaknesses while it's still fresh on their minds and just like they have been all week – they haven't lost hope.

• • •

After a long day, I drove to Mbuzane Spot, it's quite

popular around here so I opted to check it out and get myself a drink before I drive home. It looks modern for a drinking joint in the township, I am even seeing men in suits in here – the owners must be rolling in a lot of money to be attracting such big shots into the township. The music is not even that loud, it's just those drunk men in the corner that are making a lot of noise. I found an unoccupied chair next to the bar and the bartender gave me a glass of their finest whiskey, I'm not picky and no, I don't store any alcohol in my house well that was because of Kwando but now it has grown to be a habit.

For the next round, I opt for a beer, I am still driving to Durban North so I need a clear head. The door opens and a loud noise of girls talking reached my ears – it was more like they were cheering. I turned back to see who it was because my fingers were crossed that it won't be Slindile and her friends, or Zobuhle who I made sure she was in her room when I left my office but it's none of the people that I have mentioned, it is Nomagugu's team well not all of

them just a few. I turned back to my beer. My life is getting a little bit lonely now, I enjoy being in the field but when I go home it is another story and I miss Kwando a lot, I even miss Mme Radebe at this point that is just how bad my loneliness is now.

Laughter fills the room, it is from the same group of girls who have just came in and she is with them. I stare long enough to see her laughing again, she lights up like a house on fire and even in this noisy room, I can pick up her sound of laughter and it reaches my ears like a sweet melody. Look at me getting more and more cheesy, she is definitely doing something to me without even knowing it. When she turns she finds me looking at her, I raise my beer up and she gives me a nod before going back to the conversation going on in her table.

“Hello ladies,” I am a man capable of many things but I couldn’t stay away. She looks startled, those eyes are bewitching and I am definitely going to

drown in them.

“Hi!” the girls greet back and giggle like it's the first time they are seeing a man in front of them, it must be the side effect of living in a place filled with girls only and having a person like Nomagugu as their guardian. I doubt she ever lets them out of her sight, I saw how she reacted today – very possessive.

“So you are going to let me drink all alone,” I whisper in her ear.

“If you didn't like drinking alone then you should have brought someone with you.” I told you her voice was angelic, damn I'm in too deep – I am never going to find my way out of here.

“I could buy you another drink just to say congratulations for beating my ass earlier on.” That laugh again.

“Thank you I can afford to buy my own drink.”

“Girls, the next round is on me.” They all cheer and I don’t get any excitement from the girl I’m trying to flatter.

The bartender comes with their drinks at my signal and I went to pay. The night might still be young but it has been a long day. I went back to their table and took her hand while I told their friends to excuse us. She couldn't say no because her friends didn't allow her to, ah well at least I have her people in my corner so she better dive in with me and we can drown together.

“I thought since you didn’t want to join me for a drink, the least you could is take me to my car.”

“You are leaving already?” it slipped out because she regrets why she said that afterwards.

I chuckle, “yeah I have to drive home before it gets

too late.” It’s already chilly outside, I’m thinking maybe it around 7 if it’s not 8 already. “I could stay if you want me to.”

She smiles shyly. “That is not what I meant, I thought you were going to stay a little bit longer since you asked me to join you for a drink.”

“And then you refused so I don’t have any reason to stay.” I am driving her into a tight corner and she doesn’t have anything to say back after that. “You guys played well today, very impressive.”

“Your team was good too.” We have reached my car so I leaned on it while she stood in front of me. There is a huge gap between us, it could fill five people and it’d take her 8 steps max for her to get to me.

“Umuhle,” I say after a long moment of silence and

she shoots her eyes to me before she drops them to look at her hands.

Instead of thank you, she says, "I should go back. We also need to leave soon before it gets late."

"Yeah let me not keep you, knowing Nomagugu she'd have a fit if you guys come back late." That glimpse of fear flashes in her eyes again, her chest is heaving – I hope I didn't say anything wrong. "I-I'm sorry I didn't mean it in a bad way." I find myself feeling guilty for something I don't even know.

"Good night Mr Masuku," she quickly rushes off.

"But I didn't get your name."

She stops just a few steps from the door, in that minute she could get inside the door without telling me her name or she could make my night and tell me her name, either one would say a lot about how she feels about me.

"Inganathi," she says and I watch her as she disappears inside the open door.

Uthando: Fifteen

Inganathi

I swear we got here two minutes ago and now we have to leave – it's true when they say time goes fast when you are having fun. At first I wasn't interested in going out but Nozipho dragged me out the room and said it's about time I let loose. I never get to get out and have fun, if I'm not in the field playing or practicing then I'd be sitting on my study desk studying Mechanics or Physics – that is basically how my every day life is. We are staying in a hotel, Garden Court, in south beach so now we have to travel all the way back there. I don't even know how Nozipho got to know this place because as far as I know she doesn't know KwaMashu like the rest of us.

We get an Uber and head to the hotel, Nomagugu could've booked us in a cheap B&B but she had

money to spend and chose this place. I am not complaining though, these things happen once in a while because we host most games so sometimes we'd spend more time in the Academy than not. We all arrive at the same time, we had to take two Ubers since we wouldn't have fitted in one car then I chose to go straight to our room while Nozipho said she's accompanying the other group of girls to their rooms. I walked down the passage, holding my breath and did a little prayer that Nomagugu doesn't see me out here because I don't think she'd like the idea that we went out without her permission.

I opened the door the room I am sharing with Nozipho and there is a figure sitting on top of my bed. It is a small room with two single beds and an unsuited bathroom, we don't have the best view though and probably that's why it is cheap. I turn the lights on and she looks up to me. She surprisingly looks calm but that was creepy of her to sit in the dark like that. The door is closed behind me, it's either I stand there or I walk further into the room and I chose to stay glued to the ground. Everything

about her screams – stay away – but it's never too long because she always finds a way to invade my personal space.

“I hope you girls had fun. You needed to celebrate – that was a good game.”

I nod, looking at the sling bag that is in my hands.

“Come.” She pats the empty space by her side.

I took a deep breath and walked up to her. When I sit down, she doesn't wait for me to relax first before she runs her hand through my hair and trails it down to my back. She has a silly smile on her face, I don't know why she had to stay up till this late when she should be sleeping – we all had a long day and we need to rest. Her fingers are running up and down my spine, too bad because I am only wearing a shirt that is too thin against my skin so I can feel the warmth of her hand. The door cracks open, she

pauses and Nozipho appears.

“Oh sorry, I thought...” she makes a U-turn but she doesn’t get too far before Nomagugu calls her back.

“It's a good thing that you are here – the more, the merrier – come on in. I don’t think you can deny me the chance to have my own celebration, I worked hard to get you girls here and it's time to harvest. Close the door,” she is getting impatient.

The door closes and Nozipho is already stripping off her clothes, I looked at her shocked but that shock quickly vanishes when the smell of lavender hits my nostrils. My mind registers of what is really going on and I don’t know how I am going to hold back the alcohol from rising back up to my mouth because nothing disgusts me more like the smell of lavender – I hate it! She has never kissed me before but she gets it down with Nozipho. Goosebumps crawl on my skin at the thought of having her tongue down

my throat. I don't know who is moaning but I doubt it is Nozipho.

For a few minutes, I am watching the show of them getting it on and then she moves to lay on the other bed, facing up. Nozipho has been doing this for a long time, she is not the one standing on the side looking like a rained chicken instead she is doing everything that Nomagugu wants without her even telling her what to do. She is on Nomagugu's face and she is eating her up – she is moaning but her moans sound too good to be true. Nomagugu has her legs open and I know that is my cue to bury my face in between them. If it was any other day, maybe in the after life or the next, then maybe I would've found this arousing but I am not, not even a little bit.

She cums and Nozipho jumps off her face, she has got what she want and she couldn't be happier. I wipe my lips with the back of my hand, looking at Nozipho – she has a lot of explaining to do. We get

under covers on the same bed that Nomagugu had a feast on and we are snuggling up too close to each other. The only sound is that of the beach not far from the hotel and our own breath. We don't say anything to each other for a while, I have my back on her and she is holding me from behind – still butt naked. She goes on to touching my hair and I exhale. She is the one who plaits it, washes it – basically she takes care of it like its her own. I wanted to cut it but she threatened to kill me if I do but it is too long and makes me sweat really hard when I am playing.

“When did it start?” I ask quietly and she remains silent but her fingers are still going through my hair.

I stirred to turn to face her, she looked calm and I couldn't get any trace of any emotions from her.

“So are you going to tell me or not?” she sighs. If she has been at it with Nomagugu then she must have known that she was doing the same with me. I don't

know how to feel about this, I can't be angry because we are both under the control of that woman.

“Were you going to tell me if what happened earlier didn't happen?” I keep my eyes on hers like I'm searching for something. Yes, I am guilty because I wouldn't have said anything and I was too ashamed to tell anyone, what if they laughed at me? I mean I lost my virginity to her which anyone would find absurd.

“No.” I shook my head.

“All I am going to say is, all that I have been doing is so I can stay in the Academy, play ball and to keep her happy, that way I don't have to worry about anything – I have accepted it.”

I saw that, it is like this has become a norm to her and she has been here before me so it is not doubt

that it is something that has been going on for a while. It makes me wonder if she does the same to the rest of the girls or she has her own specific people that she does these things to. I won't call it punishment because I have never done anything to make her hurt me like that, I play well, I stay out of trouble and I have never been with a boy like she advised me not to, so I don't understand why she is doing all of this.

"So when are you seeing him again?"

"Who?"

"Simbonga Masuku." I can trace a little bit of excitement in her voice so I guess we are over feeling depressed and sorry for ourselves.

"I don't know." I turn to sleep on my back.

“But you are going to see him again, right?”

“Why would I do that?”

“So you are going to deny it and say you that you didn’t see that the guy is interested in you. I mean he went all out and bought us drinks even went as far as getting you to accompany him to his car.” The last part is on her, I wouldn't have gone with him if she didn’t bully me into it. “I mean even a blind person would see that the guy has hots for you.”

“I wouldn't know.” I have never been in love before so it is foreign to me but I have to admit that I felt something for him, like I was drawn to him and too comfortable around him – safe is the right word to describe how I really felt. But it was strange because I don’t even know him like that.

“Oh you can be slow Miss Obennebo.” She gets out

of the bed and walks to the wardrobe probably to look for her pyjamas. “That guy might be the one and you are here saying ‘I wouldn't know’, ‘I wouldn't know’.” She mimics my voice but she doesn't get it right.

“Would you cover for me if I were to go out?”

The way her head turned at my question, I swear her neck snapped, that was too fast for a living human being.

“What are saying to me? So you are going to see him again?”

She is the one who was preaching to me about the guy so why is she acting like she didn't have a hand in my change of mind. She walks up to me and I cover my face with the duvet. She jumps on the bed and squeals – oh I'm never going to hear the end of it.

Zobuhle

I have been working short hours at the facility, good for my sanity but I miss the chats with Sister Martha over a cup of tea where she tells me about what goes on in the facility when I'm looking the other way. I don't ever get to see much so hearing the stories from her keeps me up to date, well not anymore since I have to make it to the field at 12pm.

Simbonga kept his promise and he is still paying me for the amount of money I am losing while I am in the field instead of working. Even staying here, made a big difference – it is quiet and don't get me started about the comfort. At least now I don't have to worry about the water coming in when it rains.

As I approach my room, I see that the door is slightly open but I remember quite well that I locked it when I left this morning. I pushed it open and – I have been robbed! The bed is a mess, the small wardrobe I had my clothes in is half empty, all the things that

are left are scattered all over the place and they went as far as stealing my kettle and charger! My head is spinning right now, how could this have possibly happened? I don't know what told me to go and check the other room where we store the training equipment and when I get there, it is empty, they took every single thing. Jesu, how am going to explain this to Simbonga?

I ran outside, still with my head buzzing with questions that I don't have answers for. I don't get much time to recover because Simbonga parks his car just at that moment while I'm still figuring out how the burglars got in. I have my hands over my head, I had worked so hard to get where I am right now and in a single day everything was taken from me. How can God allow something like this to happen? I just became sober-ber, the shock flushed out the little amount of alcohol I had in my system. Simbonga walks up to me, he can see my face so immediately he gets an idea that something is wrong.

“What happened? Why are you like this?” he panics. I have tears flowing on my cheeks already and I can’t control my sobs.

“They came in and took everything.”

“What do you mean?” he eyes roam over to the open door behind me and he rushes over there.

I follow him and he is searching, I don’t know what he is looking for but there is too much damage done here – they took everything. He goes to the room which is supposed to have the training equipment and his face falls at the sight of an empty room. His hard work has gone down the drain. He walks up to me and I follow him out of the room. He looks at the door and I see something that I didn’t notice when I came in – there is no forced entry. The door is still in the condition I left it as, besides the fact that it was open when I got back.

“Where are your keys?” he looks at me and I pat my pockets.

He doesn't wait for me to find the keys first, he walks away and leaves me standing there. I search for the keys in all my pockets and in the bag I had with me but nothing. I must have placed it somewhere, I searched all over and then remembered – Malindi said she wanted a place to sleep because she was working night shift and couldn't go home since she wouldn't get any sleep if she went there. I went out of the room again and bumped into Simbonga and bab'Myeni, the security guard.

“Myeni tell her what you told me,” Simbonga signals the old man to start talking.

“Earlier today a young woman came here, the one you have been spending a lot of time with,” he says that looking at me. “I didn't ask any questions since I

know that you two are friends so I let her be. Twenty minutes later I saw her driving out and she didn't say anything."

"I am going to ask you again Zobuhle, where are your keys?"

I looked at him, he can't be seriously implying that Malindi stole those things. "I gave her my keys because she needed a place to crash for a few hours!"

"There you have it! She stole from you, from me and the rest of the team. How could you be so stupid Zobuhle, trusting someone you don't even know?!"

"I know her!"

"What is her last name, huh? Do you even know where she stays? Who her family is? Or better yet, do you know where she is right now?" he looks at me

very convinced that Malindi is the one who stole from me, even bab'Myeni is eyeing me with suspicion.

I take my phone out and dialled her number, I know she wouldn't do something like this, there has to be another explanation. It doesn't even ring, it takes me straight to voicemail. I try again and still!

“Any luck?” he asks sarcastically. I know he is happy right now and sure is yearning to tell me that he told me so. I shook my head and he sighed.

It is really sinking in now, it can only be her who stole those things, she is the one who had the keys to open the door – but why would she doing something like this? To me?

Uthando: Sixteen

Simbonga

We have been glued to this hard wooden bench for almost 2 hours now, it is in the afternoon so there is a lot of people who are cuing to open their own cases – I didn't know we had to wake up early to come to a police station like when we have to go to the Home Affairs. The service is just as bad though, which shows that all government employees only qualify if they work and move like snails. It is frustrating. Zobuhle is silently crying right next to me, I feel sorry for her but I am angry at her as well – that was just plain stupid of her. I don't even want to get into that right now, I will touch that topic when we get in front of the officer who will be taking our statements.

This place brings back a memory that I had stashed at the back of my mind, I was arrested for assault –

we were at a friend of a friend's house party and you know when alcohol goes to your head nothing ever goes well. It was a great party that ended up being a mess, the neighbours called the police complaining about the noise, the house was in a complex which had rules, terms and conditions, and having a party like that in that place was a violation of those rules. One thing led to another and we were arrested, I had to call Sisanda to bail me out – Kwando was 2 years old at that time if I am not mistaken. The way she was fuming.

She came the next morning with the bail money and I never got a word from her that day. She gave me silent treatment all the way home, you know when someone gives you silent treatment that you have messed up big time and with Sisanda it was worse because she was unpredictable. You know who I found waiting for me when I got home? My father was there. God I wanted to die right there and then – I was still hungover and that only made things worse. He pulled by ear and told me to stop fooling around,

even to this day I don't know how and when he got to Johannesburg at such short notice but that was an eye-opener.

That was the last time I messed up, I didn't even dream of messing with Sisanda and this couple walking up to us remind me of me and her. Well in their case, the woman was arrested and the guy came to bail her out. They are having a heated argument as they are walking down the hall and they have all our attention. The woman was arrested for beating up her friend over a weave, the friend borrowed it and lost it at some party – ah she lost it and beat up her ass. It is really funny just thinking about it, she is still arguing that her friend deserved it and she is not going to let it go, “ngalala ngingadlile when I bought that weave”, those are her exact words.

It is like they are used to being the centre of attention the way they are talking not worrying about

who is watching or listening – communication is good but to an extent because I wouldn't survive this. Just as they disappear outside the police station, we are called to an empty desk of an officer whose face is telling me that she has no interest of being here. I don't really know which is better, sitting here on the desk or being out there chasing after criminals but because I value my life so much – I'd choose the desk at anytime of the day. We tell her what we know but it is not really useful because we don't even have this Malindi person's full name but the selfie Zobuhle took with her made a difference.

I am sure wherever she is, she has sold all those stuff for cash, I never liked her or trusted her and she has just proved me right that she is not a person to be trusted. It makes me wonder if Zobuhle was a target in the first place or she just came up with this plan on the last minute but whatever it is, what she did was cruel and I want her arrested. Even if I don't get all that stuff back – I want justice, if she can do it to Zobuhle that means she can do it to someone

else, well that's if she hadn't done it in the past. After giving our statements, we stepped outside the station and it is getting dark. We didn't do anything today, no practice, because we had to be here.

"Where are you going?" I ask Zobuhle as she trails away while I am heading to my car.

"I'm going to the rank to take a taxi to my place." Her voice is hoarse, now I don't know if it's because she has been crying or it is because of the amount of vodka she has been drinking for the past few weeks.

"Come, you will spend the night at my place – that place is not safe right now. She has your keys and we don't know what else she is planning to do."

I look at her and she is thinking about it. I am not backing down, it's either she comes with me or I get her locked up in one of the cells inside the police

station, she will be much safer there than in that room. She walks up to me and I open the passenger door for her, she gets in and I walk over to my side. It is much better now because she has stopped crying, we are not arguing about anything so the ride home is silent. For the first time since I came here, I have a guest and Lord just had to make it be her the first person I have over my house. I park on the driveway and she follows me inside the house. It is clean because I don't spend much time around the house any way.

"You can go upstairs and freshen up while I fix us something to eat." I say after throwing my keys on the kitchen counter.

She doesn't say anything so I turn to look at her.

"Will you show me the way around this place?" she says. She looks tense but who wouldn't after the day we had and maybe a warm shower will help her relax

a bit.

We head upstairs and I show her the guest bedroom, then I moved over to my room to get her something that will fit her – a t-shirt and jogger shorts – when I get to the guest bedroom she is not on sight so I put the things on top of the bed and head out. I am not a good cook, I am a bad cook I won't lie to myself or to you, I only know the basics and that is because of the time I spent with Mme Radebe in the kitchen. As a stay at home dad, I had to learn new skills and cooking was one of them and it helped because no one can survive on takeaways for long. There is leftover food in the fridge, I am still failing to manage to cook for myself – the one cup of rice just ends up being too much and half a cup is not enough so I end up having a lot of food stored in the fridge. I am thankful now because it has saved me from cooking today.

“That was fast,” she says walking up to the counter

wearing the things I picked out for her.

“What can I say, I am good in the kitchen just as I am in the field,” we both laugh. “I am joking – it’s leftovers that I warmed up.”

She sits on the chair and I push her plate across the counter. She thanks me and starts digging in. She is not complaining so that counts for something, it may be simple but it is edible. She finishes just a minute after me and I take the plates to the sink – I will wash them in the morning. I give her a glass of water and she looks up to me like I’ve just insulted her.

“Not even juice Simbonga or a cool drink,” she is still looking at me in disbelief.

“The amount you have had of that can last you a lifetime – water is life.” I walk past her and she

remains seated on that chair.

I take the remote and switch on the tv while I made myself comfortable on the couch. She is still in the kitchen probably thinking that the longer she stares at the water then it'd change into wine, it's not funny but Jesu really amazes me and I am going to stop right there because I don't want to attract unnecessary attention to myself. I don't know when I fell asleep but when I flipped my eyes open, the room is dark but likely the moon is out so there is a glimpse of light. I raised my head and she is standing over me. The tv had been switched off. She walks to sit next to me, I wonder what time it is and how long I have been sleeping – I am such a bad host.

“It is just after midnight,” she says like she just read my mind. “I couldn't sleep,” her voice is quiet like the night but I could sense that even though she couldn't sleep, she was tired, it might be that she is stressing

about what happened.

I fixed the cushions on the couch and laid my head on top of them. I pulled her to lay in next to me and she did without any hesitation. The couch was big enough for the two of us, just that she was too close and a part of me wished we had met in a different life where she wasn't who she is but then again I can't be sure that she'd be the same person I fell for. After a few minutes she shifts towards me, my chin is on the top of her head and her body is against mine. I wrapped my arms around her because that is something I think she wants – that is comfort.

“Sims,” that is the first time I’m hearing that name.

“Do you hate me?” she continues.

I don't know what made her think I'd hate her, yes I am angry but no, I don't hate her. I don't think I'd ever will, not in this life time.

“No I don’t hate you.” My arms tightened around her. This feels right, having her so close to me bring warmth inside my heart. “Do you know who I hate?” she raises her head to look up to me with her lazy eyes. “I hate the person who brought this amount of pain into your life.” She blinks rapidly probably trying to get rid of the sleep in her eyes but she doesn’t succeed, I can tell that she is going to dose off to sleep any moment from now.

“I hate him too,” she says and swallows. The moonlight lit up her facial features like a glossy surface, she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. The mask is no longer there but there is something that is still holding her back, it tells me she is not one that likes feeling vulnerable and it has been a long time since she has been like that so it is going to take just as long for her to get rid of the fear.

She stirs in my arms and mumbles something, I don’t know if she is talking to me or she is talking in

her sleep. My fingers rub gently against her scalp, she needs to cut her hair again it has grown long, she looks good in her short haircut and it makes her face light up. I look down to her and she is sleeping peacefully with her soft, warm and steady breaths against my neck. They say love is a beautiful thing but in my case it is equivalent to torture, it hurts to love her when she is so close but yet so far and it is too bad I can't get rid of it because the feelings I have for her are like a permanent scar in my heart.

Uthando: Seventeen

Inganathi

We woke up really early because we have practice today. We have had seven matches so far and we won six of those. We are still in Durban with one more match to go then we are leaving thereafter. Nozipho is sitting very close to me with her arm linked with mine and her head on my shoulder. I have my head on the window, looking outside as the car moved forward. We are using the mini bus that Nomagugu bought for the club, it makes things a lot easier when we have to travel from the hotel to the venue where the matches take place and she hired a driver to do all the driving, she always uses her own car and right now she is driving in front of the bus to show the driver where we are going exactly.

The drive is really short but I am glad that we have arrived because the noise from the girls shouting

and screaming was becoming unbearable. When I step out of the bus, I realise where we are – we are at the Moses Mabhida Stadium. I am surprised, the girls are more excited than ever. I don't know how Nomagugu managed to pull this off but she did. We even have someone who directs us inside, it is a young white lady and she smiling too wide, she is making me nervous. We follow behind her and we walk around the stadium to the entrance, passing a few restaurants which were still closed since it's still early in the morning. They even have a Virgin Active gym here, we can see the people working out through the full length window.

I have never been so close to a big, well-known stadium – this one is huge and intimidating, I don't know how the many players who have played here managed to get over the nerves because I'd be shaking in fear before I even see the opponent. We go through the security, they scan our bags, they scan us as well and then we enter the stadium. Nomagugu is walking with white lady, having a light

chat and they are laughing here and there. I have Nozipho's hand in mine, what happened the other night really brought us closer and she has become my safe place around here. When the field comes into view, my heart accelerates even faster – the grass is so green, clean and the whole thing actually looks wider than when you see it on tv.

The lady turns to us and tells us about the history of the stadium – when, how and why it was built in the first place. We all know it was for the 2010 FIFA World Cup but I guess it's part of the tourism guide that she is following. Nomagugu has a proud smile on her face, she is really happy about this and I wish I could share the same sentiment. There are a lot of happy faces as well in the crowd, Nozipho is just as excited, I don't know why I can't get myself to be happy – there's just a part of me that feels really down, like I am sinking in and out of different worlds of happiness and sadness, sorrow.

“Haa-woo!” she screams and her voice echoes within the empty stadium.

It feels like a dream, are we training here today? My question isn't left unanswered for long because the white lady shows us the way to the changing rooms. Nomagugu shouts behind us that we have 5 minutes to get into the field. We rushed in and started changing. We have been in this position many times before so we are comfortable being naked around each other, not stark-naked in this case but you get what I mean.

“Do you have a pair of extra socks?” she asks, I barely talk to the other teammates but I know all of them by name though I never address them like that unless we are in the field – there I don't have much of a choice.

“Uh yeah I think I do,” I check in my backpack and just as I assumed, I packed two pairs of socks. She

thanks me as I hand the extra pair over to her.

My mother taught me the importance of sharing since from a young age, I grow up having a double of everything even when I played house or outside there was a double of me. I shared everything with her, even our underwears were the same – same colour, same size – so we had a hard time tearing them apart till we just wore whichever one we saw first without bothering checking first. It was like that until one morning, where I woke up and the other side of the room was empty – her bed had always been there but not on that particular morning. Even Mr Fuzzy Wuzzy, the stuffed teddy bear we shared, was not on sight. Sitting in between both my parents, my mother told me that my days of sharing were over, I looked over to my father and he nodded in agreement.

I never knew she was a huge part of me until I could be gloomy in a sunny day without knowing what

went wrong or where it hurt. Sharing ended overnight but the habit of having twice of everything will take me a lifetime to outgrow it. Practice is really great, it must have to do with the fact that we are in a new place which by all means motivates us to do our best, I'd win all games if I were to play here – I might have judged the place way too early – I don't even know what is like to be nervous as I kick the ball inside the goalpost and it hits the net! My mood is slowly but surely improving and I'm sharing the same excitement with my teammates as we head over to the changing rooms to take a quick shower before we go.

We walked back to where the minibus was parked and Nomagugu announces that we will grab something to eat before we go back to the hotel. "She is spoiling us," the girls kept on saying. Knowing Nomagugu, she can spend money when she wants to and can be stingy if she likes to. And we all have learnt a lesson to enjoy her moments of spending while it lasts. My parents pay plus, minus

R4500 to the Academy every month and they also have to pay for my fees. It is not much considering the fact that I don't know poverty at first hand, I only know it through hearsays or from seeing it from afar.

The trip is really, really short this time around so I guess we are not far from the stadium and yes, we are actually by the beach. Nomagugu approaches the crowd and tells us to follow her. There are a lot of people walking up and down, some are jogging while some are walking their dogs and others just chose to stick around so they'd enjoy the view of this beautiful beach. It is so refreshing, I wish I could run over there barefoot and let the sand run through my toes – I miss that feeling. Nomagugu leads us to the restaurant, with big words written California Dreaming, it has that summer feel which is just as refreshing as the view.

“I made a booking for the Terrace,” she tells the waitress who just welcomed us.

“I have no idea about your booking ma’am but I will get the manager to attend to you.” She has a wide smile on her face, these people are really good at customer service even Nomagugu doesn’t take any offence.

The beach is just a few metres away, I don’t know how they’d manage to save this place if there were to be a Tsunami.

“Nomagugu!” the dark, young looking man says cheerfully as he walks up to us.

“Mthembu.” Nomagugu shares the same cheerfulness. Looks like they know each other really well, they handshake just for the sake of the customers whose eyes are now on us.

Their catching up moment doesn’t take more than two minutes, then the man who I suppose is the

manager leads us up the stairs. The ground floor is nice but this, this is heaven on earth. I think they spent more time designing this place, they ended up not having much time for the ground floor so they just put tables and chairs, and started serving the customers. Here, we are overlooking the beach, the people, we can even see more places that are close by. I can see the Suncoast Casino from here, I did my research so I know a few catchy places that are around here.

She booked the whole Terrace for us, I told you mama can spend when she feels like it and she is sure making up for the times we spent cooped up in the Academy. Right now, I can take this moment to forget the past and just leave in the moment. We take a few selfies and pictures, we are not shy at all – it's like we are home since we have this floor to ourselves. We have waiters that are assigned to us, talk about knowing people who know people even Nomagugu is relaxed, we are ordering cocktails and whatever beverages we like. I can say that I am

having the time of my life. The waiter brings our food and we start digging into the mouthwatering, finger licking good food that I'd have at anytime of the day.

With how much food we have consumed, we will need 2 litres of the detoxing remedy and 1 to 2 hours of working out, to get rid of the calories but at least we have Nomagugu to blame for this one. We always eat well, healthy and watch what we eat and when we eat because it is very important to maintain a healthy diet when you are a soccer player. We do drink but in the corners or when no one is watching but Nomagugu will always know when you do your worst in the field and right now I don't even want my mind to go as far as thinking what the punishment for that would be. There is eight of us sharing one table, the rest is sharing the other tables and Nomagugu is with the assistant manager.

"So how are you guys doing? Are you having fun?"
My whole body flinches under the touch of her hand.

I didn't know she was checking up on all of us, yeah I saw her going to one of the tables but I had hoped she won't come this far.

"Please excuse me," I say as the girls were still updating her about how much they are enjoying the food, the drinks – the whole thing.

I push my chair back, meeting Nozipho's eyes and I smile to assure her that I am fine. I walk past Nomagugu, she looks really familiar with everyone which by each day passing makes me doubt the chances of her not sleeping with the rest of the team. The waitress gives me the directions to the toilets and I find my way there. I come to a halt at the sound of loud sobs echoing inside the toilet, I haven't seen who is crying so I took a few steps forward and two girls come into view. I stay behind the wall and made myself invisible – the girl crying is sitting down while the other is standing over her and they are both from my team.

“You should speak to Lucas, he will help you out of this mess.” The only Lucas I know is our physiotherapist so now I am even more curious as to what they are talking about and what mess does Nokubonga need to get out of, she is the one who is crying – our goalkeeper and captain.

“I don’t want to abort Lizzy!” she says in frustration like she has said this a countless times before. I hold back my gasp as I don’t want to blow my cover.

“Do you want to throw your future away like that? These tournaments could do a lot for your career Nokubonga, don’t be stupid,” the friend argues like choosing to keep the baby is the worst idea or decision Nokubonga could ever make. “You don’t have to do much, Lucas can do it for you at just a little price.” Lizzy is really convincing that she has sought help from Lucas in the past, it could mean she was pregnant as well and Lucas got her out of

the 'mess' like she wants him to do with Nokubonga.

“It won't change anything, Nomagugu already knows about it.” Her sobs get louder as that statement leaves her mouth. I wouldn't have known she was pregnant because she doesn't look pregnant.

“How would she know when you are not even showing?” Lizzy enquires clearly confused, I also want to know because I haven't even seen Nokubonga running in and out of the bathroom because of the morning sickness.

Nokubonga lifts up her head and her eyes lock with mine, I walk forward as I feel compelled to – I have been caught eavesdropping. I rush into the toilet before they could ask how long I have been standing there and what exactly did I hear. I am still shocked. I wipe after peeing then flushed the toilet, when I step out they are not on sight. I don't dwell on it, I wash my hands and went back to the Terrace. I can never

get enough of this place and I am definitely going to come back here once I have finished my exams. We left after a few minutes and drove back to the hotel.

“Ingie can I talk to you for a few minutes?” that’s Nomagugu.

Nozipho gives my hand a tight squeeze before I walked over to her. She ushers me inside her room and tells me to go to the balcony. She has the best view, well she is the organiser so she deserves the best, I think. She sits next to me, I am looking ahead but she is sitting facing me.

“I will get straight to the point. I have been watching you, very closely, in the field and outside the field. You are good Ingie, you are the best and you just prioritised football over your studies, I mean you should be at school writing your final exams or at your desk studying for the next but instead you are here. That shows your true determination to play

ball.”

Her hand goes to touch my hair. I had to let it loose so it'd dry up after sweating through training.

“Nokubonga is pregnant,” she says like the words left a bitter taste in her mouth. She must be disappointed, I am too because she is a good goalkeeper but there's nothing we can do about it.

“I know,” I say quietly. I haven't set my eyes on her since we have been here and I'm not even yearning to but I can feel her nodding.

“She can't keep on playing for the tournaments and I can't keep her as the captain. So that means the captain spot is open.”

I don't know where she is going with this and her

fingers are now rubbing against my scalp.

“The position can be yours,” she says and I shoot my head to her. “It can be yours, you and I know that you are the most deserving person,” I blink twice and I still see that smile on her face. “Just say the word and I will make it happen...”

Uthando: Eighteen

Zobuhle

I woke up and Simbonga was nowhere to be found. He didn't even leave a note but who am I to keep tabs on him like he owes me something when I am the one who owes him. He didn't have to take me in but here I am in his balcony with a cup of steaming hot rooibos tea in my hands. I don't want to drink coffee because of the caffeine, I have had a lot of that and like Simbonga had mentioned yesterday, it could last me my whole life. The view from the balcony over looks the houses nearby, a deep forest just before the sky blue ocean. Even from this distance, I couldn't miss its beauty. I take a sip after blowing off the steam, the cup is too hot for my bare hands so I held it threw a fleece that is resting on my lower body. The weather is gloomy today and it matches my whole mood.

I am startled a bit by the sliding door opening and I quickly looked back.

“I was looking for you in every part of the house.”

He is wearing his gym wear, he is still covered in sweat so I guess he just came back from his morning jog – his body shows that he takes care of it. Though you’d doubt that when we are in the field, he has his days where he’d join us when we are training and there are some days which I’d call ‘his lazy days’ where he just stands on the side and call all the shots. You’d swear he had grown old with fragile joints and is suffering from some bone disease that prevents him from being active because he lets us do everything. The ball may be on his feet and instead of kicking it back into the field, he’d step to the side to make space for one of us to retrieve it.

“I will take a quick shower then we can go have breakfast at one of the restaurants close by, what do

you say?"

I am not in a mood to go out so I respond with a pout.

"Okay, I will make breakfast and then you will do the dishes."

"Deal." I give him a single nod, turning back to the view that is in front of me and then took another sip of my tea.

I know this place is close to the GlenLands Mental Health Facility because the lining of the forest is just the same, too similar, its like I am looking at it through the full length window at the facility. A few houses from where I am, a family of three comes out to the driveway with surfboards tucked under their armpits, the young girl in a bright pink speedo squirms from one side to the other, jumping up and

down at the excitement for the plans they have for the day. I'd never understand how white people never feel cold, it is cold today but their plans include diving into the cold water of the sea just for fun, I'd never do that even if they paid to. The father has placed the surfboards in the back of their truck, he takes the little girl and put her over to his shoulders.

I am not close enough, so I can only imagine the wide smile on the little girl's face – it reminds me of what I had and was taken away from me.

“She could've left but she chose to stay,” I say out loud because I know that he is back from taking his shower and he is looking down at me.

“Who?” he asks still standing behind me.

“My mother.”

I hear his footsteps coming towards me, then he appeared tall and asked me to shift so I can make space for him on the small couch. When he sits down, he doesn't let me shift any further, my head is on his shoulder and his arm is wrapped around my shoulders, holding me close to his body. It feels safe to be this close to him, like he is a guardian angel that I refuse to acknowledge and a good friend, brother that is willing to be by my side but I am refusing to let him in. I have lived closed up for too long and talking about my feelings feels foreign to me. I no longer know how to do it, when is the right time to do it – though I am a bomb waiting to explode. The emotions inside are suddenly too heavy for me to carry, there is this burden I have carried for a long time and the more I think about, the more I see that it is not my burden to carry.

“She loved the beach – heaven on earth – she used to call it because it has no beginning and no ending, it represents the life of our Lord, Jesus Christ, she'd preach,” a chuckle escapes from my lips before I

could contain it. “On this particular day...”

I was 6 or 7 years old at that time, I owned a dozen of rainbow coloured speedos and swimming suits, my mother bought as many as she could every time she went out shopping. At that age, every day was a holiday to me, I was still in small school but it was never too serious. My mother dressed me in a bright pink Barbie speedo, almost the same as the one that little girl was wearing. We met with my father outside, the mood was jolly – I was the princess in my father’s castle – I carried more than just a name, I felt like royalty and I was treated as such. My parents’ only treasure, I had no one else to share with, I was the only one but I had never felt the thing they call loneliness.

My father picked me up and tickled me, enquiring why I had to be this beautiful and embarrass the rest of the living girls in all parts of the world. A child is the most beautiful in front of their parents, I didn’t

understand that then but I do now. My mother disappeared inside the house, saying she thought she forgot something and just then my father helped me sit on the backseat and buckled my seatbelt. I couldn't sit still because of the excitement, he kissed me all over my face causing me to giggle before he reached into his pocket and retrieved a piece of sweet. He handed it to me and placed his index finger across his lips, signalling me not to tell – my mother never liked it when I ate sweets, I became too hyperactive, she'd always complain.

I stashed the sweet in my mouth before mom appeared again. Both of them got in and my father drove out of the yard. My mother started sniffing, the sweet was too nice I had forgotten that it was a secret, I had little drops of saliva on each corner of my mouth – “Can you smell that?” she asked my father and he replied saying he doesn't smell anything. I could smell the strawberry flavoured sweet because I was the one eating, my mother's sharp nose sold us out and before I knew it, she had

my face on hers telling me open my mouth and blow out to her nose. As her mind registered what happened, she shot a deadly stare to my father who swayed on the road nearly driving into a truck that was coming in the opposite direct.

“I can’t believe you two conspired behind my back, I hope uzoyimela lenkinga osuyiqalile,” she glared back to me and turned to look at my father.

As guilty as I was, I had no fear in me – my father was there, my shield, hero and protector, with him around no one would get to me even my own mother. In a few moments we were at the beach, my mother set up a place for us to sit under a big umbrella that my father had set up. The view of the beach was mesmerising, it was not everyday that I saw something like that but the further I looked, the more I got scared of it – it was darker, looked angry at something or someone. My father took my hand and we walked to the water, it was too cold so I jumped

up and down as the waves came to our feet. Few minutes later, my mother took my other hand, as the waves came they'd lift me up so I didn't go under the water – the laughter and love was in the air – my happy, safe place and I'd choose to be there over any where else.

Before leaving, my mother took a two litres bottle saying she needs the water to spray all around the house, inside and outside, to cleanse it. We left when the sun started to set, it was a beautiful thing to watch but I was too tired, I fell asleep. I don't know when we got home but when I flipped my eyes open, my father was there, caressing one side of my face with his hand that looked six times bigger than mine at that age. He had a smile on his face, proud, I tried staying awake to stay in that moment a little while longer but sleep was stronger than me and I closed my eyes then I knew I had been defeated. Though I could feel his lips on my forehead as he planted a soft kiss there, then said those four words I had heard each and every day of my life and never got

tired of them, "I love you, Zozo." I drifted off to sleep too fast and too deep.

I flipped my eyes open and it was the day of his funeral. Heart broken as I was I had to mend my own heart, all the good moments, the love and happiness we shared felt like it all happened the day before. I couldn't get over it so I held on to it. I fell asleep again, telling myself that – he didn't leave me and he was there with me all the time, everyone could leave but I knew that he'd never. I fell asleep that night and woke up to find out that my mother was going to marry my uncle – she was going to replace my father at a short space of one week after we laid him to rest. A part of me thought, having another father was better than having none – he was no match to my father but he'd close the void.

I fell into another deep sleep, it was peaceful but I was disturbed by a heart piercing scream coming from my mother's bedroom. I flipped the covers and

ran there. The banging sound continued and with each bang I could hear her groaning in pain, her sobs were too painful – I knocked on the door. Curious, too worried and mostly afraid of what could be happening on the other side. It went silent and I could only hear my mother's silent sobs. I stood there, refusing to turn back without knowing what was happening behind the closed door. There was shuffling, the door opened and my mother appeared, the room behind her was bright and I peered on her side to see the man who stood tall behind her. His eyes bloodshot red and the energy around him was dark.

My mother's sniffles brought me back and I looked up to her. Not in a day when my father was alive had I ever saw my mother shed a tear, I had never saw her unhappy, if she ever was then she did a good job at hiding it because I never doubted that she was happy. She looked down at me, "It's late and you have school tomorrow – go back to sleep," she said with a trembling voice. At that age I could see that

she was unhappy, I wanted to know so I could help her, we were happy before and I could make it happen – for her. But she chose him, over and over again, and not once did she think about me. About how what happened to her affected me, if I was happy or not and the last thing I felt was love – she truly died the day my father took his last breath.

“I sank into another deep, peaceful sleep and woke up, and she was dead – again.” Fresh tears trailed down on my cheeks to my neck. I could feel the heavy weight of pain in my heart doubling up, it was too heavy – I couldn't contain my wail.

“Come on, cry it all out.” He brushed my back and pulled me more closer to him, tightening his arms around me.

Whatever that made me humane was ripped out of me, my heart was chopped into small pieces and they fed it to the dogs. All of me became non

existent, there is nothing to live for, I wake up and the pain is still throbbing in my heart. Akukho ukuphumula. Everyday is the same, the pain becomes more daunting and I have thought of a few easier ways to end the pain – forever. It would've been better if I had someone to share my pain with but I have no one, my parents denied me the chance to have a sibling, a brother or a sister. They had me only, the loner they gave birth to and left her to fend for herself. I am a dead woman walking, there is nothing left for me here...

“I told you this before and I am going to say it again, I am here for you Zobuhle – through it all I will always be there. You are not alone, you have me.”

He cups my face, wiping the trail of tears with his thumbs and the look on his face told me that he is genuinely concerned – he cares.

“I love you, never forget that.”

Uthando: Nineteen

Simbonga

“Look who I found at the gate,” she says. I turn to look to my left and she pushes Inganathi forward, towards me. Inganathi waves, with a nervous smile on her face and I hold my breath, taking in her beauty and presence.

We are in the grounds, I was briefing the team about their schedule for the upcoming weeks – the upcoming matches, practice and training so everyone is here. And they seem to have their attention on our guest right now and I am invisible – I don't know why she is here but I'm looking forward to founding out but after she has answered the endless questions from the girls. You'd swear they've just seen a celebrity, I don't want to call myself one but I wasn't given this much attention when I first came here and I am more popular than

her. Some say God is female so I won't argue any further. I just stood by and let them have a question-and-answer session of their own.

I watched her closely as she answered each question, confidently like she had been expecting such and she had an answer for every question. I watch the way her hands moves as she explains something into detail, she is good in public speaking, not shy at all and I can see that her heart is into soccer – the things she is saying, you'd swear she has been playing football for a long time. I don't know which one beats the other, the fact that she is a good player or that she has a good coach, it might be both but her determination takes the cup. They dare her to show them her secret move or you can call it her signature move when she is in the field, like dancers, singers, writers, etc., soccer players also have a signature something-something that sets them apart. She catches the ball but manages to get out of the dare without revealing her signature, the girls let it slide and moved on to asking more

questions.

“You and Nomagugu seem close, how is your relationship with her, I mean do you see her as a mother figure – judging by the fact that you live in the Academy away from your parents?”

The mood stills for a few seconds, like air has been sucked out of the little round ball we live in and the time has come to a standstill. The girls are looking at her waiting for her to answer the question, their curiosity has grown bigger than when they first saw her stepping towards them and Inganathi looks uncomfortable for some reason. She holds on tight on that sling bag she has over her shoulder and turns to look at me like she is begging to be saved from some vulture. The question referring to her relationship with Nomagugu must have put her off, I remember the last time I mentioned Nomagugu’s name and she went sour in seconds.

“Okay that is enough,” I say loud enough for them to turn their heads to me.

“But she hasn’t answered the question,” one of them complains and I put my hands up in the air.

“She is not here for your questions and you have the day off, unless you are eager enough get into an hour or two of training.”

They all shake their heads, talking amongst each other and start moving away from us.

“So what do we owe the pleasure of having you here?” I say, taking a few steps towards her.

She sighs, in relief and pulls a small smile. “You know KwaMashu better than I do so I was hoping you would show me around.”

Wow, I laugh lightly and she smiles wider. I haven't been here for that long but yeah, between me and her, I am a better tour guide around here.

"Okay. I have a few things I have to do in the office – paperwork – I wasn't planning to do anything else today," her face falls at my statement. "But since you're here I will make an exception, I will do it later so that your trip doesn't go to waste."

She smiles again, there's something about her and the fact that she is here on her free will sets her apart. She is like a breath of fresh air, and if it wasn't for that nervous energy she releases whenever Nomagugu is around or anyone mentions her name then I'd say she is a happy soul, an angel on earth and those big eyes of hers make her look innocent like a little child. I tell her to accompany me to my office so I'd get the paperwork, I will do the work at home and wherever we are going I am not willing to

drive back here thereafter.

“How did you know that you’d find me here?”

“Were you hiding?” she asks and I shake my head no, chuckling. “You are very popular around here so it wasn’t hard to find your location,” she says.

“And out of the thousand people in KwaMashu you came to me to give you a tour?” I say, fixing the piles of papers.

“Out of the thousand people here in KwaMashu, you are the only one who is trustworthy and I know you are harmless.”

Okay.

The door opens just as I grab my car keys and Zobuhle walks in.

“Oh sorry I didn’t know you were still here,” she says looking at Inganathi.

“We are actually going out so I won’t be here for the rest of the day.”

The warm smile on her face only curls to a wider smile and she doesn’t say anything more before she disappears behind the door. I lead Inganathi to my car after locking the office door. I know a place that sells very nice vetkoeks, fried chips and chicken wings – is giving me the cheese girl vibes but she is in the township so I’ll give her the township experience, even if it takes me to take her to the shisanyama or the car wash in G section. Maybe the next time I see her I will take her there. Yes, I am planning to see more of her, she is a rare gem that I want to hold onto and she’s here now so I am never

letting her go after this.

After getting our order, I drive to a secluded area that overlooks section C and D of KwaMashu and if you look further you can see the KwaMashu train station that has a shopping centre on the side, further up is Ntuzuma I am not really familiar with it but I know that it is there. If you move your eyes further to the left in the mountains, there is Richmond farm, it is not the nicest place to live in or the safest. Here the air hits differently, it is much peaceful and we hopped out of the car. I set the food on the bonnet and we sat on each side, overlooking the township from the uphill. She can see the most from here so it is much better than being on the road, looking at everything from the window in a moving car.

“I am definitely going back there for a takeaway, Nozipho won’t believe me when I tell her about this,” she says shoving the last bite of igwinya into her mouth, she squirms kicking her feet in the air as she

continues to chew it.

“It was her idea for you to be here?” she shoots her eyes to me and I chuckle.

I won't say almost, because yeah, she did manage to fool me that it was her idea to wake up in the morning, dress up and come all the way from the city centre to the township for Simbonga Masuku to give her a tour.

“Am I that bad?” I nod, yeah she is. She sold herself out before we even got to Nkomo Fried Chicken to buy the food. “Well she was the mastermind but I played the biggest part since I am the one who is here.” She takes a mouthful of fried chips into her mouth then wipes the drip of tomato sauce mixed mayonnaise on the corner of her mouth with her fingertips.

I swear she ate the most of the food because I spent

the whole time looking at her. The longer I looked at her, the more I saw that it didn't take her long to be comfortable around me and she looks much happier. It might be my mind playing with me but I really like this side of her, she has grown to be more jolly and playful. I got off the bonnet and went to stand in front of her. She doesn't mind until I put my hands on top of her thighs and her body tenses up, and she stops chewing. The look on her face is enough to tell me that she is freaked out and I raise my hands up, surrendering...

"I won't do anything you don't want me to," I assure her and she nods. "You like your hair like that?" I point to her.

"What? Does it look bad or don't you like it?" I sense a bit of panic in her voice.

I shake my head no, "It's just that it makes your face a little smaller when it is like that."

I don't know where she got the elastic band from but she quickly pulls her hair up and ties it into a ponytail on top of her head. It is not the best looking ponytail but now that her face is out for me to see, I couldn't be happier.

"How is it now?"

"Umuhle," I say, crossing the boundaries and invading her personal space again by placing my hands on her thighs. Her body shudders under my touch and she takes a deep breath, and reaches for the bottle of water behind her.

She gulps the water, closed the bottle and placed it back. When she turns to look at me, she looks much calmer and I also relax.

"I would like to see you again after today."

“I have the last game tomorrow and then I am leaving. I don’t know how you are going to see me when I am all the way in Umlazi.”

“I don’t care about the distance, I’d come to you even if you were in Cape Town or in the faraway land, drinking tea with some Queen in London,” I say and she laughs.

“Why do you want to see me again?” she still has a wide smile on her face.

“I don’t know yet but the question is – will you grant me the chance to find out?”

She pulls her lips into a thin line, batting those long and thick eyelashes looking over my shoulder. I don’t back down, she is comfortable now so my hands are moving up and down her thighs with a bit of tapping here and there. She brings her eyes back to mine.

“Okay,” she smiles sweetly and I return her smile, my day has been made well she has made my life because I want to see more of her, not only in the near future but further than that. My heart is pumping like never before, it’s like it is a foreign organ in my body and my body will soon reject it with how much it is beating.

It happens in a blink of an eye but it feels like it went on in slow motion – I pulled her face to mine and kissed her sweet lips.

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Inganathi

Walking down the hallway, I am humming a song

that I, myself, have never heard of. It just popped into my mind and my body and mouth went with the flow. If this is what they call happiness then I want it as my daily dose because in just one day I am already addicted to it. A happiness junkie. I kissed a boy! Sorry, my bad it was a man. Damn, it takes a minute to get the hotel key card out of my bag because my hands are shaking. There are too many emotions that are going through my body and mind and it is hard for me to adjust. I have never been in this situation so I don't know how to react to it, is it even normal to feel so many things at once?

I step inside the room and closed the door behind me but it opens again before I could even get to sit down. I turn back and she walks inside. The look on her face made the hair on the back of my neck stand and I just froze, still looking at her. Whatever that I was feeling a moment ago is out of the window and is replaced by fear – I hate the person I turn into whenever she is around and right now she has managed to make me feel much smaller than I had

already felt. She closes the door behind her, there are a lot of emotions that I am sensing from her but anger stands out taller than the rest. She walks towards me, fuming and she breathing out sharply than necessary.

She grabs me on my upper arm and I flinch. "You forget that I have eyes and ears everywhere." Her fingers dig dip into my flesh as she tightens her grip on my arm. "Strip off all your clothes!" she commands.

I get to it while she is looking at me, only now I notice that she has a black belt in her hand. I take longer to remove the pair of jeans but she is patient. When I am stark-naked, she tells me to lay on top of the bed on my stomach and I reluctantly did as told. I could hear the sound of the metal as she rolled the belt around her hand, I wasn't ready for the first whip so I screamed out loud and scratched my butt cheek because it was stinging. She slapped my hand away,

“you scream like that again and I will kill you,” her words sent me back to dip my face into the pillow. She hit me again and again, my sobs were muffled by the pillow, the burning sensation was so bad even my legs were shaking. I have seen her angry but I didn’t think she was capable of going this far.

My butt wasn’t the only place she whipped, she hit me all over my back until I just gave into the pain and let her do her thing. The tears were still flowing uncontrollably but I didn’t make any sound. Once she was satisfied, she tossed the belt to the side and grabbed me by my hair so she could look at my face.

“It hasn’t been a day since I gave you that captain position and already you are going around running after boys!” she pushes my head back and forth, and I don’t know which pain to focus on because she is pulling my hair too hard. “What kind of an example are you setting for your teammates by missing practice the day before your match, huh? You want

to be another Nokubonga, is that what this is about?" I shook my head no and she lets go of me hair, pushing my head back down to the pillow.

I sniffle quietly, the heat on my skin is unbearable and I can't even move faster than I wish to. I manage to turn to sleep on the side, she has her back on me but quickly turns when I sniffle louder. She looks at me, her facial features are much softer now and I don't know what happened to the monster she was a few minutes ago. She walks to me, peers to my back and she makes a sound that I don't understand. After that I don't get to see her face, she walks away and I hear the door open and close. A sob rumbles up to my mouth and I just let it out, pulling my knees to chest and wrapped my arms around them. The door opens again and I hold my breath – is she here to finish me off?

Footsteps run towards the bed and Nozipho appears in front of me with a horrified face.

“Did she do this?” she peers to my back like Nomagugu had done a while ago. “Oh my God, did she?” she looks at me with eyes welling with tears like she could feel the pain I was going through.

I nod.

“I am so sorry. I swear I didn’t know she’d do something like this, if I knew I wouldn't have left when she sent me to fetch the soccer jerseys from the dry cleaners, which was strange because she could have used the facilities here in the hotel but she...wait, what did she hit you for?” she pauses and crouches on the side of the bed.

“I missed practice, and that I went out without telling her.” My voice is hoarse and trembling.

Nozipho opens her mouth to say something but my

phone rings inside the sling bag that is on the floor. She turns to the bag and takes out the phone, she looks at the screen and to me. "It's Simbonga," she says looking nervous unlike the Nozipho I know. I reach out to take the phone from her, he must be calling to find out if I arrived safely but Nozipho doesn't hand the phone over to me instead she cuts the call and says, "if you talk to him, he will know that something is wrong and then what are you going to tell him?"

Uthando: Twenty

Simbonga

“Aw manje sithandwa sami mina ngizok’thola kuphi
du du ru du

You will meet me at the river, you will meet me at the
river

Uzongithola ngiblom’emlanjeni sithandwa sami du
du ru du.”

I laugh at the “du du ru du” and she looks up to me.

“Should I continue?” I shrug and continued to dunk
the sponge into the foam water. “I know I am a bad,
no actually I am a terrible singer – I wouldn’t even
volunteer to sing at your funeral.”

What the hell?

She sees my face and giggles. I stop washing the car and looked at her, she is amused and doesn't see anything wrong with what she has just said.

"You have known me for what...?"

"One month," she replies holding back from laughing out loud.

"And already you see yourself at my funeral?" she giggles again, looking all innocent.

I let it slide for a second and she continues to sing along the 'Mafikizolo – Uzongithola Emlanjeni' song again. I look at her through the corner of my eye and she has relaxed so I scooped a bit of water from the bucket, and threw the water at her direction. It lands

on the side of her face and trails down her neck and arm. She screamed out loud and froze because of the cold water in contact with her skin – the sun may be out but no one would want to be splashed with cold water unexpectedly. She recovers quickly and scoops the water, throws it to my direction as well but only drips get to me because I managed to duck. I laugh at her failed attempt and she picks up the whole bucket, and charges to me.

“Uh-uh Buggie play nice,” I say, putting my hands up as a shield.

She doesn't back down so I start running around the car and away from her. She chases after me with the bucket filled with water, she manages to get a little amount of water on my back but I don't dare stop because something tells me she won't stop until she has splashed all that water on me. It is even worse because she's fit as an ox, I can't even outrun her and there's no doubt that I'd be tired before she does.

She finally gives up after much ducking and chasing. The sound of laughter never left our space though. She drops the bucket on the ground and pouts. I can never ignore the fact that she made me feel like a child again, running around with no worries or whatsoever – just having fun. I walked up to her and pulled her to me.

“Are you hungry?” she eyes me. “No offence but people get really grumpy when hungry,” I say and laugh as she pushes me away from her.

“You are not getting away with this Simbonga, I am definitely coming for you – you better watch your back,” she warns, pointing at me with her index finger.

I laugh even louder this time than I did a few seconds ago, I bet she has seen this more times in her life she even inherited it and now she is using it against me. I remove the wet t-shirt and moved

inside the house while she followed behind me. I picked her up from Umlazi in the early hours this morning, I was serious about us pursuing a relationship and so far things are going great. She brings out the best in me, the childish and carefree Simbonga, and I do the same with her because she is a complete different person. Much more relaxed than when I first met her so we don't ever mention Nomagugu's name, like ever. Nozipho made a plan for us to meet away from the Academy and the preying eyes – I felt like a teenager.

“The weather is changing again,” she says, balancing with her elbows on top of the counter.

I look back to the window, in deed it's collect the clouds and it looks like it is going to rain. The car outside will be rinsed by the rain because I am too tired to get into it after this. If I knew washing a car with Inganathi would be so tiring then I would've scratched out that idea before we even got into it. I

made us sandwiches, she takes her food and starts eating. Everything about her screams 'young', the way she squirms on her seat as she chews down the food, the humming of songs I have never heard of and that look I get from her whenever I catch her doing something out of the ordinary like I'd scold her or tell her to stop but in all honesty I like it.

"So what are your plans since we have reached the end of the season?" she asks, picking up the breadcrumbs from her plate then she raises her eyes to me when I don't reply her.

I shrug, "prepare for the next season."

"What? Don't you have a family to go to for the holidays? I know that you lived in Joburg so I thought you're going to go back."

"I am not, there is no one there – my son is here in

KZN with my parents.”

I take my plate to the sink and she follows behind me with hers.

“Then go to your parents’ house,” she says like it is the best idea she has ever come up with or it is an obvious thing that I should've figured out about without help.

But I don't think it is a right time now to be around my parents with Kwando around. I mean how will I explain why I don't want to get close to him or treat him as mine. Being family means keeping the people you love close but it is the opposite with me because I have to run the opposite direction just to protect my son from me. A lot will have to be revealed for my parents to understand and I don't want to get into it, the holidays are for making memories and not dragging tainted memories into the present and ruin what people knew because of the things they didn't

know. That time will come, just not now.

“No, maybe not. I will stay here.” She frowns and I pull her to my chest.

That soft, curly hair of hers is in my face. I take in its scent and it smells like lime, refreshing and summery.

“Do you wash your hair with lime?” I ask, sniffing it again.

She giggles, “No it is a lemon flavoured shampoo.”

Never came across such but it smells really nice. The warmth that comes with her being in my arms feels permanent, I don't want to let go of her and she holds me tighter like she heard my thoughts. It is so scary to be on this road we are on because we don't

know what tomorrow has for us – will there even be an us when we wake up tomorrow – or will it all end before the end of today? My feelings for her are different and I can never compare them with any other feelings, they are different from the feelings I had for Sisanda, different from those that I have for Zobuhle and right now I am still stuck at determining which ones are stronger.

“I have to go to the office. Since you mentioned we are at the end of the season, I have to make sure that things are in place for when we open again.”

I kiss the top of her head and she lets go of me. I suggest she wears something warm since it has started raining.

“Yeah Nozipho made sure to pack those for me,” she rolls her eyes and walks away from me. “I don’t know what made her think I will be sleeping over.” Trust me I was just as shocked to learn how heavy

her bag was when I helped her with it.

“So you will never sleepover?” I ask, following behind her and she turns back to me before she climbed up the stairs.

“I-I, no, not now at least.”

“It’d just be a sleepover, it's not like I’d do anything to you – unless you ask me to,” I tease and she corks her brow with a frown. “Move along, the time is not on our side, I am sure you want to take a shower before you go.” I push her up the stairs.

When we reach the top, she turns to look at me, “I don’t think I am ready for us to...,” she points between me and her, and I get the idea of what she means. “So how long are you willing to wait?”

“For as long as it takes for you to be ready, and like I said – I won’t do anything to you unless you ask me to.”

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Zobuhle

There was a celebration here, which investors and sponsors attended, the patients thought it was their birthday celebration. Dirty is scattered all over the place, you’d swear it was a young kid's party – we are only missing a jumping castle. The fun is over and now I have to do the hard work of cleaning. Grateful for the help from the other staff, I only have to clean the hall and the passage leading to the exit door. I drag the bucket down the passage and there are voices erupting at the end of the passage, I look

up and there are three teenagers, one boy and two girls, they are hugging and kissing their mother. The same woman that was in here because of her abusive husband.

She is a rare case because by the looks of things, she has been reunited with her children and will be going home. It is a heart warming sight, the nurses are with her and her psychologist, she did the most by staying strong and not giving up. She did it so she'd go back to her children, it wasn't all about her but for them. A thing that my mother failed to do for me – for herself. Tears trail down her cheeks but she has a wide smile on her face, the kids are just as happy and you can tell that she was missed and they need her. I stood there and looked at them. Life doesn't owe me anything, my parents don't owe me anything too but I owe it to myself to heal from this pain, and move on.

She says goodbye to the nurses that have been

looking after her, she thanks the psychologist for helping her get out of that dark hole and she exits through the door with her children by her side, shielding them like a hen protecting her chicks. They disappear and the nurses went back to their stations. In every situation, there is always light at the end of the tunnel, if she gave up that husband of hers would have won, he'd have destroyed her and she wouldn't have gone back to her children. The kids would've been at a greater loss without a father or a mother. I get out of my head and continued with cleaning.

There is no practice today and for the weeks coming because of the festive break. The tournaments are going to continue next year, we still stand a chance since we are still part of it and with my head getting clearer by each passing day I am sure by the time I go back to the field I'd be ready to kick-ass.

Simbonga is here, I know so because his car is parked right in front of his office. Before I could go past it, I hear a car coming behind me and I turn back – I must be tested for real. What is this old

thing doing here? She switches off the engine and comes out. I feel anger brewing inside me at the sight of her face. She has a nerve to show her face and how the hell did she get past Myeni, wasn't he the one who called her dodgy and accused her of stealing from us?!

"Zobuhle," she says, walking towards me.

"Don't say my name with that filthy mouth of yours and dare take another step closer, and I am going to show you the other side of me that you never want to see," my voice is stern as I warn her, I am too angry – she played me and stole from me – even my eyes are welling with tears as it feels like she is here to rub salt on my fresh wounds. She hurt me because I trusted her!

"I'm so sorry," she says quietly. The look on her face tells me that she is genuinely sorry and if she came back a month ago then I'd have welcomed her with

open arms but I am way over that.

“Sorry for what Malindi?!” my voice reflects my anger and her face falls. What was she expecting? – that I’d say welcome back and let’s continue where we left off?

“I am sorry for everything.”

“You stole from me Malindi, I trusted you and I was kind to you, and what you did with that kindness, huh?”

“Trust me, I wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t need to.” Her eyes get glittery at that statement.

She can’t be serious! So she is justifying her actions by saying that she didn’t have a choice?

“I want those things back,” I say at a lower tone. She

doesn't look like she has any of the stuff with her and there's no doubt that even the money she got from selling those things is no more, and now she is back to steal more stuff.

"I don't have them."

"I want the money then." I open my hand to her and she looks at it.

"I don't have that kind of money Zobuhle, I used all that money for my mother's operation and if she didn't go for the operation, she'd have died." She fails to hold back her tears this time around.

"So you stole from me to save your mother – what happened to asking for help Malindi?!" I shouted and heard footsteps running towards me from behind.

“What are you doing here?” he sounds just as angry. He looks at me and back at her.

“She came to say sorry,” I say.

Malindi looks at us, “actually I came to ask you to drop the charges, I heard that the police are looking for me for charges of theft. I have never stolen from anyone else and you are the only one who would’ve filed the case.”

I look at her in disbelief, so that sorry meant nothing and she wouldn't be here if there were no police on her tail? Wow.

Simbonga chuckles bitterly, “you have come to the wrong place, I want my stuff back and if you don’t have them then I want my money – if you can’t do that then a police cell is a suitable place for people like you!” he points to her.

She tries to plead with us but we hear none of it, she should've sold that thing she calls a car if she needed the money so much. I don't want to ever see her again because I don't trust myself as to what I might do to her when I lay my eyes on her. "The next time I want to see you is when you are able to pay me my money, if not, then I will see in court as a witness to make sure you serve time and I get justice." The anger he had has doubled up. I can't believe I allowed someone like her in my life, they say love is blind but pain is losing all your senses, I don't even know what I saw in her. "Leave!" I add and she finally gets the message. We watch her as she reverses out and disappearing around the corner.

"Are you okay?" he asks, turning to face me and he sounds much calmer.

"Yeah," I say, avoiding eye contact, I am very embarrassed of the mess I had created if it wasn't for me then Malindi wouldn't have stolen those

things.

I don't know what made him pull me to his chest, a hug is exactly what I needed.

"I have to drive Inganathi back home, are you sure you're going to be alright?" he forces me to look at him this time around and I nod.

He lets go of me but not before planting a kiss on my forehead. The door to his office opens and Inganathi steps out. She gives me a brief smile and I return it with a slight nod. Simbonga leads her to the car and he hoots as he drives out. I sighed and walked to my room.

Uthando: Twenty One

Zobuhle

“Oh that one has better plans for next year.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, sitting on top of his desk.

“I got a call from him this morning, he wants to stay with his grandparents.”

“As in, full-time?”

He nods and exhales softly. One thing I know is that Kwando wouldn't have come up with that idea if where he is didn't feel like home and I don't blame him. From what I have gathered, he doesn't have a good relationship with his father for some reason

and being with his grandparents is exactly what he needs. Simbonga hasn't said much about the reason behind him not having that father and son relationship with Kwando, the close kind of relationship, I mean he can be his father and everyone knows that but it doesn't feel that way. Not only for him but for the child as well. I won't push him to tell me why, one thing I have learnt the last few weeks is not to push yourself or the other person to talk about stuff they don't wish to talk about and its best to just let life takes it's course – nothing remains hidden anyway, you just need to be patient.

“I don't think that is a problem, you said it yourself that he sounded happy to be there.”

“I know but I wanted him to get the best quality of education money can buy and not be schooled in the village. And what about those extra curriculums that were going to help him with his school work? The

village schools don't have that," he complains, covering his face with his hands.

"I don't think that is the problem, I was schooled in the village and I turned out just fine."

"Really?" he looks at me and I give the 'duh' look. "You work at the asylum and not as doctor or nurse but as a cleaner and you don't have much going on besides that," he says waving his hands in the air.

"Wow," I cover my mouth with my hand and looked him.

He sighs, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say it like that or to belittle you." He looks apologetic enough.

I know I don't have anything next to my name – I have nothing but that job gave me enough to survive

this long and I am truly grateful for it. And it is not the village schools to blame for all of this, if I had a plan then I would have continued with my studies but I went into this life blindly without any plan or direction. I was confused, the only thing I wanted was to get away and leave that life behind me, not knowing that I am going to be stuck here. I looked up and around the small office. Whatever dreams I had are left in that place, buried deep – six feet under with my parents.

“No you’re right. I can’t really compare myself with him. I don’t have aspiring dreams and matric certificate is the only thing that I have to show – that makes me nothing.”

“I am sorry, it’s just that –“

“You want what is best for him, I understand, but let him be. He is just a child and the only thing you should be prioritising in is to make sure that he is

happy.”

“He is happy.”

“Really?” I tilt my head to the side, using his technique against him – he does this to me to make me feel stupid.

He sighs again. “What do you want me to do?”

“It's not about what I want you to do, it's about you choosing between giving your son a home, that love he had always wanted from you and making him happy or you can give him an expensive school with an endless list of extra curriculums that will guarantee him a scholarship to some Law school in some other part of the world and have him resenting you for not putting his happiness first. I don't know what you are trying to do but to be honest you're doing it the wrong way – do what is best for him and

not what you 'think' is what is best.”

He looks up to me, taking in what I have just said. I also could have chosen to stay because of what that life provided for me – I had everything that anyone could ever wish for and I got everything that I wanted, and I would have gotten more if I said the magic words but that was not enough. Any child or person wants happiness, wants to feel loved and appreciated – money is not everything – it is true when they say it won't buy you happiness because you can have it but still be the most miserable person in the world.

“Trust me, I didn't look at it that way,” he finally says after a long moment of silence. “You're right, thank you.”

“That's what friends are for,” I say, punching him on the shoulder and he laughs. “Wait, which picture do you look at and think – I am blessed, think of it as

the best day of your life and your life changed at that moment.”

He smiles really wide and says, “I think I have just the right photo for that,” and digs into his pocket to reach for his phone.

I watch him and he scrolls down a dozen of photos, I didn't know a guy could keep so many photos. I am a woman but I don't keep as many photos – I am not photogenic, I take photos when I want to or when I have to, not for unnecessary reasons like checking if my nose is oily or not – I have a mirror for that. He hands me the phone, I look at the screen and it is a photo of Sisanda with a baby in her arms, who I guess is Kwando. I have seen her photo before so that's why I know that it is her. It looks like it was the day when she gave birth because she looks tired and sweaty, and that is definitely a hospital gown that she is wearing. The baby looks so tiny.

“That was the best day of my life,” I hear him say and I look up.

“I am sure you were at your happiest peak. Will Kwando be as quick to take out a photo or call out a moment where he was at his happiest?” I ask, handing him back his phone and he takes it.

“Yeah, when his mother was still around we made the best memories.”

“His mother is dead Simbonga, do you think after the way he has been living after her death, he can recall those memories without shedding a tear?” I ask getting off the desk. “Don't act hero even when you don't have to and just live.”

He nods and I smile to him. I am not the best person to give out advices because I am not perfect but I don't want to see anyone go through what I went through.

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Inganathi

He called me out here, I thought we were going to leave and go far from this place but no we are still in Umlazi. And I have been looking over my shoulder every passing second, if Nomagugu were to pitch up and see me out here with no one other than him then someone will definitely die. I saw the tension between them the first day I met him, it was too thick – I may not know what is going on between them but there's definitely something.

“She said all that?”

“Yeah, an eye opener I tell you,” he says, smiling.

“Mmmh, I truly agree with her,” I say and he laughs.

“Oh Lord, I can already see it, the both of you ganging up on me.” He raises his hands up as a shield and I smile.

I don't know how to take that, maybe it is a joke but it didn't come to me as one, it looks like he is really close with this Zobuhle girl and well he speaks highly of her. Nozipho needs to know about this so she can intervene, maybe I am over thinking it and she needs to point me to the right direction. His phone rings and he excuses himself saying he needs to take the call, and he steps away from me. Then his face falls after a while of talking with whoever that was on the other end, he looks spooked, pained and pale – there's a lot that is going on with him and I don't know what to make out of it. I walked up to him and at that moment he concluded the conversation, and

hung up.

“What is wrong?” I ask, concerned.

He looks worse now, tears are welling in his eyes and his chest is heaving. Oh my God, could it be Kwando? Lord, let not it be him. He rubs his face furiously, he is making me more worried with his silence and is pushing me deep into my misery because I am only thinking of the worst.

“He is dead,” he says with one hand on top of his head and the other deep inside his pocket which his phone is in.

“Who?” I look at him, like the answer will reveal itself on his face.

“Dingani, he was hijacked I don’t know what went

wrong but they killed him,” it took a lot for him to say that and he is trying really hard to hold back his tears – this Dingani person must have meant a lot to him.

“I am sorry,” I tell him and he nods, not looking at me. I don’t know who said men don’t cry because this one here is holding on to those words like his life depends on it and if he were to shed a tear then he’d be less of a man. Whoever said such a thing should be killed, if he is already dead then kill him again in the after life and in the next.

“I can’t believe this, we spoke just a few hours ago.” He breathes out and takes a step back.

Death has no timing, no one is ever prepared for it that is just how selfish it is.

“I am sorry,” I say again. I am really bad at comforting people, a hug is all that I can offer

because I can't come up with comforting words. And how can you comfort someone who has lost a person close to their heart, it's not like I can say it will get better because a person is dead here and they will never wake up. And saying get over it will seem more cruel than ever.

"I have to get to Joburg today," he says, taking out his phone and calls someone.

"Flights are cancelled until further notice," that's what he tells me after his call.

He grunts and bangs the bonnet of his car, I understand his frustrations but the car didn't do anything wrong.

"Simbonga can you calm down!" I shout pushing him away from the car.

“How, how can I calm down? And why are you so calm, don’t you understand the seriousness of this situation?”

I scoff, “if we were both messed up like you then who would do the thinking?” I can’t say the other thing I was thinking of saying, I mean I don’t know this Dingani person, yeah he may know him but he has nothing to do with me and I don’t feel anything about his death – I didn’t even know he existed and was alive. But I understand Simbonga’s pain and I feel sorry for him but he can’t expect me to get all worked up about someone I didn't even know.

He is truly a mess, I don’t think his mind is working straight right now because it is obvious and it is right in front of him.

“You could just drive there Simba!” I say and he stops pacing.

“What did you just call me?” is that a smile that I see on his face?

I don't say anything and he charges for me, and pins me on the car. He looks at me, deep inside my eyes like he is searching for something with a smile on his face. I don't know where I got the idea to call him that, it just slipped out but I think it is the right pet name for him, I mean he calls me 'Buggie' because of my eyes and I hate it. He deserves a pet name that will match him, it also doesn't fall far from his name and he is a human version of Simba – with that soft and tender heart of his – and he appear all big and strong but deep inside he is a softy.

“Simba,” I say again and giggle.

He smiles wider and starts tickling me. I don't know what more he wants because I have said it three times already. “stop!” I say and he does. I thought I was the childish one between the two of us but

looks like my childishness is rubbing off on him as well. I take a few deep breaths to calm down.

“If I go back to the Academy, there is no way I am going to come out again – at least not today,” I tell him after he had suggested that I come with him. Yeah it is a long drive from here to Joburg and he doesn’t want to travel alone. I also want to go with him, it won’t be under the best circumstances but it will be a good road trip and we could use it to bond.

“Are you sure Nomagugu won’t have a problem with it?” he asks, pushing back the stride of hair that was on my face, that’s another thing I have learned about him that he doesn't like it when my hair is covering my face, not even by on stride.

“What she doesn't know won’t kill her.”

I planned to leave the Academy on Tuesday to go

home for the holidays, the other girls had already left and there's only a few of us that are left. I will have to call Nozipho and let her know about this unplanned trip, I know she is going flip but this is my chance to live outside Nomagugu's hold. I buckle my seatbelt and he starts the car – I hope I won't regret this.

Uthando: Twenty Two

Simbonga

A lot of people attended the memorial, everything had to be done fast so his family could get to bury him soon since he died in a tragic way – he was shot twice on his chest. The bullets went straight into his heart, nothing could save him so he died on the scene, right outside the gate of his workplace. The hijack took place in broad daylight with people watching but no one has been arrested yet – no one saw their faces since they were wearing balaclavas, not even the security cameras could show who those men were. My heart aches, I have lost a good friend, a father and a partner.

His children handled it better than I thought, even his wife is not such a mess. Well knowing Ndoni, I know that she is a fighter, a hot headed woman I have ever met. Right now she is busy preparing food for the

guests, I don't know why she wouldn't let her relatives handle that and she sits down to mourn. She even took Inganathi with her, she must be doing the dishes or cooking something there in the kitchen. She has been a lot of help, Ndoni said so too, since we came here she has been willing to help and I am glad I brought her along though I couldn't stand Ndoni's constant nudge whenever Inganathi entered the room. She likes her and thinks I should put a ring on it, I told her it is too soon and her words were, "it's been two years, get on with your life – Kwando needs a mother."

I don't know where she got that from, trust me I know that I need a woman in my life, a partner who is here to stay but I don't want a woman who will replace Sisanda – she can be good for Kwando because like I said I want a woman who is going to stay with me for the rest of my life. Zobuhle's words are still ringing in my head, "do what is best for him", that is a reminder that I don't live for myself but for Kwando as well and whatever decision I make will

affect him too. So when I decide to propose – we are going to do it together. I feel a tap on my shoulder and it's Ndoni, she pulls me on the side and whispers,

“She is in the bathroom,” I look at her confused and she nods towards the passage.

I sigh and left her there. No one goes past the passage or up the stairs, Ndoni made sure of that and not even many of her relatives are provided much freedom to roam around the house. I don't know why but I am definitely not getting involved in family feuds. She had been complaining about how greedy but stingy her in-laws are, there is always something about the in-laws and I don't know if I am ready to deal with that drama. I am hoping and crossing fingers that I don't get snobs as in-laws or witches because hey, I won't survive – I'd take my wife and son, and we'd go live in Mars I tell you, I love my life peaceful and that's why I don't go

around attracting trouble for myself. Inganathi must be really good to get a pass from Ndoni to be this deep in the house.

I knock on the door and it opens really fast, I am shocked.

“Are you okay?” I ask, suppressing my shock, how can she open the door like that without checking who it is first?

“Yeah,” she says on a low tone. I open my mouth to say something but she shuts me up, “I am fine really, I just wanted to get away from the ugly cousins who have spitting venom every second they got.” She sighs, fixing her dress one last time.

“We can leave if you want.”

“No it’s fine, I will finish with the dishes then we can go.”

I let her be and accompanied her to the kitchen. She is really dealing with a lot, I can tell by the looks on their faces that they’d have a lot to say once I turn my back – typical rural people. They’d even gossip about plates, cups and dishcloths, anything to keep their mouths running. People are leaving and Ndoni is showing them out, Dingani never really had friends, none that I know of – so the people who were here were his associates and family. There was a lot that we planned to do, he was also still helping me find my feet as a coach and with him now gone I don’t know where that puts me. I mean I am here because of him, I was going to make it because of his undying support and I was going to reach far places with him by my side.

“He is not gone-gone, he is watching over you and he wouldn't have put you where you are if he didn't

believe you could make it,” she says, looking at me. “And who knows maybe he is sitting in the backseat right now, listening to you complaining about how much you’re missing him,” she says that and I laugh because that is just crazy.

“I don’t doubt that for a second and maybe I should invite him to sleep on my bed since now he can,” her face falls and now it’s my time to laugh even harder.

I am driving us to my house now, at last the day is over and we get to relax. It was such an unplanned trip that she didn’t have anything to wear for the funeral and we had to go shopping for a dress. And unlike most girls, she took the first black dress that she saw and fitted her. The same with the basic cosmetics, she made it look easy like she had done it before and when I asked she said, “it is not about the quality, it’s about having it.” I was taken by those words because it shows what kind of a person she is. Same as Zobuhle, both of them just amaze me with

how much they are down to earth, matured and loving – don't forget un-judgemental.

“Thank God, finally we are home.” She gets out of the car and I follow her.

“Did you just call it ‘home’?” I close my door and lock the car.

She looks at me with those big eyes, I don't think she realised it. “Uh yeah, it's your home so that makes it mine,” she says making her way inside the house.

She says it like it doesn't mean anything but to me that is something – I mean she sees a home that has me in it, I mean home-home her home like in the future kind of home. You know the home built by two people who love each other? – I have confused you even more so let's not get into it further than that because I might confuse myself and lose the

meaning of what she just said.

“Simba,” I look at her and she busy removing her shoes. “Do you think he died because it was his day?”

“What do you mean?” I remove the jacket I was wearing, threw it on top of the bed and stepped closer to her.

“I mean maybe it wasn't a hijack ‘that went wrong’ maybe someone wanted him dead,” she says and puts her hands on my arms.

Trust me I never thought of it like that, I didn't even know Dingani had enemies that would want to kill him. Yes, he was good – good at what he did but it wasn't that deep and if he had something that worried him then he would've told me. I am the one who should be worried since I still have that

Nomagugu woman's threats hanging over my head. Maybe his family killed him for his insurance money, you know how people can get crazy over money that doesn't belong to them.

"Have you been listening to those cousins you were cooking with in the kitchen?"

"Well that is the only interesting thing they said and I also gave it some thought – his death was too much of a coincidence and from what I heard from you about him, he was a good man so maybe someone saw it as a reason to take him out."

"And gain what after that?"

"I don't know," she shrugs.

"I didn't know you had it in you to play detective," I

smile and she hits me on the chest.

“Ha-ha very funny Simba, continue laughing at me,” she tries to get away from me but I put her in.

“Are you sulking now?” I ask copying her pout, she always does that when she doesn't get her way with me. “Do you want me to kiss it better?” I kiss her on the nose and she smiles. “Getting better already, where else should I kiss you?” I kiss her on both cheeks, she smiles wider – I went down to kiss her on her neck and she giggles, shying away from me but my hold on her waist was firm so she wasn't going anywhere.

Another kiss on her neck, then on her jawline and I raised my head to look at her. Those innocent eyes, that make me drown in them each time I look into them – where has she been all my life because this is how I've always wanted to feel. That excitement pumping inside me, that adrenaline rush she gives

me each time she giggles and the way my body heats up under her touch. I lean closer and take her lips, and she kisses me back. I am so eager to have her closer than she is right now. I pull her closer to me but she is not close enough, her lips are so soft against mine and I want more of her. I kiss her harder and she moans inside my mouth.

I pulled out and she gasps for air.

It doesn't take me more than a second to kiss her again, this time with more hunger and it gets intense but she keeps up. Her dress slide down to her ankles and her skin feels smooth under my hands. We both work on my shirt and that tells me she wants me as much as I want her. She reaches the bed and collapses on it, laying on her back. She gets shy as I look at her and I get on top of her before she could think I am being creepy but who can blame me when she is so beautiful and I can feel my partner in crime getting more and more excited. I kiss her, on her lips,

trailed down to her neck as I unclipped her bra and I raised my eyes to look down on her breathing through her parted lips – beautiful.

“Umuhle,” I tell her.

“Thank you,” she says and swallows.

I smiled and went in to kiss her again. Her panties come out flying with her holding her breath, she hasn't said anything nor stopped me so went on down to come face to face with her sacred place – I pause. I look up to her and her chest is heaving already, I look at it again – I know I haven't seen all vaginas of all the women out there but one thing I know is that they aren't suppose to look like this. She closes her legs faster than I could blink. I went up to her and tears were welling in her eyes. I don't get to say anything before they trail out of the corner of her eyes.

“Inganathi?”

Uthando: Twenty Three

Inganathi

The silence in this room is getting heavy on me. I can hear people talking outside but the room we are in is quiet, he is looking ahead to the empty chair in front of us – we are waiting for Dr Boyes who is a Gynaecologist and we are here because he insisted. After what happened last night I don't think I want anyone else to look down there, I am already self-conscious about my body so I don't need to feel worse than I already feel. He was clearly scared off by how it looked, I could tell by the look on his face that he was already judging me – I don't know how it looks because I have never bothered to look but his face told me that it is bad.

Whatever he had started, we didn't finish it because I was no longer in the mood and he was clearly over it too. I even slept in the guest bedroom but I don't

think I slept because I cried for hours and the next thing I felt was a tap on my shoulder. I looked up and he was looking down on me, then he said, "get up and get ready – we are going to see a doctor." It wasn't up for discussion and he left me to get ready. After getting ready, I tried arguing but he heard none of it and because I didn't want to be dragged out of the house, I finally gave in and now we are here. I don't know how to feel but anxiety overweighs all the emotions I am feeling. Suddenly I regret coming here, if I didn't come then none of this would've happened.

The door opens and a white middle-aged woman walks in, I guess that is Dr Boyes, I don't know how to feel with her being female, maybe a male doctor would've been better but Simbonga was also horrified by it so I don't think it makes much of a difference if the doctor is male or female. But the thought of having a female looking at me down there gives me creeps, I had a female touching me down there and look where I ended up. I know Simbonga wouldn't have hurt me so that's why a part of me

prefers a male doctor right now.

“What can I do to help you?” she asks after we have exchanged greetings. She has a warm, welcoming smile but that doesn't make me relax, not by one bit.

Simbonga shifts on his chair and looks at me, I don't know why we are here so he doesn't have to look at me – he better start explaining himself as to why we are here.

“Something happened,” he says looking at me and not at the doctor in front of him who is the one waiting for an answer but he turns to her before continuing, “I don't know what it is but something is definitely not right.”

“Okay,” she replies clearly wanting to know more details before we go on, I don't know why he is mumbling when he could just say it.

We remain silent for a moment or two.

“Her vagina is scarred – there I said it!” he sighs sharply and my heart skips a beat.

The doctor is looking at me now like I'd add anything on what he has just said but I have nothing to say because I didn't know. And after a few seconds, she nods more to herself than to us. I don't know how to feel but my heart aches and I feel like crying but I fight my tears back. She tells Simbonga to excuse us and we are left alone – I can't look at her, this is so embarrassing. “Let me have a look then we can go on from there,” I hear her say and I nod absently. I could open my legs for Nomagugu and for him so I can open them for her too. She touches me and I get away from her touch, “I am not here to hurt you, I will only look.” I nod again and she disappears in between my legs.

I don't hold back the tears now, I just let them flow freely and after a few minutes she says she is done, and I could dress up. It felt like a day and half when it was just a few minutes. She disposes the gloves, goes to her desk and starts writing something down. Once I was done, I went to her desk and she stood up to call Simbonga after checking with me if I wanted him there or not; he is the one who brought us here so yeah I wanted him there. Even though it might not feel like it, but I know that he means well though I am angry I don't know if it's at him, at me or at someone else.

“You were right,” she says looking at Simbonga. “Her vulva looks scarred and her vaginal canal tissues have also suffered the same trauma.”

I drop my eyes and started fiddling with my fingers, I can't look up or stop the tears from flowing out of my eyes.

“What happened?”

“I don’t know doctor but I swear I have never touched her, we were going get into it last night and that is when I came across – this.”

“Inganathi?” I hear her call my name but I can’t look up, not now. “I’d have said your boyfriend here might have penetrated you too rough and caused the tearing but that is not the case so there’s only one other thing that remains – have you been raped or someone forced you to do something you didn’t want to do?” she asks, calmly.

I keep my head down as more tears fell out to my hands and to my lap. Simbonga took my hand, squeezed it and I sniffled but still didn’t say anything.

“When you are ready to talk, here is the number of our highly recommended therapist and you can call

in at any time of the day.” I don’t get to even see the card but Simbonga took it from her and thanked her.

We leave after she gave us a prescription of what I should apply down there to get rid of the scars. It wasn't painful so I didn't even know they were there. Simbonga drives in silence to the pharmacy – what I thought would be a perfect getaway has turned out to be a horror experience. This vagina seems to bring me more heartache than life ever did. It’s like it carries some sort of curse because even Nomagugu couldn't stay away from it, she called it sweet, a honeypot that she kept dipping her dildo in and the bigger the better. She’d shove it as far as she wanted it to go and not as far as it suppose to – tear or no tear – she’d come back for more.

That pain she put me through made me resent her, I even started hating having that front hole but I couldn't get rid of it and it was another thing that kept me in the Academy for this long so I guess I

need it to guarantee my place in the team. He drives straight to the house after stopping at the pharmacy and I didn't bother to go with him, he also didn't force me to. I wish I could scrub it off, get rid of the pain and the images of those events from my head. I feel suffocated, like there's too little room that can fill so much that is going on in my mind. The pain at the thought that I am damaged is unbearable. He parks on the driveway and I get out of the car, heading inside the house.

"I am sorry," he says coming to sit next to me on the sofa. "I really didn't mean to talk like that or act out like that, it's just that I was shocked because I have never seen anything like that."

I don't reply nor look at him. For the last few seconds, my eyes went dry so I don't have anymore tears to cry – maybe my body is still recharging and the day hasn't ended so I know I will cry some more.

“Can we please talk about this?” he sounds sincere, very soft and daring. “Please talk to me, I won’t judge you or think less of you, you will still be the same Inganathi I met and know.” He takes my hand into his and says, “Were you really raped?”

I feel anger brewing inside me at the mention of that word, “don’t you get it?!” I snap, standing up to my feet and he shoots up to stand as well. “A woman can’t rape another woman!” I say and he gasps; and that is when I realised I had already said too much.

I ran to and up the stairs, down the passage and into the guest bedroom that I had occupied the night before. I turned the key to lock the door and at that moment he started knocking. I stepped back with tears running down my face – my body has fully charged and I could cry till the next day since I have started already. He turns the handle and realised that I have locked the door then he started banging on it, “Inganathi,” he called out but I didn’t reply. I

reversed until the back of my legs touched the edge of the bed and I collapsed on it. "Please let me in and don't shut me out," he said quietly.

I cry for a while, sobbing and clinging onto my chest as I felt it closing in. "Inganathi," he is still there. I sat there and took deep breaths. My legs feel heavy, weak and they are trembling as I put one foot in front of the other, walking towards the door. I turn the key and the door opens before I could reach for the handle. He pulls me to his chest and holds me really tight like his life depended on it. I just let it out and cried on his chest, in his arms. "That's it cry it all out and don't worry – she is going to pay for this," he says and I know that he meant it.

Uthando: Twenty Four

Simbonga

Before we got on the road leading to Durban, I decided to drive to Tina's office and she was glad to make time for us. I know Dr Boyes had recommended another therapist for Inganathi but I have known Tina for two years now and we are not here for Inganathi but for me. Inganathi suggested that she'd wait outside while I went inside but I wasn't going to do this alone, she had to be there so I dragged her inside the office with me. We sat down on the couch across Tina, I had already briefed her about the reason why I wanted her to make time for this session and she was happy to hold my hand through it.

"The reason why I am in Durban is for therapeutic reasons, everything that I have been doing that side is part of therapy," I said and involuntarily pointed to

Tina.

Inganathi shifts on her seat and remained quiet for a moment.

“So I am also part of your healing process?” she looks between me and Tina.

I don't get what she meant at first but it quickly clicks after a few seconds.

“No, no you're not. You are part of my life.” I take her hand and placed our entwined hands on my lap.

“Why do you attend therapy in the first place?”

I raised my eyes to Tina but she remained quiet. Yeah, I said she'd hold my hand and not that she'd

do the talking for me but this is harder than I thought. Opening up about this is hard but I have to do it. She is also having a hard time at opening about what happened to her, she hasn't told me anything about who victimized her or how long it has been going on. I know that it is a woman and my mind has already pointed to one person that I know would be capable of such. The thought of her, just makes me cringe and I am very angry but that is not important right now. I want to show Inganathi that talking helps, I am here to help and she must know that she is not alone.

"I-I was...raped," I inhaled sharply. "I was first assaulted by my coach at 11 years old and then another one raped me at 15, not once but twice." I exhaled just as sharp as I had inhaled.

The room falls silent and the air becomes thick. She hasn't yanked her hand off mine and at the thought that she tightens her grip on my hand. I turned to

look at her and she had teary eyes. She is working really hard to fight back her tears, she shakes her head and sniffles.

“Tina has been helping me since the trauma got out of hand,” I looked up to Tina before I continued, “I couldn’t look at Kwando for more than 2 minute without getting a boner. It just happened involuntary not that I was fantasizing about him or felt sexually attracted to him but my body just had a mind of its own.”

“Had?” she asks with a raspy voice and tears streaming down her face. Tina hands me a box of tissues and I pass it to Inganathi.

“I haven't seen him in the months I have spent away from home so I don’t know how my body would react if I am around him again.”

“So that explains why you two are not close or have a ‘normal’ father and son relationship?”

“Yes,” I nod to her and she blows her nose.

“You could call it a father-son incest though with Simbonga it is caused by his traumatic experience when he was growing up and it is not a desire to be sexually intimate with his son,” Tina speaks up and continues to explain. “Trauma can lead us to act in different ways from other people even if we experience the same traumatic experience – just like for example when the trauma could affect you now but with Simbonga it could be later in like 10 or more years later – we are all different. What Simbonga did was an honourable thing to do because based on the stats, father-son incest are the least reported incidents and Simbonga came here before he could incestuously abuse his son.”

Inganathi is still looking at me with teary eyes, it is a

lot to take in given what she went through as well but I am glad I got through with it and now she knows that I understand how she feels more than anyone because I have been in her shoes and they fit perfectly because we were both assaulted by people we trusted. The people we looked up to and were supposed to protect us. They used their power against us and not once did they think how their actions would affect us – that is just how selfish they are. I remember that day like it was yesterday but I am sure he doesn't remember and has moved on to the next or more boys to victimize.

I couldn't make any of the two men who molested me pay but I sure do want Inganathi to get justice – she deserves it and so is the rest of everyone who fell victim of the thousand perpetrators we live with. She told me everything on our way back to Durban, me insisting we see Tina helped because she was able to open up to me after that and we used those hours driving back talking about her experience – what sickens me the most is the fact that SHE broke

her virginity! That nearly pushed me over the edge, I couldn't even drive and I needed a full good hour to calm down. If she were there I would've killed her! I want her to pay though, I want her to feel exactly what she made Inganathi feel during those times she molested her and that is why we are here in front of the police station.

We have just filed the case and to my surprise the officer who attended to us was rather helpful, he didn't ridicule us or anything like that and they have already sent out a team to take Nomagugu in for questioning. Dr Boyes helped us a lot by giving a copy of the examination results after we consulted her and she was happy to learn that Inganathi finally spoke up and we opened a case against that monster. Now I get why she held herself so highly both in and outside the field or the fact that she was overprotective over her team though I don't understand if she was afraid that they'd tell on her or they'd leave her for something 'better'. The whole idea of that woman's existence just makes me sick.

We waited to see her come in, I have to look at her in the eye when she gets inside the station – handcuffed! She has to know that she is not God, never have and never will be. I catch a glimpse of a familiar face on the side mirror and I quickly get out of the car, Inganathi follows after me. It is her but she is not in handcuffs. I feel anger brewing inside me at the sight of her face, she turns to look towards my direction and she looks just as angry.

“Why is she not in handcuffs?” I ask the officer who is behind her.

“You should go and play with your peers boy, he too is under my payroll and angeke azwe ngawe,” she looks at me like she is ready to spit on my face but that face quickly disappears and she is looking over my shoulder now. “I have always known you had your eyes on my girls Masuku and wena it didn’t take you a second to open your legs for him?!” she

directs the last part to Inganathi who is standing behind me.

“Don't piss me off more than I am Nomagugu. Not everyone is like you!”

“Oh boy you don't know what you have gotten yourself into,” she shakes her, scanning me from top to bottom then to the top again.

“Unlike him –” I point to the officer who she was unafraid to say was on her payroll and he too didn't bother denying it, “– I am not afraid of you.” I say taking a few steps towards her and I feel Inganathi's hands pulling me back.

“Nc nc nc you should be scared boy, this is my territory and I will be driving out before you could reverse out of that parking spot.”

I chuckle bitterly and took another step towards her, Inganathi works twice as hard to pull be back, “your day has come magogo and once you step inside that door there’s no way you are coming out scot-free – I made sure of that!” I point to her face with so much anger like I was going to punch her.

“Simbonga,” her sweet voice calls out behind me as she pulls me back. I don’t think she should because I want to kill this woman then I’d sleep well knowing that the world is one less of a molester that is not even apologetic for ruining other people's lives – she deserves to go to hell and the police cell will provide more comfort than she deserves.

“They are waiting for us inside,” the officer pulls her to the side but she is not done talking.

“Don't think this is over Simbonga Masuku, once this is over I am coming for you and everything that you have – make my words – you are going to pay for

this,” she says that and the officer pulls her to the entrance of the police station and Inganathi pulls me to the car.

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Inganathi

I sigh, sitting on top of my bed. Who knew that it'd take just one trip to Joburg for my life to take such a huge turn? It took so many turns I don't even know where I am going. I look around the small room that has two single beds and I remember the first day I came here. The warm welcome I got from Nomagugu, not knowing that she is a wolf in a sheep's clothing and then another warm welcome I got from Nozipho. I was very cautious with her because I didn't want to get too attached to her then

one day I wake up and she is gone. But as time went by I let my guard down and learnt more about her and her intentions for our relationship – I found a sister in her.

The door opens and I jump, thinking that I might be reliving the horror again which was too soon considering where she is right now but it is not her, it is Nozipho. I am surprised and shocked to see her here because she is supposed to have gone home already.

“You are back,” she says, walking further into the room. She is drenched in sweat and I guess correctly that she had been out for her afternoon jog – she is a fitfanatic and she never gets tired even I can’t keep up with her.

“Yeah,” I say in a low tone. “Why are you still here?” I ask. The Academy is literally empty since everyone has gone home, I only saw the cleaners in the halls

and now her, and I am glad it is this empty because it would've been a big thing now if the girls were here when the police came to get Nomagugu.

"I am leaving tomorrow, I had to see you before I go so you'd fill me in on what exactly you were thinking when you left for Johannesburg without even a toothbrush." She sits on her bed and looks at me. "We are leaving tomorrow so you better start talking girl," she says with so much urgency.

"I am not leaving," I drop my eyes to my hands.

"Why?"

Should I tell her? But she is more than a friend and she will find out about it any way so...

"Nomagugu has been arrested." They took her in for

questioning but it a same difference as being arrested, she in the police station angisho.

“What?” she is on her feet in seconds. “Wait...how do you know and why do you look so guilty Inganathi Obennebo?” she asks, walking towards me and I look up to her already feeling the tears filling my eyes.

“He knows,” I burst into tears and she rushes to my side. “He knows what she did to me, to us and he got me to open a case against her.” I say and she pulls me in for a side hug.

She comforts me without saying a word, I don't know if she's angry or not that I told Simbonga about what we went through but I don't regret it and if she is angry then that is her problem. For a long time I thought what she did to me was just something more than punishment considering the pain and that no one ever did something like that to me before but

I have never considered it as rape. She is a woman so she couldn't have raped me – a woman can't rape another woman – that is the stigma I grew up with, not knowing that I was being led to believing nonsense. I'd have died in silence, caused by that kind of abuse because the society said such doesn't exist and if it happened then it is not what you think it is – I repeat, it doesn't exist, just like how they have said a man can not be raped or a female can't rape a man.

I hear her snuffle and I look up to meet her teary eyes. I hug her tightly and we cry in each other's arms. We have killed the world with our own hands, we have no one to blame but ourselves. People must always remember that, just because it has not happened to you or someone close to you then that doesn't mean it is not happening.

“She was sweet, she made many promises to me – many that she has fulfilled and some that she is yet

to fulfil. When I questioned her or when I said no, she said she is a woman of power, she knows people who know people who have a friend that won't hesitate to take me out if I open my mouth and tell anyone about what happened between us," she sniffles and shifts a bit before she continued, "at first it was bad, like your kind of bad but as time went on I chose to accept it because even if I wanted to tell on her who would've been willing to listen to me. She is a woman so she is not capable of molesting another person let alone another woman."

I shift from her, getting out of her arms so I can look at her. She wipes her tears away with both hands and exhales.

"There was this constant fear in me every time I thought of speaking out but I was more ashamed. Then I found out that she did it to you too," she bursts into tears again, "I thought I was protecting

you when I said don't tell Simbonga about it. I thought –”

“Shhh,” I said, pulling her to my chest and embraced her.

“It hurts Inganathi and it's not physical pain, it hurts from within. I mean...” she raises her head so she can look at me, “...why me? Why you or the next girl and why did she do it in the first place? Was it so important to her to make us more vulnerable than we were, to control us like we are mere toys with no feelings and use us so she'd reach her peak of pleasure?” she doesn't hold back any of her tears, she lets them run down her cheeks like she has been longing to do this, to vent as much and loud as she wished without feeling ashamed or afraid.

I really don't know what Nomagugu's reasons were but she deserves to be in that hell hole and I wish her nothing but the worst.

“I hate her,” she says, wiping her nose with the back of her hand.

“I hate her too.”

Uthando: Twenty Five

Nomagugu

The warder comes to the holding cell, “Nomagugu Mthethwa, you have a visitor,” he announces and the lady of the moment stands up and walks to the gate. There’s nothing more that she hates than being treated like the rest of the people when she should be addressed with respect. She didn’t even get bail because Inganathi wasn’t the only one who opened a case of assault against her, there are more people who have come forward – no names were given but the detective handling the case told her in her face that they have enough evidence to keep her in here for the longest time. She couldn't bribe him because he is new at the station and you could smell his determination and dedication to his job five metres away from him. It stinks like a dead fish.

Even the rest of the officers have lost respect for her,

like this warder who is pulling her out of the cell like there was no event in this life time where he bowed to her, mouthing 'bosslady' or 'Gabadiya'. She looks at him and clicks her tongue – her image and reputation amounts to nothing in this hole. She better find a way to get out of this place before she loses herself as well, it is good that the other inmates know their place but it won't stay like that if the charges stick and she'd be transferred to a more cruel place where people like her don't come out alive and if she is lucky enough she'd come out as an empty shell, the cell would become a better place than to step outside and go back to the life she was used to know.

She is surprised to learn that the warder is not leading her to the visitors' hall but outside the building through the backdoor. She hasn't received any visitors until now and it's not like she can expect anyone to come visit her. Her associates are probably thinking it is best they play far away from her since she'd taint their reputations, not knowing

that they have their own skeletons buried deep inside their closets but if they were to be uncovered, a prison cell would be a small price to pay. They walk past the parking lot and to a secluded area that people don't get to see unless they are looking for it in particular. There stands a man, he is facing the other way but at the sound of footsteps approaching, he turns to look back and Nomagugu's lips curl into a smile.

"My man," she says sounding impressed by what he just pulled off. Right here and right now they could jump the fence and no one would know. Who would've known that he'd come through for her in tough times like this?

She steps closer, the man puffs his cigarette and throws away what is left of it. He nods to the warder, "You can leave her with me and don't worry I won't allow her to jump the fence," he mouths and Nomagugu's face falls. The warder leaves them and

disappears around the corner they just came from after the man had told him to check the coast and alert them if needed.

“You are in some deep shit. How the hell did you get here?” the man asks, looking directly at her. She was in handcuffs and she looked nothing like the Nomagugu he met. The woman he met wouldn't be here to begin with, she wouldn't even get as far as coming in for questioning – she was supposed to talk it out with the detective handling the case and he'd have throw the damn file into the bin, burn it or better yet, eat it for supper. This is the last thing he expected to see, she looks weak!

“Lies. You know me, I don't do shit like that – I was framed and that boy Simbonga is in it too,” she huffs and makes sure that she doesn't make eye contact with him at all costs. He may be young but he is much more capable of worse things that she can never think of doing – he is a heartless bastard.

“There is a lot of evidence against you and it doesn't look like it's based on lies – is there something you want to tell me?”

She looks up to him and chuckles bitterly, “Don't patronise me, I told I know nothing about it. He probably paid them good money and filled their heads with this nonsense. If there is anyone who should be here – it's him, I am a woman and how the hell would I rape those girls?”

“You tell me,” he says still looking at her with suspicion. He knows that she is lying. Nomagugu clicks her tongue and attempts to leave but he pulls her back. “Fine. I believe you. It's just...you know how I feel about people exploiting other people and one of those girls could've been my sister,” he argues, trying to justify his actions.

“Well it is not on me,” she shrugs his hand off her arm.

“I know.”

“I can’t wait to get out of this place and put an end to this nonsense.”

“You better not be thinking of what I think you are thinking because you know very well that I don’t want him dead. If anything, I want him to suffer – get rid of everyone that is a pillar to him, one by one and soon he will fall on his knees, begging me for mercy – he messed up my life and I am going to mess up his but he won’t be lucky this time because I plan to destroy him.” He sounds angry as much as he looks. There’s a lot of history between him and Simbonga but even till to this day Nomagugu still doesn’t know the reason behind his anger or vengeance.

“You are all talk and no action,” she says and sucks through her teeth. He is always preaching the same verse, “I want him to suffer, I want him to suffer” but Simbonga is out there sipping on cocktails,

celebrating her downfall.

“If I am all talk and no action then where is Dingani Mavuso?” Nomagugu shoots her eyes to him and he is smirking.

“No you didn't,” she gasps and he doesn't reply but instead he laughs out loud. “You sick bastard,” she kicks him on the leg, her hands are behind her back so there's no way they could high five at this. So he is the one who killed Dingani?

“Don't ever underestimate me and that was nothing compared to what I want to do to him.” He is a man with a plan, she can see it and if she sticks with him, he could avenge for both of them and there's nothing more that she is yearning to see than Simbonga getting what he deserves. She saw it the first day they met that he was trouble and he was out to do the most; and he has done it but isondo liyajika jika – tomorrow will be his day.

“You didn't tell me you were out of rehab,” she says eyeing him. He has lost a lot of weight, that thing nearly killed him and his career is in shambles because of that powder he was stuffing in his nose every second things didn't go his way and it was literally every second because Simbonga's success was like a thorn in his butt. And Simbonga was too good, he took every opportunity that was in front of him without thinking twice and whatever he touched turned to gold – and him on the other hand, he never got past to playing for the national team.

“It hasn't been for long,” he is looking ahead and the thought of that place just makes him cringe. “He is seriously going to pay for that too,” he pause for a second before continuing, “you said he is the one who should be here – how much do you know?” he asks, turning to look at her.

“I know just a girl that will be willing to talk in exchange for an orgasm and a good bag of cash.” She smirks and he nods.

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Simbonga

I feel well rested, I even overslept that is just how much I enjoyed my sleep and I am looking forward to today's day. I haven't felt so much alive in a long time, I don't know what my instinct is telling me but I am definitely looking forward to something – good or bad – I want to see it. I got out of bed and headed to the shower really quick. Things are going just the way I wanted them since Nomagugu was denied bail, I won't thank the justice system just yet because she is not declared guilty as yet and she is not sentenced but there is no way she is going to get out of this. I mean her whole team are her victims and each one of them opened a case against her. Worse the

#metoo and the #Nomagugumustfall is trending on social media, and the soccer committee wants nothing to do with her.

They even closed the Academy – that is just how bad things are looking for her but I won't count my chicks before they hatch – I want to see this through, when she is finally thrown in her designated cell then only then would I celebrate her downfall. Knowing the kind of influence she has, the money she has and everyone has their price so she might just pay her way out of this and I don't think she'd mind leaving jail with no cent in her pockets – she'd do anything to get out of there. After getting dressed, I descended down the stairs with my phone in my hand and it rings just as I enter the kitchen. It is Zobuhle so I answer real quick.

“Simbonga,” she breaths in sharply before continuing, “this is bad, like really-really bad,” she exhales with panic.

“W-What? Is something wrong?”

“They wrote something about you on some tabloid online – I am going to send you a link right now,” she says with so much urgency and she hangs up before I could say anything to reply to her.

And as quickly as she said she’d send the link, a text comes through from her and I click on the link – bang! ‘Female football players fall victim in sports’, they put a picture of my team on the article and they even added a shoulder length picture of me on the side – clearly to show their readers who is the perpetrator that they are reporting about on the article. They have written a lot of things about me, my history in sport which is something everyone knows but they put it in light just to patronize me and what attracted my attention is the mention of that I am attending therapy because I was raped when I was still an aspiring football player – it is not a lie but how the hell did they get their hands on that

information?! It goes on to say that the therapy is just a front, I am not in a healing process but I am still in sport for revenge.

They also suspect that being here in Durban coaching a female team is some ploy to get my revenge – if my coach could rape me and get away with it then why wouldn't I want to do the same thing to somebody else. It is also of a questionable coincidence that I am coaching a female team; where a player as cried victim of rape by none other than Simbonga Masuku, they didn't mention a name to protect the identity of the victim but the evidence they have is substantial. I can't believe this! They are pleading with the police department to investigate further into this matter as they believe that the player isn't the only one. This one takes the last straw – I framed Nomagugu because she was going to expose me and sending her to jail for the same crime as mine was my way of shutting her up.

What the hell!

I don't read the rest of the nonsense they wrote there, I am fuming with anger and my heart is beating fast – I want to kill someone. Who is the victim anyway when I've never touched anyone inappropriately? I take my car keys and left the house. Other reporters have started blowing my phone, probably wanting me to comment or they want to fish for more news to report on. The soccer committee will be calling soon too – “damn you Nomagugu!” I say, hitting the steering wheel as I drive to KwaMashu. Whoever the victim is, they better say it to my face – I feel betrayed – there is nothing that hurts the most than being falsely accused of something and right now I don't even know what I am going to do.

I arrive at the field, the whole team is already there and we have guests. I get out of my car and the reporters are the first ones to run to me, they are flashing cameras in my face, screaming out questions at the same time and I shield my face with my hands, running towards my office. They are like

pests. I get to my office but I don't get to close the door because the girls are behind me. The office is too small for all of us to fit in so the few that could get in, got in. They don't look angry, they look sad and they are looking at me with eyes filled with pity. Zobuhle appears too in the crowd and honestly I don't know what to say, the reporters are here too right at the back peering in and waiting to hear what I will say.

"We know you didn't do it," I shoot my eyes up to them, I don't know who said but the voice came from the crowd in front of me. I sigh, furiously rubbing my face.

"Mr Masuku, we have questions that need answers!" one of the reporters shouts.

"Are really a victim of rape?" another shoots to me before I could answer the first question.

“Are you a perpetrator, sir?”

“Ladies, what do you have to say about the allegations against your coach?”

“Are the accusations true?”

“Mr Masuku did you get this job out of merit or you were in it with the late Dingani Mavuso in your plan to get revenge against the soccer committee?”

“Is it true that you don’t have a certificate in coaching but you are here?”

I exhale sharply. These questions are making me dizzy and how or which question will I answer first? I was right about calling them pests. They are fighting to get their way to the front of the crowd now and I don’t have energy for this. I also have my own

questions and this is something I don't want to deal with right now. Where is Dingani when I need him?

"They won't leave until you answer their questions or atleast say something to your defence," Zobuhle speaks up and they all nod in agreement.

I took in another deep breath and stepped towards them. They let me through but before I step out of the office I realised something, "Zobuhle, where is Slindile?"

Uthando: Twenty Six

Inganathi

When they closed the Academy we had no choice but to leave. I couldn't go home, not when I am feeling like this and I don't know how I'd explain the whole thing to my parents, so Nozipho took me in. We are in her home, in Hibberdene right down the south coast of KZN. You can see the beach from here and no, it's not one of those modern suburbs it's actually just a small town filled with people who are working really hard to get through the day. If you're posh then you'd call them poor. We are sharing her room which she was sharing with her cousin but since I am here the cousin is sleeping on the couch – the 'treat the guest special' tendencies are on another level in this household – since from the day I came here I haven't even washed my own plate because Nozipho's mother won't let me.

“You don’t have to leave you know that right?” she tilts her head up to get a better view of me as I pack some of my clothes back into my suitcase.

“I know but Simbonga needs me right now,” I sigh as I remember what I read online the other day. If I didn’t know Simbonga I would've believed everything they wrote because whoever wrote it was really creative and didn’t leave a space for the reader to doubt the accusations.

“And you miss him, so it’d be like hitting two birds with one stone, huh?” she says, wiggling her eyebrows and then I knew she’s thinking about nonsense again.

“I see you are acting crazy again,” I zip the suitcase and placed it down on the floor.

I know Nozipho’s mother will be sad to see me leave

but I think I have overstayed my welcome even the cousin is not enjoying sleeping on the couch anymore. I could see by the grumpy face she gave me every morning and its no fun because she has to wake up early too. From here I am going to Simbonga's house, he offered for me to stay with him when we were evicted from the Academy but I said no, it all looked so wrong to stay with him but now I am kind of forced to be closer to him. I can't imagine what he must be going through and it is no doubt that this whole thing is one of Nomagugu's masterpieces.

"It looks like your boyfriend is trending again." I look up to her and she is scrolling on her phone and I heave another sigh asking myself 'what now?'

I crawled on the bed to sit besides her and she hands over the phone to me. It is a post under the #metoo thread and this person says she is one of Simbonga's victims. She goes on to say that he

didn't do it once but rapidly after she had told him to stop, she couldn't speak out because Simbonga is seen as a saint in the outside world and no one would've believed her. He is a monster, he damaged her and she wants justice – not only for herself but for every other girl that had been victimized by her coach. It has been a nightmare and a traumatic experience for her, she advises everyone who was molested or assaulted to join her movement and open a case against Simbonga – like she had done! I hold my breath and went to view her profile photo. I know her because I have seen her face amongst the girls of Simbonga's team.

How can someone be so dumb and post such lies about a person who did everything to level them up, open doors for new opportunities for them and be their pillar – worse she used her real profile!

“I have to go to Durban – now!” I say, throwing her phone on her lap and got out of the bed to put on my

shoes.

I take my sling bag and headed to the door, there is no way I am going to take those heavy suitcases with me right now. Nozipho runs after me asking me how I am going to get to Durban, I don't know and I don't care even if I have to hike then so be it but what I know is I will get to Durban. Nozipho's mother is not in the kitchen or any other parts of the house so I guess I will have to leave without seeing her. Nozipho is following me around like some sick puppy. My chest is heaving, I don't know what to think or what not to think but I refuse to believe that Simbonga is capable of doing the things she accused him of. I turn and I find Nozipho with her arms folded to her chest – “Just breathe okay!” she signals the urgency of me to breathe with her hands.

I exhale sharply and tears just welled inside my eyes – this is all my fault. I open my mouth to say something but she shushes me and goes on to

converse with someone on the phone. She asks the person if they are going to Durban, obviously the person said no and she asks them to take me to Durban then they continue to argue about the petrol money but finally whoever it is gives in after Nozipho said they will 'talk'. I think I know what she means by that and I try to object but she says he is one of her exes so I don't have to worry she will handle him. I don't know where I'd be if it wasn't for this female species here, we hug and I stepped out of the house after promising her that I will call when I get there.

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We started at his house but there was no one there so he had to be here. I thanked the driver and told him that he could leave, I will be fine from hereon and he leaves. He really helped me I don't know where I'd have gotten the wings to fly all the way here. When I walk inside the gate I realise that they have beat me to it – there is a police van parked next

to his car and...no they can't do that to him. On what grounds at they arresting him for? I ran towards the van and the police were already pushing him inside with his hands cuffed behind his back. And there's someone screaming for the police to stop this nonsense and by the time I get to the van, the doors are closed – I couldn't even get to see him. The person who was screaming is Zobuhle, she puts her hands over her head as the van drives away from us and I just do what I do best – cry.

“We have to leave, we have to go to the police station – can you drive?” she asks, looking at me and I shook my head no. That makes her more frustrated and she cusses under her breath. If I knew the situation was like this then I would have told that guy not to leave.

An old car parks just next to us and a woman comes out, honestly I was expecting an old man with a pot belly and an ugly face to step out of that car and not

her. Zobuhle turns to the car, she looks annoyed and angry for a second then she steps forward to the woman. I guess she knows her as she addresses her by her first name.

“Malindi, can you take us to the police station?” she asks with so much urgency in her voice, she even forgot to say ‘please’.

The woman nods and Zobuhle signals for me to get in. The Malindi woman was flying on the road, I feared for my life – what if this thing lost its brakes and flew off to the cars coming from the opposite direction? I held on tight to my seat and it was by God's grace we got to the police station still in one piece. I am seriously not getting into that thing again. We rush inside the station and the officer who Zobuhle spoke to said Simbonga is not allowed any visitors yet. No one is allowed to see him besides his lawyer but I am not leaving until I have seen him, Zobuhle too isn't leaving. I sit on the bench while she

went to speak to that Malindi woman. Zobuhle's face hasn't changed, she still looks very much upset and Malindi is making the situation far more worse by being here.

Malindi hands Zobuhle a small brown envelope after they have exchanged a few words and she opens it to check what is inside. No one besides me is paying attention to what they are doing even though I can't hear what they are saying. Zobuhle puts the envelope in her back pocket while nodding to what Malindi is saying then just like the meeting is adjourned and I quickly looked away. Malindi left so she came to sit next to me on the bench and just as she settles, a man in a navy suit walks in with a briefcase in his hand – I hope he is Simbonga's lawyer. They let him in with no further questions asked after he had introduced himself. I am clouded by a lot of emotions but I have collected some courage and stopped crying – he is not dead, he is just in a police cell and he is going to get out before the end of the day.

I must have spoken too soon because the lawyer man in a navy suit walks out with an angry face and Zobuhle finds her feet in seconds, she must have thought he is Simbonga's lawyer too. An officer follows out after him, I stand up and walked up to officer.

"Can I see him now?"

"Who?" he asks absently.

"Simbonga Masuku, he was arrested just an hour ago."

"He is not getting any visitors." This man is getting on my nerves, I am already upset and dealing with a lot, and I don't need his attitude in the mix.

“You have to let her see him,” Zobuhle’s voice chirps in from behind me. I didn't know she was that close. “She is his wife and is allowed to see her husband or we could call the station commander and report this matter to him. You're violating our rights here,” I shoot my head towards her direction and she is damn serious – I swallow hard, turning back to look at the officer.

“You think you can fool me, where is the ring if she is the wife?” he points to my hands, chuckling lightly and I open my mouth to say something but Zobuhle beats me to it.

“Kukhuluma izinkomo in our culture baba and a ring doesn't mean anything. I could suggest we go to the chief to ask for confirmation of their marriage but we don't have time. Now, are you going to let her in or should I ask for directions to the commander's office?”

The officer's face falls and he doesn't have a choice but to let me in. I look at Zobuhle before stepping inside the room and mouthed a thank you. The door closes behind me and he looks up. It's only been an hour but he looks drained already.

"Hey," I said quietly and walked up to him. He stood up and we hugged. I can't believe we are here. "I am so sorry," I said those words fighting the urge to cry.

"It's okay," he brushed my back and held me tighter one last time before we both pulled out from the embrace.

"What happened? Your lawyer came out in such a hurry, did you guys even get to talk about how you're going to get out of here?"

"No," he shakes his head, dropping his eyes to the table in front of him. We sit opposite each other and

I wait for him to speak up. “That bastard called me guilty, can you believe that?” he huffs, relaxing back on his chair.

“But I thought he’d be on your side as your lawyer,” my voice is very low and soft but high enough for him to hear me.

“He's not my lawyer goddamit!” he bangs the tables and I jump, startled by his outburst. He looks up to me and sighs deeply. “I am sorry, its just that...I am so angry right now. My lawyer couldn't cone down here at such notice so he got his friend to take over the case but that good for nothing –” he was about to cuss but held himself.

Right now looking at him, I feel very much convinced that he is here because of me. He takes my hand and I looked up to his eyes, “don’t blame yourself,” he said looking straight back to me. The door cracks open and we both look up – Zobuhle walks in; I don’t

know what she said this time to get past that ugly officer; and when I turn to look at Simbonga, his face has lit up more than it lit up when I walked in.

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Zobuhle

I walked past the old woman who was sitting outside and into the house without any permission. No one can stop me now, I am in too deep. I open the door to her room and when she realises that it is me she stands up to her feet but doesn't get to say any words because I slapped her across her face and she landed on her bed while screaming in terror. I want to jump on her, throw a number of punches so I'd rearrange her face but I don't want to find myself in a police cell, arrested for assault because she's

one of the fast ones to go to the police but this time she went about it the wrong way.

“Rape, Slindile? Really?” I ask taking a few steps towards her. She is holding onto her cheek and is crawling backwards with fear plastered across her face.

“Why are you here questioning me when you could ask him yourself?”

“You know he didn't do so why did you lie?!” I shouted.

“I didn't lie, it's the truth.” The seriousness on her face makes me want to punch her on the nose to get her back to her senses. If there is anyone who should be arrested here, it's her for hounding the poor guy and offering him her pussy on a silver plate time after time even when he tells her no.

“You are sick,” I jumped on her without holding back and gave her a few slaps here and there but she was crying like she was facing death. “Why did you do it? How much did they pay, huh?” I have my hands on her throat and she is choking. I can’t get the picture of Simbonga being pushed into that van in handcuffs for absolutely nothing out of my head.

“Y-You are killing...me,” she says breathlessly while trying to remove my hands from her neck.

A rough knock on the door jerks me off her and she starts coughing, holding onto her bruised neck.

“This isn’t over Slindile. If you value your life then you’re going to go to the police station first thing in the morning and drop the charges – otherwise I am coming for you,” I say pointing to her and she nods.

I have lost a lot of people in my life and I’d be

damned if I lose Simbonga too. I take my shoe that flew out when I jumped on the bed and put it on. She hasn't said anything and I see it as a good thing. Tomorrow I am definitely coming for her if she doesn't drop the charges, she knows Simbonga would never do that to her or any other person but for money she'd even profess that Jesus gives the best orgasms nx. I reached for the door handle and heard her say, "he won't let this one go, he is coming after Simbonga with or without me so I'd watch my back if I were you." She's spewing nonsense right now because she's the one who should watch out because even her Louis Vuitton branded vagina won't save her from me.

Uthando: Twenty Seven

Inganathi

She walks in with a tray in her hands, I get a disapproving look from her as I wipe my face dry with the sleeve of the sweater that I am wearing – it is Simbonga’s and its big – I haven't been close to him like that but I miss him and wearing his clothes makes me feel close to him. It’s been two days since the day I went to see him after he had been wrongfully arrested and after that day he said he doesn’t want to see me there – that’s what hurts me the most. I came back to support him but he doesn't want me any where close to him. She places the tray in front of me and I know she’s going to shove the food down my throat, forcefully. She has been like that, yesterday and the day before that, and I regret why I asked her to come here.

“You have to eat Inganathi,” she says, holding a

spoonful of Futurelife Smart Food porridge an inch away from my mouth. At least it's not the banana flavoured one so I please her by being a good girl and opened my mouth – she won't let me feed myself – that's how bossy she becomes when she has promoted herself to being a mother of a 23 year old.

“I am fine now,” I say after swallowing three spoons with no chance to breath in between, she sighs and drops the spoon inside the bowl, her goal was to feed me fast enough and as much as she could before I could register that I am full.

She hands me a cup of black rooibos tea, it tastes bitter since she didn't put any sugar in it.

“You have to stop crying, you will get sick,” she has her hand on my forehead, testing how high my temperature is – and I roll my eyes.

“Yes ma.” I take another sip of the tea.

“Don't be cheeky with me Miss Obennebo and you better get your ass out of that bed before that girl snatches your man away from you.” She is back at being the Nozipho I know and I love this side of her more than the strict mother she was a few seconds ago.

I told her about Zobuhle and now she sees her as a threat.

“She won't do that.” I place the cup of tea on the tray and wiped my lips with the back of my hand.

“Then tell me what she was doing here knowing very well that Simbonga is not around?”

“To check if I am alright, she knows that I am here

and so maybe she needed a shoulder to cry on.” I shrug and she scoffs. She likes over thinking things and make me doubt everything around me, it is good at times but not this time around – I refuse to think Simbonga could have a thing for Zobuhle even though the signs are there.

She remains silent and reaches for the papers on my side to read them for the umpteenth time – I was served this morning by the sheriff of the court and guess who is the witness against Nomagugu Mthethwa? Yeah you guessed right, I will be testifying against her, they sent the letter here since it is the address we wrote on the case file when I opened the case against her and it is a good coincidence that I am squatting here under Simbonga’s instructions. Even though he wouldn't allow me to see him, he said it would make him feel better knowing that I am safe in his house. I hate the feeling that always creeps out whenever I think about him in that place – he must be hating me for putting him in that cell, I mean what other reason

does he have for not allowing me to see him?

“You are doing it again.”

I look up and sniffle while wiping the tears on my cheeks.

“Don't worry, Simbonga is going to come out and we are going to work hard to put that magogo in jail where she belongs.”

“How can you be so sure that he is going to come out when the police say they have a water tight case against him? And he hates me Zipho!” I say, breaking into tears once again.

“No, no he doesn't hate you and I am going to tell for the fifth time today that he doesn't want to see you because you seeing him in there hurts you and you

keep on blaming yourself so he is saving you from putting yourself through that.”

“It's not making any difference because I still feel the same, or is it worse?” I look up to her and she is looking at me with pity in her eyes.

“It is making a difference trust me,” she pulls me into a hug and pats my back. “This is what is best for the two of you and he is going to come back, I know it because Simba came back for Nala in The Lion King – he is your Simba too so his actions can't be different,” she pulls out from the embrace and looks at me with a smile on her face because I am also smiling – she can be really crazy some times.

“I think it's time you called for help.” She has quickly transformed to being serious and I sigh because I know what she means by that.

She hands me my phone, I look at her and she is not backing down so I take the phone from her and punched in his number.

It rings for the longest time before he answers.

“Daddy.”

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Simbonga

The warder called me and said I have a visitor. I don't know who it is because I clearly advised that I don't want to see anyone – even Inganathi. I doubt it is my parents, my father would wait for my call to

say if I want to see him or not, at times I appreciate that but other times it's hard to ask for help so I expect him to be there without me asking him to but this is my life and I have to live it. Once again I am occupying the chair in the interrogation room, the detective handling the case against me brings me here three times per day to question me about the same thing and I always give him the same answer. I haven't even applied for a bail hearing because I don't have a lawyer, I told them to keep their state lawyer because he is not different from the one my lawyer appointed to take his place – just because I am man doesn't mean I am also capable of rape.

The door opens and a tall dark man walks in. I have never seen him before and as he steps in, I realise that he has a brief case in his hand and I stand up to my feet, I don't know why but I feel compelled to. There is something about him that demands respect, my throat feels dry I can't even voice out my greetings to him. He places his briefcase on the table and stands opposite me. He hasn't looked at

me for more than two seconds but I feel like he has already judged me or I am thinking too much about this encounter.

“I am Musa Obennebo, your lawyer,” he says sitting down on the chair opposite mine and I look at him clearly confused, the last time checked I didn’t have a lawyer.

He has made himself comfortable on the chair and I am still on my feet. To be honest I was expecting to sound like those men from the Nigerian movies because he looks like them but his accent sounds different and expensive like the suit and watch he is wearing. That Obennebo surname sounds familiar though.

“I am Simbonga Masuku, your client...I guess.”
Finally I take a sit and he looks directly to me.

“Did you touch my daughter?” he asks leaning forward with his hands linked. I shake my head lightly taken aback by his question because I don’t know him so how would I know his daughter?

He sees the confused look on my face and says, “Inganathi – did you touch her?” there’s a trace of anger in his voice, the man doesn't know me but has already painted me as the bad guy in this equation. Like I have said the surname sounded familiar and I knew I had heard it from somewhere.

“Oh you mean Buggie,” I say with a light chuckle but the man’s face remains stiff. I clear my throat and composed myself. “I didn’t touch her – I swear.”

He eyes me for a second before he opens his briefcase and takes out a notepad – I guess he was serious about him being my lawyer and right now we are getting down to business but I must also point out that I am actually embarrassed to be meeting my

girlfriend's father in jail – what a bad impression – Inganathi should've warned me.

“So are the accusations true?”

“No.” I shake my head.

“Then why are you still here?” I shrug, how am I suppose to know that – that is his job to find out now that he is here but let me not be rude and ruin things for myself, and make it worse than it already is.

“They have a victim and apparently the evidence is material and I will not be getting out of here anytime soon.” I exhale sharply.

He doesn't say anything after that and stands up and heads to the door. When the door opens he asks for

the man in charge of the station. I sit there oblivious of what might be going on. The man in charge comes up to him and he asks for the case file. The station commander is a bit hesitant but he gives him the file anyway.

“Where are the medical records?” Mr Obennebo asks, after going through the pile of papers which I think are really unnecessary but who am I to be the judge of that.

“We can’t show them to you, they’re the state's evidence.”

“If you can’t show me the evidence right here right now then there is nothing you have on my client so I suggest you show me the evidence or you release him at this very moment.” Mr Obennebo argues and the commander looks upset all of a sudden.

“So you're here to stand with a rapist?” the commander is still not backing down. I feel anger engulfs me as he calls me a rapist, I am not one and never will be, he better not start something he won't finish – angimsabi phela.

“Can you show me, prove to me that my client is a rapist?”

The station commander swallows whatever words he was thinking of saying, I can't believe they kept me here knowing very well that they have nothing against me. He has nothing to show so he suggests that he will go prepare my release forms – wow. Nomagugu went this far just to put me in jail just like her? I wonder how much she has spent so far because she'd need a lot more to get out of what is coming for her.

“It's possible they even paid your lawyer not to show his face.” That is what Mr Obennebo says as we

walk out the station.

There are women waiting for us outside, Inganathi runs up to me and throws herself at me. Dirty as I am, I hug her back. She pulls out and looks at me with teary eyes, it is no doubt that she has been doing a lot of crying these past few days. I can't do anything more than hugging her, her father is here remember? "Thank you daddy," she says to her father. And by the looks of things she is daddy's little girl, no matter how old she is and her father is very overprotective of her. I wish he could meet Nomagugu so he'd make her pay but I doubt Inganathi has told him about her since he is so calm right now. Zobuhle is still standing where she was standing and she is not moving. The fierce look she is getting from Nozipho could kill her, I don't know what is going but there's something.

I leave Inganathi as she continues to converse with her father.

“Where are you going?”

“I am going to see Slindile!” I call back without turning back. I have to see her and God save her before I get my hands on her because I won’t be held responsible for what I am going to do to her. She will have more reason to have me arrested this time around.

“You can’t see her,” Zobuhle’s voice makes me stop on my tracks and I turn to look back. She looks damn serious. “You can’t see her – she is dead!”

Uthando: Twenty Eight

She was found in the bushes, badly bruised, naked, raped and dead with a single shot in the head. It was a horrifying scene for those who got there first before the police came. At the first glance they knew who she was because no one would miss her face with how well-known she was. She was everyone's friend because of her bubbly personality, a good looking girl with too much confidence – that made her popular amongst other things. It was evident enough to say that she went through a lot of trauma before she died, her killer or should we say her killers made sure she suffered – they forced themselves on her, both on her front and behind. With the amount of blood that was on the scene, you'd swear it wasn't people but animals who did it.

She was laid to rest on the weekend of the same week her body was found. Simbonga was the first suspect of her murder but the police didn't have

enough evidence to pin the case on him because he was in their custody when the whole ordeal took place. The investigation is still on going, no one has been arrested and there are no suspects at the moment. Her mother pronounced that Slindile was the best daughter, very humble and well-mannered; and she deserves justice. The people mumbled amongst themselves saying that is not the Slindile they know, the one they know probably offered herself to the perpetrators and it was too much for her to handle, that is why she ended up in the ditch.

The social media platforms are buzzing, and Slindile is trending for all the wrong and right reasons. To some, she deserved it because she put an innocent man in jail while crying rape – it was the most selfish thing any living person would ever do because people who are actually raped don't often get the same attention as the one she drew upon herself. And to some, even though what she did was wrong, she didn't deserve to be killed like an animal – she deserves justice and her case must be left

open until the police find whoever did that to her. It was good riddance to some but her mother lost a daughter.

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The court case could no longer be postponed. Nomagugu has been buying time to get people on her favour but it could not be put on hold for any longer and so they are here now in the High Court of Durban. The people came out in numbers – it is a popular case since it is one of the first that has ever been reported in the history of football. Inganathi finally narrated everything to her father, from the first day she set her foot in front of the Mangosuthu Female Football Academy building to the time where she opened a case of rape against her coach. Mr Obennebo had to take the case despite that it'd be conflict of interest, but he brought a good old friend of his to assist him when things get too heated and he can't control his emotions.

As one of the witnesses, Inganathi is occupying a seat away from the audience of the court. Her eyes are roaming around and when Nomagugu appears up the stairs to take her stand in the court, her heart starts beating like a war drum – not once did she think they'd be here, with Nomagugu having to defend herself and with her trying to do whatever it takes to keep her in jail. In all honesty, she hasn't changed from the last time she saw her and she hasn't lost any weight, if anything, it looks like she has gained weight instead – jail must be really nice for her. What is going on here is just a breeze, not a storm as they hoped it'd be. When their eyes lock, Nomagugu flashes a fake smile and whispers something to her lawyer, the lawyer turns to look towards Inganathi's direction and he smirks too.

Simbonga stands up because he saw a glimpse of a familiar face in the front, he looked closely and bang – it is his lawyer who is representing Nomagugu. "Bastard!" he mouths under his breathe, clenching his jaws. He feels his body heating up, right from the

tip of his toes to the tip of his head. If they weren't in court then he would've charged for him already. Mose has always been more than just a lawyer to him, they developed a very close relationship over the years and he would refer to him as a friend when they are not in Mose's office discussing work but at least Simbonga didn't confined in him. If he knew that Mose would flip sides just for a stack of cash then he'd have never trusted him. This is what they meant when they said 'bathande bonke kodwa ungathembi noyedwa'.

"Are you okay?" Mr Obennebo asks with a frown on his face.

"That is my damn lawyer!" he breaths out, "or should I say was?" he eyes haven't moved from them as they continue to converse like Nomagugu is in court accused of shoplifting.

"Calm down, you don't want to be thrown out of here

or worse, arrested for disrespecting the Judge. Even though I hate to say it, I will say it anyway – Inganathi needs you here more than she needs me, keep that in mind.” With that said he turned to the table in front of him and Simbonga sits back down, slowly breathing in and out.

Zobuhle comes in and scans the room for Simbonga. She sees him and goes to take a seat next to him. He is happy to see her but his mind is on Nomagugu and Mose. Nozipho is late, she should be here by now but she is not – hopefully nothing has happened to her. More people came in and the room became more noisy. There is a large group of people outside, protesting – the other female players who opened cases against Nomagugu also came in. It is D-day, they have to get rid of her no matter what and the Judge better play his cards right, and put Nomagugu in jail where she belongs.

“All rise!” the sheriff screams and everyone stands up.

The Judge comes in, sits down and signals for everyone to sit down as well. This is it.

“Who will be representing the defendant?”

Mose stands up, with his hand raised up and says, “it is me, your Honour.”

“And who will be representing the plaintiffs?”

“Me, your Worship.” Mr Obennebo is already on his feet.

“May the accused rise before the court,” Nomagugu stands up with her head held high. This doesn’t scare her, she knows that she will be out but will go through this just for the formalities. “You have been accused of rape, not only by one individual but 12 other people, you have been charged with aggravate

rape – are you aware of these charges?”

“Yes, I am aware.”

“And how do you plead?”

“Not guilty, my Lord,” she says with no hesitation.

The court room rumbles with people's objections, they are very angry at her plea and it really shows what kind of a person she is. After the noise has died down, Nomagugu sits back down and the court case continues. Mose defends his client and Mr Obennebo points out the reasons the court should declare Nomagugu guilty. The Judge is very quiet, with a straight face and no one can read what he must be thinking but both sides are really convincing. It is time for the witnesses to take a stand.

Inganathi sits down, facing the people – her eyes fall on Simbonga and he gives her a small smile to assure her that she is doing the right thing, and he is here to support her. Before Mose questions her, Nozipho walks in and sits at the back.

“It took you four years to open a case of rape against my client, may I ask why?”

“Because I was scared,” Inganathi say after clearing her throat.

“Scared of what?”

“Her and what the people would say,” she pauses for a second, “She has always been intimidating and we live in a society where people don’t think a woman can rape another woman so everyone would have found it absurd.”

“And now it is not absurd?” he asks and he gets no reply. “Miss Obennebo, did you really think my client was raping you or someone put that into your head?”

“Objection, your Honour!” Mr Obennebo is on his feet in seconds and Mose is surprisingly shocked – what is wrong with him?

“Your objection is overruled, please continue Mose.” The Judge even knows his name – great!

Mose is clearly amused and turns to look at Inganathi. “Should I repeat the question?”

She shakes her head, taking in a deep breath. “I have never seen it as rape, if anything, I thought it was a punishment. I was being punished for being me. I thought instead of beating me she saw forcing a dildo in the place between my legs was a better way to punish me,” she say breaking into tears and the

court expresses their feelings through noise and mumbles.

“Did you or did you not think that she was raping you?” Mose asks the question more slowly.

“No.” She shakes her head while sniffing.

“I have no further questions, your Worship,” he says turning to the Judge with a smile on his face. It is clear to him that they are winning.

More witnesses are brought forward and there is a lot of back and forth going on between the two sides. It is the witnesses' words against Mose's right now and the guy is hellbent to prove that Nomagugu didn't force herself on anyone. If she did touch them then it was in their consent, no one was forced to do anything they didn't want to do and Lucas, their physiotherapist, is also accused of sleeping with a

handful amount of girls in the team just for doing them favours, like the abortions for instance. He had never forced himself on anyone but he took advantage of the girls' situation and manipulated them. No charges are filed against him but he is the defence's witness.

"Nomagugu has always been a mother to them, yes she can be strict but her goal was to keep them in line and make sure that they stay in the team."

"What do you mean by make sure they stay in the team?" Mose asks.

"She kept tabs on them, pregnancy is the highest risk that would kill a female team so she made sure that no one got pregnant by putting them into contraceptives which I was responsible for and keeping them close to her was also one of the ways of protecting the girls," Lucas says, confidently.

“In spite of protecting the girls and putting them on contraceptives, can you tell the court just how many girls got pregnant and how many abortions took place?”

“According to the records, about half of the players got pregnant and most of the time it was one after the other. It went on like it was a trend.”

“So you’d say that Nomagugu did everything in her power to avoid such instances happening, the girls also knew of the consequences around the issue of falling pregnant but they went ahead and got pregnant anyway?”

“Yes,” Lucas says, nodding his head.

“You can vouch for my client to anyone who wants a football coach, and I must add, a guardian as well?”

“I’d definitely recommend her to everyone. She is a good coach – I mean she started that Academy out of nothing and look where she is now.”

Nomagugu is smiling from ear to ear at Lucas’ comment. No one can beat this, they should give up already.

“Okay. Let’s give the court something to think about – did Inganathi Obennebo come to you or anyone of your staff members to say that she was being violated at that time? Or did you see anything that would scream ‘I am a victim of abuse’ during the physio sessions?”

Lucas shakes his head, “She has never voiced out anything about being abused, she was happy with being at the Academy and there had never been a complain from her.”

Mr Obennebo can feel his high blood pressure rising but he continues to keep calm. This woman seems to be one step ahead with everything, that is why she wanted the court to postpone her case – she was up to something but the day hasn't ended, he will get justice for his daughter come fire or high waters.

“Obennebo, he is all yours now,” Mose says turning to the table opposite his.

Mr Obennebo stands up, moves away from the table and stands in front of the Judge. “Your Honour, I don't have any questions for the witness.” People start objecting, Nomagugu is satisfied – she didn't think they'd give up so early I mean she was still enjoying the show and Mose is ready to pack his things and leave. “But I would like to bring my own witness, Dr Boyes, the one who examined Inganathi Obennebo. She may come forward if the court allows her to do so,” he says, in a calm manner and the Judge doesn't hesitate to give the go ahead.

Nomagugu is lost and frustrated – who is Dr Boyes and why is she taking the stand? Mose is just as frustrated – how can Nomagugu keep him in the dark, he prepared his defence based on what she told him and everything was good until Mr Obennebo mentioned that there is a Dr Boyes who is alive and breathing. Dr Boyes makes her way to the stand with a file in her hand, it is no doubt that it is a medical file that she will provide as evidence to the court. Mose stands and rushes to Nomagugu, “What is this?”, he asks looking and sounding upset. “I don’t know but don’t worry they have nothing, keep calm and confuse the enemy,” she says but her heart is spewing other things and her mind is running over the hills. Mose is worried, she looks calm but he knows that they are done with.

“Dr Boyes, can you tell the court about yourself and your findings when you examined my client – Inganathi Obennebo.”

“I am a gynaecologist and I have been in this profession for over 27 years now. With regards to Inganathi, I did an observation which showed that her vulva and vaginal walls were scarred. It happens in most cases where the patient has been raped or their partner had penetrated them too rough. The vagina is the most sensitive part of the woman’s body so when it goes under extreme trauma – it shows. In the case of Miss Obennebo, she didn’t suffer in the hands of her partner because she has never been intimate with a male before...”

“Objection your Honour, the witness is speculating and nothing she has said is based on facts or proves that my client has anything to do with her findings – her statement is irrelevant!” Mose argues.

“Dr Boyes, please get to the point,” the Judge says.

“This file,” she lifts up the file in her hand, “Are the medical records of Miss Obennebo, with a report

based on my findings during the observation.”

Mr Obennebo takes the file and hands it over to the Judge. “In your findings, Dr Boyes, would you confidently say Inganathi was raped?” he asks turning to look at the doctor.

“Yes.” She nods.

“I have no further questions your Worship,” he bows to the Judge and goes to sit back down.

Mose stands up to say that he doesn't have any questions for the doctor. The Judge announces that the court case will resume two days after today and that will be when Nomagugu's fate will be declared.

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Inganathi

A part of me is happy that I have taken the stand and now it is over but I also can't help but think that maybe it was all for nothing. The world knows about my business but I won't get anything out of it. My father is the worst case, he is really not happy with how things turned out in court – Nomagugu has always had an upper hand in everything and even today she did her magic. I don't wish to find out what the Judge will say, I mean everyone has their price even if she is declared guilty she might not be in jail for a long time. It'd be only for six months and then she'd be out on "parole". I hate the justice system in South Africa, in fact, we have no justice system – look what happened with Slindile's case. I am sure the police are waiting for the people to forget so they'd let go of the case.

"Don't worry the worst is over," he says, taking my hand into his.

I wish that could calm me down but it doesn't. We are staying in his house, yes my father is also here but I sleep in a different room in respect of my father. He is somewhere in the house, shouting and barking orders to someone. I don't know why he is wasting his energy when all is done, it is very clear that Nomagugu is going to win and I will definitely pay for putting her through this. I know she doesn't care about the rest of the girls who also opened cases against her because I am the one who started the whole thing. If it wasn't for me then none of this would've happened.

"You won't believe what that daughter of Lucifer just did!" my father barks as he appears and we look up to him.

"What has she done?" Simbonga asks the question that failed to crawl out of my throat. I also want to know but also afraid of what she must have done, maybe she escaped and is coming for me – I know

that is impossible right now with how the police are hovering around her but this is Nomagugu and who can blame me for thinking of such.

“She bribed the Judge, the sheriff, all her witnesses – the whole team!”

What?

“But the girls testified against her,” I argue getting on my feet.

“She knew nothing they’d have said would stick and who knows they probably held back tangible information that would put her in jail.” That is Simbonga, he is also on his feet now.

“Now that I think about it, every girl who took the stand said almost the same thing,” we look at him in

awe. “They were not sure for some reason and their explanations were just plain and dull, yes she forced herself on them but none of them said anything about their feelings, thoughts and emotions.”

“Why would they do that?” I fall back on the couch. I know Nozipho refused to testify before the court date was even announced but the rest of them said they will take a stand against that monster!

“Everyone has their price, she probably even threatened them but couldn't do it with you because of me and your father.” What he is saying makes sense but why would they turn their backs on getting justice, that woman is nothing but pain, she thinks she is God and they are allowing her to get away with it.

“What are you going to do about the Judge? We can't possibly allow a fraud to declare her fate – you have to do something,” he says looking at my father.

“Don't worry, I already have something on my sleeves. Oh she will regret the day she put her hands on my daughter and every girl out there, and after that she'd swear never to even touch her own vagina.” He sounds really bitter. I have seen my father in all emotions but he was never this dark, I wonder what he has on his mind and I hope it is nothing that will come back to bite us at the end of the day.

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We are back in court, it is just as full as it was the last time we were here. I look at my fellow teammates and I don't feel the anger I thought I had for them. I feel sorry for them for some reason. I don't know how much Nomagugu paid Mose but the man has wings bigger than his head and he thinks he has everything stashed in his bag. He thinks he is better than everyone, bloody hypocrite. I don't see Zobuhle any where today, I am the one sitting next to

Simbonga today and Nozipho is here next to me. After a few minutes of sitting down, we are told to rise and we all stand up.

The Jud– whoa who is that now? A woman who I guess is today's Judge walks in and sits in front of us. Mose turns to Nomagugu with a horrified facial expression and I wish to see the look on her face. Daddy played his cards right, now let the games begin! We sit down and wait for the Judge to address the case and her conclusion.

"I won't be wasting your time and the court's time, I will get straight to the point," her voice is deep like that of a man and it carries so much authority, and I bet no one wants to get on her wrong side even Mose is behaving. "After going through the notes, evidence, the victims' statements and testimony – there were so many gaps, I know I wasn't here to listen to the testimonies myself but the court has made a decision, we have concluded our declaration

of the accused's fate. May the accused stand in front of the court," she says.

Nomagugu stands up, not as fast as she did the last time.

"The judgement of this court is based on the evidence that was provided, the testimonies of the victims and their statements, and the testimonies of the other witnesses. The accused also pleaded not guilty so we also took that into consideration when we made the final judgement. Nomagugu Mthethwa, the court finds you guilty of aggravate rape..."

The crowd goes wild, it feels like I am in the field right now, playing for the winning team – God never turns his back on the ones that he loves. Simbonga pulls me to his chest and I hold onto him for dear life.

"Order, order in the court room!" the Judge screams

while banging the desk and the crowd quietens down. “As I was saying...you are guilty and will be serving a life sentence with immediate effect. This court session is adjourned,” she bangs the desk one more time and makes her way out.

We stood up and cheered. This is the best day of my life and I am so emotional. I get out of Simbonga’s embrace and hurried to the front to my father. He hugs me just as tight and I can definitely profess that he is my hero, my shield and protector. I pull out and feel Simbonga’s hands on my shoulders – I wouldn't be where I am today without these two men, I am blessed and I am grateful. We are having a wonderful moment but it doesn’t last for long –

“You will pay for this!” she screams and we turn to look at her direction, why is she still here? “I will make you pay for this and you will regret ever messing with me!” she is livid and is fighting the officer that is trying to pull her away.

“I hate you!” those are the last words I utter and she disappears.

“It is all over and don’t worry she will have to go through me to get to you,” Simbonga says pulling me to himself. I know I am safe and I am not worried.

“Okay, that is my cue to leave – I will see you at home,” my father says with a faint smile, I nod and he leaves with his friend besides him. I can’t thank him enough, he came through for me when I needed him the most.

“You are going home?” he asks as I fasten my seatbelt.

“We are going home,” I say and he frowns. “My father invited you to come to his house, you hosted him so he wants to host you too and my mother also wants to meet you.”

“But why didn’t he say so himself? And you know I didn’t offer him a place to stay just because I wanted a pass to his house,” he says still wearing a frown on his face and I chuckle – he worries too much, this is not a marriage proposal if that’s what he is thinking.

“You will have to come, or he won’t hesitate to come drag you down to Umzimkhulu,” I say and he shakes his head.

“And your father looks very much capable of that.”
He starts the car.

“Are you scared of him?”

“Who, me? No I am not scared of anyone,” he says pulling a brave face but I am not convinced.

“If you say so,” he glances at me and I laugh. He'd

make a very bad actor, I can just see right through him that he shakes to the core in my father's presence but he will get used to it. I lean to his side and plant a kiss on his cheek, "Thank you," I say and he nods with a smile on his face.

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Nomagugu

She had been transferred on the same afternoon she was sentenced. This was not part of the plan and she can't stay here for longer a minute, she has to get out. She needs to make THEM pay for putting her in this hell hole. The warder leads her to her cell, it is empty like the walls of her heart. She has never thought of crying but now would be a perfect time. She sinks on the single bed with a sponge that feels

like a pile of cupboards, she lets her emotions take over but she is disturbed by a sound of the gate opening again. She leaps up and turns to look towards the gate that is opening, her eyes widen at the sight of the person walking in.

“Soso, what are you doing here?” she asks, trying really hard to disguise the fear in her voice. This can’t be happening on her first day here, it has been a long time since the last time she saw Soso – the scar on her chin is still very much visible and she remembers very well how Soso got it because she is the one who put it there.

“Haw Gugu, is that how you are going to greet your old friend?” she asks walking in further.

Nomagugu has never feared anyone but Soso is very unpredictable, it was better then because she knew her but now she doesn’t know what she learnt over the years in prison and there is no guard on sight so

anything can happen, and no one will save her.

“We are not friends,” she looks at Soso with a straight face.

“You are right about that but that won’t stop us from having some fun,” Soso says reaching for something behind her back. “They said it is one of your favourite,” Nomagugu’s eyes fall out of their sockets at the sight of the large dildo, it looks larger than the donkey’s genital organ.

“You can't,” Nomagugu shakes her head moving away and shifting to the wall.

The room is too small for her to get away from Soso. “We are going to have a lot of good times together,” she winks and it dawns to Nomagugu that this is her fate – what she has done onto others is now done onto her.

Uthando: Twenty Nine

Simbonga

As I am driving, she places her feet on the dashboard, she is a pretty girl alright but she's got ugly toes. They look like she stole them from someone, they are so big, wrinkled and darker than the rest of her feet. I want to laugh, she turns to look at me and I just burst out of laughter. "I know I have ugly toes but I am offended that you are laughing at them," she says looking up from her phone. I continue to laugh and she goes back to her phone. The music is playing softly on the radio and I am really enjoying this trip. The air hits differently in this place and the view is really nice, and refreshing. My father will have my head if he ever finds out that I went to my girlfriend's house, I don't think Inganathi or her family really dig deep into tradition they probably go on like white people do – if I am her boyfriend then I have got a pass into the family, and

the rest is history.

“Just so you know you’re the first person I have ever brought home so be warned – my mother is going to be extra clingy,” she says without lifting her eyes up. I glance at her, what kind of clingy is she talking about? “You’re doing it again, why do you over think things?” she looks up.

I shrug, “I don’t know that is just how I am.”

“Then you’re in the wrong profession.”

What’s that suppose to mean? I want to voice out my thoughts but she quickly answers her ringing phone and exclaims in excitement – I just know that she is speaking to Nozipho. I have heard that girls go wild when in the presence of their best friends but those two are extra. Nozipho, alone, is just over-enough. I am following what the GPS is telling me

and thank God she ends the call, bummer it wasn't ended instead her battery died. They could've talked for hours much to my annoyance, trust me I love their relationship but like I said – they can be too loud. A few minutes later, I stop the car in front of the large, tall gate.

Inganathi presses the button on the intercom, yeah she is leaning from her seat all the way to my window and now I am looking at her butt. I feel the urge to spank her but that would be very disrespectful to the man who just answered the intercom. "Daddy I am home!" she exclaims. The gate opens without her saying anything more. She moves back to her seat with a smile on her face, she is really excited about being home. I drive in and park on the driveway. When we step out of the car, both her mother and father are standing at the doorstep. She runs to them and I stay glued on the ground, scanning my surroundings – this house is huge.

“Mama, this is my boyfriend Simbonga,” I didn’t even see her walking back towards me. She has her arm linked with mine as we approach her parents.

“Sanibonani,” I greet with handshakes.

“Molo, I have been waiting for you two, what took you so long?” her mother is Xhosa, I should've thought of that because that’s where the Inganathi comes from – this Nigerian looking guy couldn't have possibly figured that on his own.

Inganathi looks at me so I’d answer, “it was traffic,” I lie but it doesn’t matter to her as she quickly ushers us inside the house. The bags are still in the car, I guess we will get them later.

There’s a lot of food on the table, now I know why we got scolded, she went all out preparing this food and it would've gone to waste if we didn’t arrive but

this is too much food. “Inganathi you still know where the kitchen is?” her mother addresses her in Xhosa and she replies just as her mother had addressed her swiftly. I am going to be honest with you, I have never heard Inganathi speak in Xhosa, Zulu or anything close besides when she’d be singing so I am a bit surprised by how fluent she is. She takes the bowl of curry that her mother wants her to warm up and disappears down the passage.

“So how have you been since the last time we saw each other?” the man of the house asks. We last saw each other the day before yesterday but he is saying it like we last saw each other a month or two ago.

“Fine,” I say nodding.

“Would you like the potato salad?”

“Yes ma’am,” my reply is accompanied by a single nod.

She laughs lightly while walking from her husband to me, “you can call me mama or Ma whichever one you prefer, not ma’am, we are not in school.” I smile thanking her.

She is on her feet, dishing for her husband. I thought having the food laid on the table was to allow everyone to dish for themselves but I guess not. “I hope you are not allergic to anything,” she adds and I say I am good. The last time I saw this much mouth-watering food was three years ago when Sisanda cooked for us on Christmas day, after that we didn’t have that much food prepared – I won’t get to the reason why because that is a subject I don’t want to touch right now. Inganathi comes back, places the bowls on the table and sits next to me. My plate is already almost full when she offers to add more of the butternut mash which I kindly decline.

“How is therapy?” her mother asks as we dig in after a small prayer. Inganathi and I both look up because we don’t know to who she’s addressing the question because we both attend therapy. She is looking at Inganathi so I continue to eat, leaving Inganathi to reply.

“It is going well,” that's all she says. It is still early days so there’s isn’t much to say, people go to therapy for years if need to be so it needs patience and importantly support. I take her hand to give it a squeeze and she goes back to eating.

We all get back to digging into our plates and the food is really nice, I am enjoying it. They have a really good relationship, it is never awkward when they talk and they are just flowing from one topic to the next, I also don’t feel left out. We are laughing here and there. Mr Obennebo is the clown on the table and he is cracking jokes every chance he gets. I didn’t think

I'd ever see him so relaxed and talking freely. There's love bouncing on the table and I can't get enough, they make me miss my own parents which I last saw two years ago on Sisanda's funeral. Kwando is living with them and he is attending at the same primary school I went to as well. He always sounds happy whenever I call to check up on him but gets really sad when we touch anything that has to do with our relationship. I need to plan for a trip to go back home, I miss my son.

"I got my results and I got four distinctions," Inganathi says with a wide grin on her face. I am so proud of this girl right here. Despite what Nomagugu put her through, she still focused on her books and did her very best, even on the field she has never disappointed.

Her father cheers, "I am so proud of you my baby," he says and her mother is just as happy.

“So when am I getting my car?” she says sounding really spoiled and her father laughs, and we all laugh.

“Get your license first and we will talk,” he is serious. Inganathi squirms on her seat and smiles widely like a child entering the candy store.

“I am really, really proud of you Inganathi I wish your sist–” someone clears their throat to cut her short.

“Do you want me to dish you more food?” that is Inganathi trying to get my attention but before I turn to her, I notice a fierce stare that Mr Obennebo is giving his wife and she sinks in her chair.

“No, I am good,” I say with a small smile on my face. The atmosphere is no longer light. I might have spoken too soon because things have just took a different turn and they all look uncomfortable – what is going on here, what was Inganathi’s mother going

to say before they cut her short?

“I should probably clear the table now seeing that you are all full,” she says standing up to her feet. Even the sound of her voice is no longer jolly and she looks different from the woman I met a while ago.

“Simbonga, let’s take a stroll in the garden,” Mr Obennebo says, also standing up with a glass of his water in his hand. I look at Inganathi and she forces a smile on her face which I know is fake because it doesn't reach her eyes. I take my own glass of juice and followed Mr Obennebo outside.

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Inganathi

“What was that all about?” I ask when I am pretty sure that Simbonga is not on sight.

“You know I didn’t mean to say it in front of him,” she says busy putting the dirty plates together. We didn't even get to dessert because of her.

“You told me never to mention her but –”

“Inganathi...” she looks up with teary eyes, looking sad but don’t forget guilty.

“You told me she’s dead, remember? So keep to your word and keep her out of your head,” I push the chair back as I stand up to leave.

“She didn’t do anything to you Ingie, you don’t have to hate her!” she calls out behind me but I continue to walk away. I don’t hate her, I hate that I had to live without her, they took her away from me and they forced me to accept it. Pretend that I have always been like this when I had lost a part of me – she was everything to me like I was everything to her but how I felt didn’t matter to them.

I walk inside my bedroom and mama put my favourite cover on the bed but I dwell on it. I strip off all my clothes and wrap my body in a towel. It is late now, we should’ve been here during midday but Simbonga had to see Zobuhle before he left. Why? I don’t know but he made it sound like it was important. I step inside the shower and didn’t bother to turn on the hot water, I just let the cold water wash away all my anger. I let it run through my hair and I face up to let the water fall on my face. I see her face, flashing in my head, I feel like screaming – scream for her but I don’t. I swallow hard and turn off the tap.

When I walk out of the bathroom, Simbonga is in my room looking at the pictures of me when I was in high school. I don't have any of my childhood photos because she was in them too. He brought the bags in with him, it's like he knew I'd need my pyjamas, I take my cosmetic bag and went to sit on top of my bed. He hasn't turned to look at me so I continue to dry my hair with another towel.

"You have always been beautiful and you haven't changed at all," he says turning to look at me.

"Thank you." I take out my body lotion and the bottle of the ointment that Dr Boyes recommended I use to get rid of the scars on my...you-know-what.

"Are you okay?" he steps towards me and I look up.

"Yeah I am fine," I know I am far from being okay but

that's all I can tell him because I can't really tell him I am not, I don't have any explanation for as to why I wouldn't be fine.

"Do you need help?" he points to the bottle that has a clear liquid in it.

I look at it and back at him. "I have seen it before, all you can do is allow me to see if you're healing," he says. He takes the bottle from my side before I could object, I regret why I washed my hair now because of the cold drops of water falling onto my shoulders. He looks serious as he opens the bottle and tells me to lay on my back. I tell him that he needs to use a cotton wool but it doesn't look like he heard anything I said. I laid still with my towel pulled up and legs slightly open. I remember the last time I was in this position and everything that followed after that. He is still wearing that serious face as he kneels down, disappearing behind my knees. I can only see the tip of his head and a part of his face. I don't know what

my father wanted to talk to him about but I guess it wasn't bad since he came back in one piece.

He pushes my legs apart and I oblige, swallowing hard. I am still scared of having anyone or anything down there, truth be told that I feel much safer if it is Dr Boyes who is looking down there even though she did it once, I just know that she has no intention of hurting me. I feel his thumb on my folds and I inhale sharply. He stops and asks if I am okay, words fail me so I just nod. He reaches for the bottle again and rubs his finger on my entrance, I hear him groan and mumbling a sorry. I know I should be feeling scared but I feel different as he continues to run his fingers on my sacred place. He slowly moves his thumb up to my clit, still I don't stop him – it feels different, really good even my heart is racing. I have always felt when we kiss but now it is intense.

He rubs my clit more faster, putting more friction, my chest is heaving and I find myself chewing on my

bottom lip with my legs opening wider. I want to scream on top of my lungs, tell him how good he is making feel but I can't with my parents in the other room. I am pulling my hair as he pinches my throbbing clit. I can't hold back anymore, I open my mouth and realised a soft moan. I tilt my head up and he is looking at me, damn him. I throw my head back, moaning and slowly shuffling from one side to the other. "You're so wet," he says moving his thumb down to my entrance, of course I'd be wet because he just applied that ointment. I breathe in and out thinking that he is done, leaving me yearning for more but he is not done, he replaces his thumb with his lips.

I feel like I am going crazy, fuck is this me? I can't believe I have a man in between my legs, sucking on my genitals like he is sucking my lips. He is making me feel a lot of different things at the same time, once again I question myself as I put hands on top of his head pushing him down. I have even forgotten to keep it down, my moans are flying out of my

mouth as he continues to run his tongue on clit, swaying it around my entrance, going back up to suck on clit. My legs are up in the air when I feel a wave of pleasure crawling all the way from my toes to the tip of my head, I call out his name, again and again until my body tenses, feeling the need to grab on the covers and scream out that Jesus is indeed Maria's son.

After that massive explosion, he rises and comes to kiss me on my lips. I can feel my pum-pum calling for him – I want him.

“You were so loud, your father is going to kill me,” he grins and I shy away from his eyes. I want to tell him that I want to do it, that I am now ready but how do I do that without sounding like a slut? I pull him down for another kiss, which is wet and sloppy but he pulls out before I could get my hands under his shirt.

“I want you Simba,” I say breathlessly.

“I know and I want you too,” I sense a but so I wait for him to continue. “But not in your father’s house,” he grins at my disappointed face.

I feel his lips on every part of my face as soon as I close my eyes.

“I love you.”

His silence is heavy so I open my eyes to find him still looking at me.

“I love you Simbonga,” I tell him again.

Uthando: Thirty

Simbonga

I flip my eyes open and I find big doe, brown eyes looking at me. She is not smiling nor frowning, it is just a blank stare which I fail to read – I don't know which mood she woke up in but she still looks beautiful. I place my hand on her cheek and she places hers on top of mine while slowly closing her eyes. I couldn't leave her bed last night, I slept here instead of in the guest bedroom her mother assigned to me – don't panic, nothing happened. I slept well with her in my arms. She opens her eyes and smiles for the first time today. "You have to leave, mama won't be happy to find a neatly made bed so early in the morning," she says. I remain silent looking at her, reminiscing her words, over and over again. I know she meant it, I could see in her eyes that she was serious.

“I love you too, Inganathi,” I say still looking straight into her eyes. I know I am a few hours late to say it back but now I mean it. I didn’t tell her in the past but I have always felt like this.

She is smiling widely so I know that saying it late is better than not saying it at all. She kisses my palm and shuffles, getting out of the bed. I also need to get up but I am so lazy, I need another hour or two to curl up under the covers with my arms wrapped around the girl who stole my heart. I sit up and just like that my phone rings. I take it and look at the screen, it is an unknown number. The shower is already running so I guess that is my cue to also get out of here before the madam of the house starts doing her rounds to ask if we slept well during the night. Inganathi said she’s clingy so I don’t doubt she’d do something like that. I answer the phone as I make my way out.

“Simbonga, you are speaking to Ryan Weymouth –

the newly appointed Technical Director. I believe we haven't met before," he says.

"Yes, though I have heard about you that you will be taking Dingani's place in the soccer committee. How can I help you sir?" I ask, stepping inside the guest bedroom and closing the door behind me. It is a relief I didn't bump into anyone in the passage.

"I am in Durban, I was hoping we could meet for breakfast." That's all he says, he doesn't mention anything as to why he wants to meet with me.

"I am not in Durban at the moment but I can make it there during lunch time so instead of breakfast, we can meet for lunch." I don't give him another option. He is the one who wants to meet with me so he will go with what I say – first of all; everyone knows I am busy which is not true but they don't need to know that; he had to make an appointment to meet with me or did he think I'd jump because he said so?

“Oh,” he is silent for a few seconds. “Lunch is fine, I will see you then.”

I say okay then we both drop the call. I wonder why he wants to meet but I guess I will have to go to the meeting to find out. Inganathi will be disappointed when she finds out that I am leaving a day early than we planned. She wanted to show me around the place she grew up in, I was looking forward to it and I bet I would've learnt more about her by just being in spaces she had been a thousand times in the past but then duty calls need to be attended. I hit the shower and changed into something comfortable – denim jeans and a white long sleeves t-shirt. When I open the door, the smell of bacon fills my nostrils and goes straight to my stomach which starts growling as I follow the smell that is leading me to the dining room.

Inganathi's mother is extra – who eats vetkoeks so early in the morning? The breakfast looks so greasy

and mouth-watering. "Good morning," I greet and she turns to look at me with a blinding smile. She looks much better than she did yesterday after that awkward moment. Mr Obennebo called her emotionally unstable when I asked what was the whole thing about, he even went as far as saying her instability gets so bad it goes straight to her head and messes up her senses. For a lawyer, he really sounded unconvincing but I took his word anyway. Inganathi comes to stand besides me and tucks herself under my arm. The smile on her face makes me feel bad, I know it's going to disappear as soon as I mention the call.

"I thought you were leaving tomorrow."

"That is what I thought as well but I have to leave today, right after this," I say and they all remain quiet.

Inganathi is now playing with her food, she hasn't said a word and she is not even looking up to me as

I turn to look at her. "I will make it up to you, I promise." She nods absently, I know she's more disappointed than sad, we had everything planned out and now everything has to change all of a sudden. We finish breakfast and Inganathi's mother declines my offer to wash the dishes – I am very domesticated and I'd rather wash the dishes than stand over the pot and cook. I was cursed in that department. Mr Obennebo has been very quiet, even when I say my goodbyes he doesn't say much but wishes me a safe trip.

"I will come back tomorrow," she tells me as I step inside the car. Her parents have gone back inside the house and she is standing on the driveway like a loner, hugging herself like she's feeling cold with her lips pouted.

"I love you," I say starting the car.

"I love you too," I blow her a kiss as she says that

and she smiles, now that's what I wanted to see and not that long face.

I reverse out the open gate and hoot as I drive away. It is a two hours drive to Durban but I am not bored as I thought I'd be, the deep house music is keeping me company. When I get to Durban, the heat has doubled its temperature and I regret wearing this long sleeves t-shirt, I should've opted for something cooler. Ryan sent me the name of the restaurant we are going to meet in and I am the first one to arrive. I get a table and order a drink while I wait for him. He arrives thirty minutes later, I thought he'd be younger but he is actually quite old, he has grey hair and a beard that needs shaving. I always keep my face clean and that makes me look younger than my age – I should teach him a thing or two.

“You have been in this game since you were a toddler,” he says, taking a seat on the chair opposite mine. I don't know what he is talking about but I

don't argue. He doesn't look like someone who has played football before, even his past doesn't say much about him doing anything related to football but I guess knowing people who know people can open many doors for you.

"I have been in the game long enough."

"Enough to earn yourself a coaching post without a qualification," he says and the waiter comes to take his order.

"That was arranged by Dingani, he knew me more than anyone and he trusted me with the position."

"Well Dingani is no more, I am the new sheriff in town and I don't have a reason to keep you on your post longer than you have."

“But I am currently doing my certificate in coaching, I am sure that should count for something,” I say, trying to defend myself. I know I didn’t get this position because I am fully eligible, I don’t have the qualification and the reason why I took the post was for therapeutic reasons but I have the experience – more than him.

“That doesn’t count,” he shrugs, his drink comes and he gulps down half of the content. “You don’t have the qualifications so you are not eligible to be a coach, I could tell you to go back to playing but no one would take you now. I am sure you can’t even run five laps around the field without complaining about your burning lungs or sore limbs – and I definitely don’t want you to die of a heart attack,” he says, chuckling while lifting the glass to his lips.

I feel offended, he should've told me over the phone, sent me an e-mail or a letter to tell me to step down. He knows nothing about me, we are two different

people. If this place was to be set on fire, I doubt he'd make it to the door in time because of that huge potbelly which I am very confident to say is resting on his lap right now. I lift up my own glass, emptying every drop of the beer inside – I need another glass. I don't think I will eat anything, his face is ugly enough to make me lose my appetite but that's not the reason, I am still full from that large breakfast that Inganathi's mother dished up for me.

"I am not really a nice person Simbonga but I can keep you in your post if you make sure you lose all your games," he says and shift on my seat. Why would I want to be a coach of a losing team? No scratch that, I'd be coaching my team to lose.

"Are you hearing yourself?" I lean on the table and he is nodding.

"Loud and clear, I hope you hear me too because this is for your own good. Lose all games, including the

tournament for the SAB League. Win a game and boy, you will regret ever crossing me.”

“I can’t do that. You might as well take me out and the team out of the tournaments,” I say, waving him off.

And he turns pink, with anger visibly evident on his face.

“You will do this, I don’t mind crushing you and your whole dream, right here right now and there will be nothing of you to remember – you will do this Simbonga.” He pushes his chair back, standing to his feet and reaches for his wallet from his back pocket. “Buy yourself something nice, you look starved,” he says, taking out three two hundreds notes and places them on the table. I am just looking at him, thinking who the hell is this person and what the hell does he want from me? He leaves me sitting there but I don’t remain sitting for long, I

stand up and head to the door leaving the waiter with more tip than necessary – I am anything but starved.

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Inganathi

The Academy is open but under different management, I would've gone back there but I don't want to, not yet. Nozipho is already that side, they have started preparing for the tournament but I am here, stuck with Simbonga. Well today he dragged me out of the house and we are in the field, and he is training me. Believe it or not, I am actually enjoying it. He is pushing me just like Nomag...that woman would have. I am attending therapy but I am not exactly expecting to heal overnight. I know these

things take time so I am patient. What happened the other day was a sign that I am on the right path, I will be healed – I could let him in, I also was willing to go all the way with him so that must count for something.

“You know that she will be playing against us right?!”
I hear her call out.

It is really dark now, the lights are helping us to see though – but what is she doing here at this time? Oh shoot, I forgot that she lives here. Simbonga waves to me that he will be back and I nod, continuing to kick the ball through the poles. When I turn, they are chatting in hush-hushes about something, she is smiling, looking up to him. I can't see Simbonga's face so I kick the ball to the other side. He is looking straight into her eyes with a cheesy smile on his face, whatever they are talking about must be nice because I think they have forgotten that I am here. He laughs really hard, Zobuhle pushes him away on

the chest but he doesn't remain standing on that spot instead he goes back to standing just a few steps away from her.

He removes something from her brow and he is touching her for too long, okay it was only for three seconds but he wasn't suppose to touch her in the first place. One thing I can tell you is that he is different when Zobuhle is around and I can't help but feel a ping of jealousy clouding my mind. I am no longer kicking the ball or doing anything that I am suppose to, instead I am looking at these two people who look much cosier than just being a player and a coach or friends. I know nothing about relationships, this thing is still new to me but a guy isn't suppose to talk with another female who is not his sister for more than five minutes, Simbonga here has gone over ten minutes and he doesn't seem to register that what he is doing is wrong – in so many levels!

“Simba, I need to get home,” I say looking at him and

not that girl. I didn't even greet, she also didn't bother and it was very clear that she didn't care. The only person she saw is him.

"O-kay," he says, looking at me like he is looking for something. "Zobuhle, I will see you tomorrow," he says taking a step towards her – where is he going? I stand in between him and her, while looking at him and he exhales.

"I will see you tomorrow coach," she says over my shoulder and leaves.

He looks at me, I have my hands folded to my chest and looking damn serious, don't forget angry too. He sighs and goes to collect the training equipment, I remember him saying that these stay in the room Zobuhle is occupying so I quickly suggest that he leaves them by his office door, no one will see them there. I just don't want him in that girl's presence, who knows what she is planning, some people are

so good – five minutes is enough for a quickie. He gets in the car, my seatbelt is already fastened and I am waiting for him to start the car. He suggests we get something to eat on the way and I say whatever, he get anything he wants because I am not hungry, I am angry – but I don't say tell him that, I just say I am not hungry.

By the time he parks on the driveway, my mind is already made up – there's something brewing between those two and shame on them for not even trying to hide it from me!

“Inganathi, is there something wrong?” oh so I am not Buggie anymore? I hate that name but I love it when he calls me like that.

I step into his bedroom without uttering a word and head to the wardrobe, that is where I packed my things. I take out my pyjamas and went to the bathroom to take my cosmetic bag – I will be

sleeping in the guest bedroom tonight.

“Inganathi?” he sounds impatient now. “What is it?”

“It's nothing,” I say reaching for the door handle but he stops me.

“You know I love you right?”

“But not as much as you love her,” I say looking up to him and he looks tongue-tied – wow. He won't even try to deny it.

I get out of his grip and opened the door, he doesn't stop me this time instead he buries his face inside his hands. I won't lie, it hurts.

Uthando: Thirty-one

Zobuhle

I just finished dressing up, getting ready to go to work; yeah I still have to go to work in the morning and come back during midday for practice since we are resuming with the tournaments. I fasten my shoe laces and there is a knock on the door, more like someone is banging on the door and this person seems to be determined to break it down – who could be so angry so early in the morning and I don't like visitors at this time of the day. "Okay, okay I am coming," I say, exhaling sharply. I hope its not the kids' neighbours who are playing tricks on me because I won't be held responsible for spanking someone's child. I yank the door open and she steps forward, pushing me aside to let herself in. Okay, I close the door and turn to look at her, slowly folding my arms to my chest. She has thrown her bag on top of my unmade bed and she looks really mad, she's

fuming.

“What is going on between you and Simbonga?” she asks.

“Hi, Inganathi. I slept well thank you and how are you?”

She breaths out sharply, she surely looks annoyed by my sarcasm – if we could go back a little, just reverse a few steps then I must say that I don’t really understand her question.

“What is going on –”

“Nothing,” I say with my hands hanging on the sides, walking past her and towards my bed. I have to leave and she’s going to make me late.

“I know what I saw last night,” she says, still sounding upset.

I look back to her, I really don't know what she is talking about or is she worried because we didn't include her in our conversation, seriously I didn't think she had a problem because she didn't say she did. And why is she here questioning me and not Simbonga? My silence seems to be calming her down, this is not the reaction she was expecting for and the girl that first came in here was ready to fight but she came to the wrong person. I have never fought for or because of a man so I won't start now and she better get her facts straight before she accuses me of something.

“So you are just going to stand there and not say anything?” she is getting impatient and again I don't know what she is talking about because I am not just standing, I am actually making my bed and she could make herself useful by helping me.

“First of all Inganathi, I don’t know what is it that you saw last night and secondly, you being here right now is going to make me late for work,” I say, already checking the time on my phone.

“Are you dating, or used to date? What I saw last night were two lovers, conversing or catching up, and none of you seemed to be bothered that I was around. Are you that heartless Zobuhle? You know Simbonga is with me now so...”

I put my hand up to stop her from saying another word, I am amused by what she just said but I won’t laugh because that might infuriate her even more. I know Simbonga can get too close when it comes to me, I don’t have a problem with it because I know it can never be anything more than that.

“I am lesbian Inganathi,” I tell her.

She takes a step back, I don't know what the look on her face means but before I could make out what it actually means, she bursts out of laughter. Like she is laughing really hard, I don't know which part I said was funny or I didn't pronounce her name correctly? She breaths in sharply again, calming down and composing herself. She is wasting my time, I should be gone by now.

"You're good, I should give you that but you don't fool me. Is that your famous line that you tell every girl when they confront you about putting your claws onto their men because if it is then it proves to me that you are really determined to keep on doing whatever it is that you're doing with my man!"

I don't have time for this, where did Simbonga get this girl? I push her bag into her hands within seconds, I move to the other side of the room to get my own bag and head to the door. If she doesn't follow me out then I will lock her in then maybe we

can finish this conversation later when her mind is clear because right now, I can't get anything through her. I am also upset now, I am anything but a man stealer. She roughly grabs my arm as I reach for the door handle and I feel like slapping her across her face but instead I lash out...

"He loves me okay!" my voice shoots through the roof and her eyes glitter within seconds.

"What?" she slowly lets go of my arm.

"That's what he told but I don't love him like that. As I have said before – I am lesbian, I date other girls and not men," I shoot at her but she is not fighting anymore, if anything, she looks defeated like what I have said just made her make sense of something.

I look at her as she reverses to the bed and when the back of her legs hit the edge, she sinks down, I was

expecting her to drop on the bed but she goes down until she reaches the floor. A tear escapes her eyes and she quickly wipes it off. She looks really sad, but time man – now I need to call in to say I am going to be late. I sigh, walking to the bed to sit on top of it besides her and we are close, my leg is touching on her shoulder and vice versa. She snuffles and I just let her be. The thought of dragging her out crosses my mind and I just smile at how stupid I can be – she needs comfort but I don't even know where to start, will she even let me hug her?

“When I told him I am lesbian, he wasn't happy...I thought he'd kick me out of the team because I had turned him down – you know how men are with their egos,” I say chuckling and I don't hear a sound coming from her. I don't know why I thought of that because knowing Simbonga the way I do now, even if I told him that I was an alien from space, he'd have still kept me on the team but that doesn't change the fact that he was hurt. She snuffles again and I get worried, is it worth crying that much? I thought

telling her that I am lesbian would ease her mind but it seems to have made things worse or maybe its something else. I wish she could lash out on me again so I'd know where her mind is at. The sun is rising and letting more light inside the room – if I don't leave now then I might as well forget about going to work.

“He told me he loves me...” she says, exhaling, “but I know he loves you more. I saw the way he was looking at you last night, the way he was smiling and he looked relaxed and comfortable – he was happy.” She snuffles again, wiping her face. “I told him that he doesn't love me like he loves you and he didn't even try to deny it which means it is true.”

I don't really understand how she must be feeling but my heart breaks for her, I don't want Simbonga to love me like that if it is going to ruin his relationship with her. I wish he could hate instead because this is hurting her more than it hurts him that he can't be

with me. I place my hand on her shoulder as some sort of comfort, she is not crying anymore so I think of it as a good sign.

“You don’t have to worry about me, I won’t do anything to put your relationship in jeopardy – if he says he loves you and wants to be with you then I will respect that.” She nods but remains silent.

I exhale softly, retrieving my hand from her shoulder and wait for her to stand up so she could leave but she remains seated on the floor. I sigh again. We sit there in silence for what seem like forever before she opens her mouth, “I don’t want to play ball anymore,” she says.

“Why?” I ask, failing to suppress the shock in my voice. I know that she is good and loves playing football so why would she let go of that?

“I just...whenever I get inside the field, my mind just gets flooded with a lot of horrible memories – the things she did to me and how she made me feel. That time, I got inside the field to perform well, just to make her proud thinking that will make her less of what she was, that maybe it'd make her stop punishing me but that only made her worse. The better I played, the more attention I attracted to myself – I would've played bad but she wouldn't let me,” she shakes her head and I can tell by her body language that she is crying again.

I slid off the bed and sat next to her, she is indeed crying. I feel more sorry for her, no person deserves anything that she went through or any other girls out there. That woman did more damage than she thought she was doing, the physical pain can never be compared to the emotional pain and it is worse because whatever it is that you're feeling inside can easily be missed because the other person can't see it. I sit facing towards her, cup her left cheek to make her look at me and she bats her big round eyes.

I don't know how one person can have such big eyes. I wipe her cheeks dry, I don't know if I am imagining things but the more I look at her the more the space between us closes in and before I know it, I am breathing in her breathe and she is breathing in mine. One move and my lips can land on hers but lift my face up to kiss her on her brow instead and pull her in for a tight squeeze.

She holds me just as tight and then I hear a car driving in. We both pull away from the embrace and I say, "I think it's time to go claim your man."

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Simbonga

We are back on the tournaments and things are looking good for our team. Nomagugu's team has a new coach, I think they rotated all the staff members and the whole team was put on a counselling programme. Inganathi told me about her plans to leave football and focus on school, I don't know how I feel about that because if she lets go then that means Nomagugu wins but it can also mean that she knows what is good for her and if staying out of the game makes her happy then it is a good decision to make. My team is just as fired up as it has been before and I am truly confident that we have a bright future ahead of us. I am focusing on making sure that the team plays well and I have pushed Weymouth's threats at the back of my mind.

The team is not complete without Slindile and we all miss her but the last memories we have of her are not really friendly so we try by all means to avoid

mentioning her name. She was a good player but she was also good at other things which made things worse for her, I am not saying she deserved what happened to her but I hope she learnt a lesson and if after life does exist, I hope by the time we meet again she'd have repented. We have won all games that we have played so far but that doesn't mean we have to take a break from practicing but the rewards are getting bigger and bigger, and I am thinking of throwing in a spa day for the girls and Zobuhle can be in charge of making sure that things go according to plan.

"You have been on that computer since you came back," she says, walking into the room that I have turned into my study where I do all the paperwork when I am not in my office.

I look up and she is wrapped in a silky white gown, she can be needy sometimes but I promised never to touch her until she is truly ready – it is torture but

I am willing to wait. She went through a lot of trauma and I don't want to be the cause of her set back. Therapy is going well, I can see because she is opening up a bit more and she doesn't cry much when she mentions that woman's name. I still feel that jail is a light punishment for her but death would've been too easy for her too.

"Just a few minutes more and I will be all yours," I say and she smiles.

As she closes the door, an email from Weymouth comes in – I sigh – this gives me more reason to just go to bed now. I close the laptop without viewing it, that man thinks I will play into his hands but he doesn't know me. I would never set myself for failure, he can come with his threats but I have bigger guns. I went through a lot to get where I am and I am not about to let it go just like that, and I won't let him take it away from me. I am Simbonga Masuku, raped or not, I am still a man.

I get inside the bedroom and she is already in bed. We have been really good the past two months, I don't know what happened or what changed but she looks much happier and less insecure. I wanted to talk about Zobuhle but she pushed the idea out the window and said it doesn't matter anymore. We have been good ever since and if we are not arguing about not putting my dirty socks in the same washing basket as the rest of her things then we'd be fighting over the tasteless food I cooked – we won't be fighting about other people and we are in a good space.

“I spoke to mama earlier, she passes her regards.”

“That is nice, I miss her food – she must post us that mouth watering beans curry of hers it'd be very nice with steamed bread,” I say removing my shoes.

“You say like you are going to cook that steamed bread.”

“I have you so I don’t have to worry about that.”

“I won’t slave around the kitchen for you – never, even my mother would have a heart attack if she finds out that I am living with you and my father would definitely disown me, and you know what that means right?”

I frown, “what?”

She exhales sharply, putting her phone away and I walk towards her.

“If my father disowns me that means I won’t get my car when I graduate,” she sulks and I chuckle.

“I don’t think he’d do that, if anything, he’d rather cut off my balls instead of letting you go,” I flip the

covers off her, revealing her bare thighs – she tempts me all the time, I don't know if she likes seeing me miserable.

“What...” she says as pull her legs so she lay on her back. She looks at me puzzled as crawl in between her legs and I lean in to kiss her on the lips. It is an intense, arousing kiss with my hands all over her soft, smooth skin and she is moaning in my mouth with her hands gripping on my shoulder and back, pulling me in for more but I can't give her that, not yet.

I pull out and she breaths out heavily. Her lips look slightly swollen and she looks beautiful when I know she's horny with every inch of her body yearning for my touch. “I want you to meet my son,” I say and she shoot her eyes wide open like they are not already big enough. “I want to take you home with me,” I tell her and she looks into my eyes, searching and I hope she finds what she is looking for because I am

serious about her. I want her now, tomorrow, the day before that and the day after that till forever comes to us because we will be patiently waiting in each other's arms.

Uthando: Thirty-Two

Simbonga

She looks nervous, she keeps on biting her nails and I am worried that she'd end up bleeding. I take her hand and kiss her knuckles, she heaves a sigh for the umpteenth time and I know if I laugh she'd bite my head off. I don't know what she's worried about, it was her who took me to her parents not so long ago but she looks worse than how I felt. I have tried everything in the book to make her calm down but I can't get through her so I have let her be. When we get there, she will see that there was nothing to be worried about in the first place. The municipality still hasn't dug deep enough inside the government's pocket or they have the money, it's just that they'd not using it for what it is meant for – I seriously can't believe that the village still has gravel roads with potholes too! Sighs.

“Is that your house?” she asks, leaning forward to have a good look at the house that we are approaching.

“Yeah.”

“Wow,” she says still looking at it and I park outside the gate. “It's huge Simbonga, if my mother was to see this house then she'd drop dead on the spot.” Is she kidding me? Her parent's house is much bigger than this one or maybe it stands out more because of the other houses next to it. But I still believe her house is much bigger than this one. I built my parents a big house – they didn't want to leave this place so I brought Umhlanga to them – I had to thank them with something for how they made sure I had everything while I was growing up. Being the only child didn't help at all because black tax fell onto my shoulders alone but I was paid well so it wasn't much of a struggle and my parents are not demanding so it was a breeze.

I get out of the car and luckily the streets are quiet, if not then I'd have had the whole village demanding hugs and selfies which can be tiring because it never ends. Even the elders end up inviting me into their homes before I can even step inside my own house and greet my parents. That is another reason why I stayed away. I open the gate and went back to the car so I can drive in. The house is the only thing modern about my parent's house, other than that everything is still traditional and manual. I park in front of the house and step out of the car. The garden looks great, I am sure Kwando takes care of it – it was my chore too when I was growing up and my mother would always make sure that I watered her flowers before I went to school in the morning and before I eat supper in the afternoon.

I have Inganathi's hand in my hand as we walk to the door. I told my parents that I am coming home and they were happy to learn the news that their prodigal son has finally remembered that he does have a home. I am excited to see Kwando, Tina was also

encouraging for me to see him and see how far I have come with therapy. I knock on the door and she looks at me, and I smile. The door opens and my mother appears with my father walking towards the door behind her. The smile on her face and the tears welling in her eyes, makes me feel as bad as I should. She pulls me in and hugs me tightly. I pull away, "I missed you Simbonga," she says fighting back her tears and smiling widely.

"I missed you too. Baba how are you?" I ask with a handshake.

"I am good, we are all good. Ngenani ningami emnyango bazothini abantu," he says and we step inside but it is not for long.

I hear Inganathi gag, she gags again and covers her mouth. "I'm sorry," she says running back outside.

Both my parents look at me for answers but I have none. I am just as shocked as they are but it quickly clicks – lavender! I run out of the house leaving them both frozen with shock and found Inganathi vomiting on my mother's flowers, oh this is not good, not good at all.

“Are you okay?” I ask with my hand on her back as she remains bent over the garden. I will have to clean it before my mother sets her eyes on it.

“I am fine,” she says with hoarse voice, she gags again and I wait for it but nothing comes out.

I turn to look towards the house and my mother is standing there in the veranda, looking at us.

Inganathi stands up and stretches her back. “I’m sorry,” she says wiping her lips with the back of her hand. I tell her not to worry, I know the smell of lavender triggers her to vomit – she told me it only made her gag but now she doesn't hold it back and

she just lets it out. That is what her therapist advised her to do – she doesn't need to hold back on anything anymore and she should just allow her body to let go if need to be, the same goes for the tears. If she wants to cry, she must just cry.

“I am sorry ma,” she says to my mother but the old woman is looking at me like she wants cut my head off. I shrug and she turns to look at Inganathi with a smile on her face like she didn't threaten me just now.

“Are you okay baby?” she asks.

Inganathi nods, “it's the smell of lavender that I don't like very much.”

Ma turns to look at me and I swear with my eyes that I didn't impregnate her, well not yet, if that's what she's thinking about. She ushers us inside the house

after exchanging a few more words. Baba is still standing where I left him, then Ma shouts for Kwando to come and greet us. The way the house is so quiet I was sure that he wasn't home. He appears down the stairs, walking slowly towards us and stands next to his grandma with his hands tugged behind his back and his head bowed down. He is just standing there with no excitement at all, this is not the reaction I was expecting even my parents are not happy.

"Hey buddy," I greet.

"Hi," he raises his head for a second then he drops it again.

"Okay um, everyone this is Inganathi – my girlfriend," I tell them and the elders look at each other before turning to look at us with smiles on their faces. Well Sisanda is the only woman they knew and after that I have never brought anyone home; I also didn't think

I'd find her so soon.

“It is nice to meet you,” Inganathi says as she hand shakes both of them.

“Simbonga you should have told me that she doesn't like lavender, look how uncomfortable she is and now I have to set the table outside hayi kodwa,” that is my mother complaining. If I knew she'd use the lavender flavoured detergents then I would've told her not to.

She leaves the room with my father following behind her, that man can't stay away from his woman for a second longer and he fails to do anything for himself. I wouldn't be surprised if she still takes off his shoes whenever he comes back home from doing his rounds checking on the villagers – he is a people's person like that.

“Kwando, hi.” She greets and he raises his head to look at her.

“Are you the one who has been keeping my father away from me?” he asks and Inganathi is shocked as I am. “Are you the reason why –”

“Kwando!” I snap. I didn’t mean to but he can’t be blaming Inganathi for my faults, she is not the reason for anything other than that my heart flies out my chest whenever she looks into my eyes.

He doesn't stand there for a second longer, he turns and runs up the stairs. I sigh, this has gone from bad to worse. I thought he was okay, that is what he told me when we spoke on the phone and he never questioned me but now he is acting out of character. That is not the Kwando I know, the boy I raised would never talk to anyone like that and his voice did not only lack respect but it was also laced with so much anger and pain. “I will go speak to him, let ma

know.” I kiss her on the cheek and I climb up the stairs. I may have not been here for a long time but I know my way around the house. He is not in the first guest bedroom I checked so he must be in the other one. I knock on the closed door and no one replies so I turn the handle to open the door.

I walk in and he is busy putting his textbooks inside his bags. He doesn't even turn to look at me as I let myself in. His room looks clean and nothing like how mine looked like when I was his age.

“Kwando, can we talk?”

“I can't, gogo said lunch is ready and I can't be late,” he says zipping the bag and putting it aside.

“I am sorry. It wasn't Inganathi's fault that I stayed away, she had nothing to do with that and I am sorry if looking out for you looked like I didn't care about

you. It is just that I didn't want to hurt you, okay?"

He turns around with a 'please find me because I am lost' face and I exhale sharply. I guess it is time I told him everything, I know he might have seen something on the internet or the newspapers and if not then someone must have told him something. I think that is where his anger is coming from and he wants someone to blame. He can blame me for everything, no one else, not even himself because I was the one who was raped, who was a mess because of the trauma and I am the one who killed our relationship while trying to protect him. The last thing I wanted was to hurt him, I didn't want him to go through what I went through and end up like me. I had to break the chain but in that process he also suffered and I hate myself for that.

"So does that mean you will no longer be staying away? Does it mean I can stay with you?" he asks after I have let him in but not fully because some

things are not suitable to be heard by his young ears and I don't want to ruin his pure mind – I don't want him to have nightmares – that'd be cruel.

“I want us to work on our relationship, if it takes us living together again then let's do it. I just want you to be a part of me, I want to raise you to be a better man than the man I am, make you happy but most of all I want to protect but I want to do it right this time,” I tell him and he nods rapidly.

“I think I like Inganathi, she looks like a nice person,” he says and I chuckle.

“You haven't seen anything wena, she's an angel.”

He is smiling and I couldn't have asked for anything more. He is my priority, the centre of my life and from now on I will work on being the best dad.

“Come here,” I open my arms for him and he looks at

me.

“Is it safe?”

“What do you mean if it's safe – I am your father, aren't I?” he nods. “Then come,” I smile to him, he stands up and walks towards me. He throws his arms around my neck and I hug him back. I ended up sitting on the floor when I was telling him all that I could tell him and being in this position, having him this so close to me feels like a million bucks and more. No words can express just how happy I am to touch him without any fear clouding my mind. “I love you son.”

“I love you too dad.”

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After lunch, I just had to talk to my father and find out how the things with regards to the NGO have been going. I know around here they won't be short of anything with my father around, he always does things to his best ability and likes playing hero, he even goes as far as saving those who don't need saving. We talk about sports, the cows, about how much the village hasn't change much since I last came here and he asks about Inganathi. There is something that I want to talk to him about but I can't seem to find the way to push it through our conversation.

"That boy, Kwando, he is a good boy but there is something man Simbonga. He is distant and I can't reach out to him," he tells me and I think this is the perfect time to tell him.

"I have been going through some things baba so it affected our relationship as father and son. So I guess that is why he has been acting like that," he

stops walking and looks at me. I know he wants to know what exactly is it that I have been going through – is he the only thing that has changed around here, I mean doesn't he read newspapers anymore? "I have been attending therapy, for two years now, because I was raped when I was 15 by my coach. Disky too, he assaulted me."

He breaths in sharply, looking away from me. I know Disky was his most trusted friend, he trusted him with me but he saw it as an opportunity to feed on his sick cravings. He doesn't say anything for a good minute.

"I am sorry son," he looks up to me. His face has fallen, I didn't say anything because this is not the face I wanted to see. I didn't want him to see it as his fault, I didn't want him to blame himself like I don't want Kwando to blame himself for our failed relationship. "I trusted him, he was a good man or so I believed – I shouldn't have allowed him inside my

house nor allow you any close to him,” he sounds upset now and this is exactly what I didn’t want.

“It wasn't your fault baba, I never blamed you – that would've been wrong of me. He is to blame but my mind is no longer there, the therapy has helped a lot and I have moved on. He is not a factor in my life, I mean they are not factors, I am my own person and I will live my life. I will not let them or their actions hold me back.”

I know I have forgiven them, there’s nothing better than accepting an apology you have never received, moving on from something because holding onto it doesn't and won’t bring you any happiness nor peace. I am at a good place now that I have chosen to break off the chains, they no longer have their hold on me, I have chosen to set myself free by forgiving them. I made a promise to that boy, I promised him that I will come back to him when I left him and now I am back. I will also keep my promise at being a better

father. He will be proud of me like I am proud of him and this man right here did all he could to protect me but sometimes you can't stop fate. It was destined for me to go through this so I'd meet people like Zobuhle, Inganathi and Nomagugu.

"You are a better man than I'd ever be," he says placing his hand on my shoulder.

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Inganathi

I have been sleeping in the guest bedroom the last two days, Simbonga's mother is worse than my mother and every morning I wake up, I find her on my doorstep. She'd make a horrible mother-in-law

but I like her. Our stay has been really nice, Kwando is getting less and less cagey. I once addressed him as 'Kuhle' and the boy looked at me like I had cussed him and he ran out of the room. Simbonga told me that his mother used to call him like that and I was very sorry, I promised never to call him like that, like ever. His father had to speak to him again, and hopefully told him that I am not here to replace his mother.

The cutlery in the kitchen is wow, Simbonga really did a lot of work and he spent a lot of money to make sure that his parents have everything that they need but I don't wish for my mother to see this. That woman treats everything as competition and she'd run my father's bank accounts dry just to make sure that she tops whatever that is in this house. She might as well suggest that my father builds her a house in Mars, that's how bad she can get – I have seen it before with the stokvel ladies – the drama never ended. But that was until my father told her to leave the group, it was not helping her with anything

and it was more of a problem to him because he had to pay for things she didn't even use but bought them in the name of having them.

“Inganathi, can you help me with this word puzzle?” he asks as I make my way down the stairs.

“Why don’t we play outside instead, I mean it is not raining,” his father suggests and the boy frowns.

“This is the reason why I chose the spelling bee instead of soccer. With you it has always been soccer this and soccer that; don’t you get tired?” Simbonga just bursts out of laughter and I smile, taking a sit on the chair around the dining table, that’s where they are sitting.

“I wonder too Kwando, he is so bad I can’t believe he had time for his books while he was still at school.”

“I bet not, he always refused to help me practice spelling the words or help me with any of my essay assessments.”

“It looks like his brains are in his feet instead of his head, yeah?”

“Yeah,” the boy nods looking at his father.

“I am here you know.” He has stopped laughing so it is our turn to laugh.

“The poor boy would’ve died imagine having a coach both at school and at home phela wena Simbonga you never know when to stop,” I tell him.

“Oh really?” he leans forward to the table with his hands entwined. I don’t know what he is doing but he can’t possibly be looking at me with bedroom eyes

with his son around.

“Yes really,” I say then turn to Kwando. “You said you need help,” I take out a pen from his pencil case and Simbonga leaves the room.

Kwando and I continue with the puzzle. The parents went out, apparently one of the most respected men around the village passed on so that is why the streets have been empty. Everyone has gathered at the man’s home and it is past six o’clock when Kwando decides that he has had enough of the puzzles. He goes to his room and I clear the table. The parents are still not back and at least Simbonga’s mother told me not to cook, I don’t even know what I would've prepared for them. I haven't seen Simbonga since he left me with Kwando, I will just go to my room and take a shower then get into bed – I will see everyone in the morning.

I step inside my designated room and I close...what

now, I look and he is standing there looking at me. He pushes the door open and I step back. As he steps in his eyes are on mine and I feel the room already becoming smaller for the two of us. He closes the door and he pulls me to his chest. "Simb..." he shuts me up with a kiss. His tongue is roaming all around my mouth, he is sucking all the air in me and I am struggling to breathe. I push his back while drawing in air into my lungs, "what are you doing?" I ask but I don't get an answer. He kisses me again and we are on the bed within seconds. The t-shirt I was wearing flies out and I kick off my shoes – my heart is getting really excited, finally I am getting what I have always wanted but..."your parents," I say after pushing him back a bit.

"They won't be back for an hour or so; I want you." That makes me melt and my clit continues to throb excitedly.

I pull him in to kiss him and I love how he keeps on touching my body, trying really hard not to leave any part untouched. He has stripped all of my clothing and I am heaving, yearning for him even more. I chew on my swollen bottom lip as I watch him strip off his pants, at least he let me remove his shirt but the wait has been long over due. When he removes his boxers, I close my eyes breathing in sharply. "Look at me," I hear him say and I slowly open my eyes. "I won't hurt you," he tells me and I nod, swallowing hard – are they all this big? I blink and he is on top of me again, looking down to me and leans in to take my lips again. My heart is beating faster, is this really what I wanted? I feel him on my entrance but he doesn't enter, he stays there and I feel his thumb rubbing my clit. That's what drives me crazy and I find myself moaning again.

He is still directly on my entrance that is getting more and more flooded as he continues to rub his thumb on my clit. My body has relaxed but my heart is still pumping, my vagina walls are itching, burning,

they want something and that something is him. He slowly pushes in and I hold my breath. He thrusts in slowly and I clench my jaws nearly biting his lips. I feel him as he continues to separate my wall and it's like I have been drugged, I feel high. He humps slowly, while breathing heavily against my ear – this nothing compared to anything I have ever felt before. The pain outweighs the pleasure and I am not letting him go until I am fully satisfied, I want more and I tell him breathlessly. He increases the pace and I sing all the praises I can think of.

It feels so damn good, I am slightly angry at him for denying me this. My moans are so loud, I can't even control myself and he groans as a familiar feeling takes over my body. This is much more intense, maybe I am having a stroke, I cry out loud while pushing him off me but he holds on too tight, refusing to let me go. It rushes out and I feel like I am bouncing from one cloud to another but I am heaving like someone who just finished running a mile or two. He takes his time to reach his own

orgasm, I wish this moment could last forever, he thrusts in deeper groaning and biting onto my shoulder, I swear he left a mark. He slid off me and laid on his back, and I shifted to lay on his chest. I know we have just finished but I want to do it again.

• • •

I don't know when I fell asleep last night, the light shines very brightly against my eyelids and I groan, turning to lay on my back. I flip my eyes open and yawn while still trying to kick off the sleep in my eyes. I squinted my eyes and looked closely. There are balloons on the roof, coloured in white, gold and rose gold. I sit upright while inhaling sharply and on the wall there is a pink 'happy birthday' banner, and the letters are written in gold. On top of the bed, just on the edge, there is a tray with what Simbonga would call breakfast on his lazy days – it is a cup cake with a glass of orange juice and a small white envelope.

I take the envelope and there is a card inside. 'Happy birthday babe, you were sleeping so peacefully I didn't want to disturb you, I hope you love the balloons and I love you.' I look up to the ceiling that is covered in balloons again, I wonder when he got the time to put this together and I must have been really out of it for not hearing him. I can't believe he remembered and went through all this trouble just for me – he is the best and for keeps. My eyes always have a mind of their own, I can't be crying over this. I wipe my eyes dry and the door opens, Simbonga's mother appears with a wooden spoon in her hand.

"Good morning," she says looking around the room and dropping her eyes to me then she frowns.

I look down to my chest and oops, I pull the cover up feeling really embarrassed. I had forgotten that I slept naked.

“Good morning ma.”

She nods slowly and then smiles, “Happy birthday, I am glad you are with us to celebrate your special day. You will find me in the kitchen when you are done with...” she points around the room with the spoon.

“Thank you,” I say as she makes her way out.

I should expect my parents to call any moment now, I can't believe Nozipho didn't wake me up to wish me a happy birthday this is so unlike her. I take my phone and there's fifteen missed calls from her – shoot! Was I out of it that much that I didn't hear my phone ring, what did Simbonga do to me kanti? I will have to call her back later when she has calmed down because I am sure she wants my head right now. I get out of the bed and head to the bathroom, good thing they thought of putting the bathroom inside the guest bedrooms as well. After showering,

I changed into a bright yellow summer dress and tied my hair leaving no strand of hair to go on my face. I first check Simbonga's room before going downstairs and it is empty but there is a large black box on top of the bed.

I am too nosey so I have to see this – 'I knew you'd come looking for me' – that's what the card says and I smile to myself after reading it. My instincts tells me that the box is mine so I open it, inside there is another card – 'I love you' – I melt once again. Oh my, I have just got myself a new dress and shoes, well it is not one of those typical long dresses from the boutiques that people wear when they are going to those red carpet events. This one is short, black but glittery at the top and the shoes are also black and have glitter that makes them sparkle. I am too excited so I strip off to try these things on, no one can tell me what to do today I mean it is my birthday, the only day I get away with everything.

I put everything on and he got my size right. I check my phone again and the parents haven't called, do they hate me now or what? I always woke up to their call in the morning on this particular day, well that's if I'd sleep after Nozipho's call or cheers when she is around but this year I guess things are different. I descend down the stairs with my heart dropping with each step that I take. I look up with only three steps left and they are looking at me, and by 'they' I mean – Kwando, Simbonga and his parents but they are not alone, Nozipho and my parents are also here; whoa Zobuhle is here too? I run down the remain steps nearly breaking my ankles because of the high shoes.

“Happy birthday,” they all say at once and I feel overwhelmed.

“Don't be a baby and start crying – shed just one tear and we will take everything down,” that can only be Nozipho with her forever threatful-self so early in the

morning.

Simbonga walks up to me and perks my lips, “Thank you for breakfast,” I say and he chuckles, he knows I didn’t eat that cup cake but I did drink the juice.

I can’t believe my father also agreed to this, or his parents to have this in their house I mean I am just a girlfriend, not his wife. I go over to my parents to hug them, I don’t see any gift bags on them and I guess everything changed this year. Nozipho makes the most noise as I move to hug her, she whispers something about my face glowing but I don’t pay attention to her. She has always been crazy and will never change. I also hug Zobuhle whose hug feels warm. “Breakfast is ready,” Simbonga’s mother announces and we start moving.

“Wait ma,” we hear him say behind us. Kwando is standing besides him as we turn to look back – I wonder what they are up to now. “What more do you

have to say Kwando?” he is looking at the boy who quickly digs his hand inside his pocket and retrieves a small black box, it glitters just like the dress and shoes that I am wearing.

“Inganathi Obennebo,” he says and I should be angry at him for butchering my surname but I am more curious at what is going on. They both kneel down like they have practiced it, and look up to us, to me. “Will you marry us?” the small boy says and my heart jumps up to my throat.

The people I am standing with are cheering already but I don't hear my father's cheer, Nozipho pushes me forward before I could blink again and I stumble towards them. They look serious and I just want to cry, why are they doing this to me? “Think of saying no and you will also lose a sister,” another threat from Nozipho, she never knows when to stop. Kwando turns to his father and gives him the ring while he keeps hold of the box. Well it is out now so I

might as well say yes, yes to marrying them both. They are a package, I can't get the other without the other one.

"Yes," I say with my mouth cover and they don't move, I don't think they heard me. "Yes I will marry you," I say again and they are both on their feet at the same time, I swear for a second I mistaken them for robots.

He rushes to me with the ring in his hand and I extend my hand to him. My hands are shaking but he manages to put it in, it is a diamond ring that looks simple but yet elegant and it fits! "Thank you," he says pulling me in for a kiss. I shouldn't be doing this in front of the elders here but I am someone's fiancé and that made me grow some thick-skinned balls. I am clinging on him and nothing else matters right now – it is just me and him...and his mini him, Kwando.

Uthando: Thirty-Three

Inganathi

While driving back from his parent's house to Durban I couldn't keep my hands off him, I am just too happy and in love! The ring on my finger glows and reflects exactly the same way I am feeling inside – finally there is light at the end of the tunnel. I couldn't be happier and I foresee a bright future filled with happiness, love and lots and lots of sex. We had to drop off Nozipho first and then Zobuhle before we went to his house. My father did express his fears of me getting married at this age, well to him I am still twelve and I should be still under his wing. And go as far as asking him first if it is safe before I can take a step forward but I am no longer that girl – I am my own woman now and soon to be someone's wife.

Us being under covers, in between the sheets is evidence that I can't get enough of him, you know

when you taste something that tastes good a small portion is never enough and you end up wanting the whole thing, well that is Simbonga for me. He makes me feel so good, I just want to feel it again and again. I am glad we are here because I can scream as loud as I want with no care in the world, his mother would've already kicked me out of the house if she ever heard me scream this loud. We left Kwando there since it is still in the middle of his school term so Simbonga is planning to move him next year because the school he wants to put his son in will only be taking new learners at the beginning of next year so it is just the two of us until then.

“I will go and get us something to eat,” he says shifting to get out of the bed and slide in his boxers, heading to the bathroom first.

I wrap myself in the sheets and sit upright, just as I leap up his phone rings. From where I am sitting I can see that it is an unknown number and he comes

back to the bedroom. He looks at the screen and then at me before answering. I don't know what the conversation is about but it looks like the person on the other side of the line has a lot to say and Simbonga is listening to them, attentively. "Over my dead body Weymouth, just leave me the hell alone," he says, I was expecting to hang up but instead he puts the man on loud speaker and he says, "Don't mess with me Simbonga I have told you before that you will do this or there will be consequences – I heard you are now engaged, imagine what the wedding will like without the groom or to make things a bit more fun it will be the bride who goes MIA."

I look at Simbonga and he is pissed off, well I want to piss on the bed right now. Who is this person and why is he threatening him? He cuts the call still looking at me, if he can't see the fear in my eyes then he is not looking close enough. "Don't worry, it's just empty threats – he will die before he gets to any one of us," he says, stepping closer to the bed and

sits down. He is not telling exactly what is going on, what if we need to be worried, I mean the guy just threatened me too – where do I fit in this or whatever that is going on? “Just tell me what is going on,” I shift to him, getting on my knees and he sighs.

“He wants me to lose all the remaining games so that the team won’t be selected for the SAB League,” he tells me.

“But there is like two games left and you have won the most so what difference will it make?”

“I don’t know Inganathi, worse I don’t even know what he wants from me. I just know that this is nothing about business – it’s personal and I don’t even know this guy which makes everything very absurd. I don’t know what makes him think I’d listen to him because I won’t.” He sounds and looks just as upset as he was when he was still on the phone.

I am worried, like really worried but if he says I have nothing to worry about then I trust him.

“What do you want to eat?” he asks, I guess we are done with that Weymouth person.

“You.” I say and he cracks, throwing his head back.

“You are definitely suffering from some Dickson syndrome. I will make Mac ‘n cheese,” he says getting off the bed. I hope it turns out fine this time because the last time he made it, I couldn't keep the overcooked pasta in my mouth and don't get me started on that white sauce. I will just have to wait for the surprise of my life.

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Yesterday marked my last day on the field and as a goodbye gift to my teammates and my football career as a whole, I scored three goals. To be honest I will miss that life, I will miss the feeling of being a player instead of being a fan; with or without Nomagugu I loved soccer with all my heart. It was there when I needed to get away from my reality and I could be at my best without feeling bad about it but that was before Nomagugu happened. Thanks to therapy, I can talk about her or mention her name without shedding a tear and without any fear crawling inside my mind. And I hope she is having a wonderful stay in prison.

I am in the house now preparing supper, I also invited Nozipho to come so we can celebrate and Simbonga invited Zobuhle, not that I have a problem with it I mean the more the merrier. Everything is almost done, knowing how those people are lazy they won't come in now, they will come in late complaining about traffic when they were running late on purpose. Simbonga's team didn't win the last

game, it wasn't on purpose; they were playing against us and I had to leave a mark. It was a fair game, a bit of a challenge – I mean they have Simbonga as their coach so I wasn't surprised. The coach we have is good but she has nothing on Nomagugu, I wish that woman just focused on what she is good at and not use it as a weapon to harm her inferior.

I take the baking tray filled with veggies and put it in the oven. That will continue to cook while I go upstairs to freshen up so I rinse my hands and run up the stairs but I don't get far before a knock comes through the door. I hope it is one of them because I have a pile of dishes in the sink that need to be washed – I know no one will want to wash them when they are full. I rush to the door with a smile on my face but it falls to a frown when I open the door.

“Hi,” I greet the two men standing at the doorstep, I have never seen them before so I am more curious

to know what they are doing here. "Can I help you?" I ask, since none of them returned my greetings. They scan the surroundings before the other one pushes me back inside the house. I want to scream but at the sight of the gun, I swallow whatever it is that I wanted to say. He walks towards me and I step back. My legs are shaking, the tears are already welling inside my eyes and my heart is racing. They haven't said anything, the other one hasn't moved from where he is standing, "You take whatever you want," I say with a pleading voice. I don't want to die – not like this, he corks the gun and points it to me, and the tears well to my cheeks.

Bang!

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Simbonga

Well things didn't turn out as I had hoped, we lost the last game – it was very obvious but the team did their best and now we have to go through supper with Nozipho and Inganathi celebrating their win while we nurse our sore hearts. I invited Zobuhle because I refuse to be the only one to deal with those two's madness, I know just how crazy Nozipho can get and Inganathi does her best to match it so it'd be too much for me. Now I am driving to Umlazi to pick up Nozipho, the traffic is not that bad and I hope it will stay the same on our way back. My phone rings and I reach for it, it is an unknown number so I just know who it is.

“What do you want?” that's how I answer his call.

“That is not the way to greet your old friend Simbonga but I will let it slide and I must say man, you got yourself a pretty woman here and she's very

domesticated I mean she cooked up a storm so tell me what exactly are you celebrating – her win or your loss?” he asks sounding cocky.

“What the hell are you doing in my house?!” I lash out, already in search for an exit on the highway, I have to make a U-turn.

“Unlike you, I keep my promises – I hope after this you will learn to listen,” he gets off the phone and a ‘here comes the bride’ instrumental song plays. I grunt and drop the call.

Nozipho will have to forgive me, Inganathi matters the most. I can’t believe that fucker was in my house, I mean does he ever know when to stop, if anything happens to Inganathi not only will I feel my whole world crashing down but her father will kill me. I can mess with anything that belongs to him but not his daughter, that’s what he told me when I asked for his blessings before I proposed to Inganathi. The car is

flying on the road and I don't care about the police now, my mind is on Inganathi – what did he do to her? Why didn't I take his threat seriously, he was obviously not playing hide and seek, he meant every word that he said and now Inganathi is the one who is paying for my stupidity!

But wait, I didn't win the last game so that should count for something; the team won't get into the league. So why is he doing this?

I get to the house and the sun has gone down. The streets are empty, that's what I love and hate about this place – people mind their own business but you can die crying for help while they are sitting in front of the tv, minding their own business. I get out of the car and head straight to the door. It is not locked, my heart feels sore and I just know that something is wrong. I shouldn't have left her alone, I should've asked Zobuhle to stay with her or Nozipho could've stayed after the game to help her friend with the

pots.

“Inganathi!” I call out as I step inside and the house is dead silent.

I walk in further in the lounge, nothing looks suspicious and then I head to the kitchen. My heart jumps to my throat and my vision gets blurry within seconds as the smell of blood fills my nostrils, I haven't seen her yet but I can feel it and its weighing me down. I walk around the counter and it's her feet that greet me first. I cover my mouth suppressing any sound that might escape my lips, she lays there on a pool of blood. I walk closer and the fucker was heartless enough to put the bullet in between her eye. I can't hold my tears, I keep breathing in and out sharply but none of that calms me down. There are words written 'LADUMA' in her blood next to her and I just sink to the ground. I face up to the ceiling and scream out the frustrations I have been holding in.

She is gone. “Inganathi,” I crawl to her and pull her bloody body to my chest – I will never forgive myself for this. “Inganathi!”

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At the Lizoville Psychiatric clinic

The nurses run down the hall, the heart piercing scream hasn't stop; it comes from the last room down the passage. In her seven years here, she has never made a sound and she has always been the most well-behaved patient in the whole clinic – every nurse's favourite because she won't fight them when it comes to taking her medication so her reaction today comes as a shock to everyone. The patients are peeping outside their doors waiting to see what is going on and who is being slaughtered, some have

hid under their beds because they believe the devil is coming for them next.

She is fighting everyone who comes close to her, the pain is unbearable and no amount of screaming can get rid of it. There are twelve nurses in the room now, trying to hold her down but she keeps on fighting to get away from them. There is no fear in her eyes but pain is visibly evident shooting through her eyes.

Anyone who doesn't look closely enough would think it is one of her bipolar reactions but it is not, a part of her is gone and the pain is intense, it runs deeper than anyone can imagine. "Take her to the ECT lab," the doctor says as he steps inside the room and it is hard to get her on the stretcher, and strap her down.

The screaming hasn't stopped as the nurses push the stretcher to the lab. The mouth guard is inserted in her mouth and that muffs her screams, she might be choking but that is not important right now.

Another nurse inserts a needle on her arm to flush

the anaesthetic into her system. The doctor turns on the ECT machine and when everything is in place, with one push on the button to activate the ECT machine – the electric currents passes through the electrodes to her brain and her body shakes violently. The seizure lasts for no longer than a minute.

“Increase the current,” the doctor instructs and the nurses look at each other.

“But –”

“Just do it!” he barks and the nurse obliges.

They shock her again and this time the seizure lasts close to two minutes. By the time she wakes up, she won't remember the events of today, yesterday, the day before that till the week before that or more if her amnesia goes further than that.

Uthando: Thirty-Four

Zobuhle

The news about her death came as a shock to me, we were going to have supper on the same day to celebrate their win but it was the same day her life was cut short. I don't know how to feel about it, I am sad yeah but I am hurting the most because of the state Simbonga is in. The guy is a human version of a zombie, he can sit on one spot and stare at the space in front of him for hours. I don't know how he is feeling because he is still not opening up to anyone but we can only imagine just how broken he must be, I mean we should be planning their engagement party or the wedding instead of planning for Inganathi's funeral. Whoever killed her was truly brutal – I don't know the whole details but from what I have heard I can tell that whoever it is was sending a strong message.

The dress she wore on her birthday/engagement day will be perfect. I am the one who they can send around because I am the only one who has a sane mind right now. Even Nozipho is beyond herself, I haven't seen Inganathi's father since they came to check the 'damage' and see their daughter at the mortuary. Her mother called this morning and asked me to pack her things, I was also going through her stuff for a black dress that she could wear for her send off, well that's if her parents haven't bought her something else. Simbonga's parents and son are here, they came to grieve with him and for the funeral which is the day after tomorrow.

The door opens and I step back from the wardrobe to see who it is, and it's Simbonga. He looks drained like there is no life in him, he walks to the bed and sinks on it. His mother tried talking to him but failed, I also tried a few times but he wasn't getting anywhere near talking about how he feels. He didn't even say anything when I told him that I will be packing her things and her mother will be taking

everything. I close the wardrobe and walk to where he is sitting. He doesn't look my way as I sit next to him, I love silence but this one with him is too heavy – he has always told me that speaking helps and here, right now he's not practising what he preached.

“How are you feeling?” I ask, breaking the thick ice.

He looks up to me and a tear escapes from his eye. “It hurts,” he says and inhales sharply. “It is my fault, I should've done everything to protect her but I –” he breaks into tears and I rub his back, pulling him to my chest. At least he got somewhere but he still needs to get to the point where he can say how he feels without breaking down and he sure needs to stop blaming himself for it. None of us knew that this would've happened and if it was destined then there was nothing he could've done to stop it from happening. I also partially blamed myself too for my mother's death and you saw where that got me.

He raises his bloodshot eyes to me and I wipe his face dry. This is not the Simbonga I know, the one I know is stronger than this and he'd be on top of things. He'd be out there to make sure that his fiancé gets the send off that she deserves but I guess losing someone brings out the worst in everyone. It leaves you naked with nowhere to hide and I have been there so I understand. It takes one blink for his lips to land on mine and I just freeze with my hands in the air. He breaks away and whispers, "please." He doesn't wait for me to reply before he kisses me again but I don't kiss him back, he pushes me to lay on my back and I push him back.

"Simbonga, no."

"Please," he pleads and I shake my head no.

He collapses on my chest and breaths in and out. His arms wrap around my waist, his fingers are literally digging deep into my flesh and I am sure he

is going to leave a mark. As he clings on me, I hear him sniffle – I have never seen a man cry as much as he is crying, not that it makes him less of a man but I am actually surprised and sad at the same time. It breaks my heart to see him like this and I want to be here to support him – anything that will make him feel better. I just hope that this doesn't set him back to being distant from Kwando, he has worked really hard to get where he is, emotionally.

“I love you Zobuhle,” he tells me and my heart leaps up.

I slowly wrap my arms around his neck and he shuffles, getting himself on a more comfortable position. “If we do it, will it make you feel better?” I ask and he sits upright.

“No,” he shakes his head. “I respect you too much to force you into this; please don't feel compelled to and I am sorry for um...”

“It is fine,” I shift to sit on the edge of the bed. “Will you help me pack the rest of her stuff?” his eyes glitter again and I wave him off, “never mind, that was stupid of me to ask.” I stand up and walk to the wardrobe again then I hear the door close – he is gone.

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I hate funerals, I have gone to two many of them and they both left me drained and empty. With nothing to go back to, nothing to live for and no home. I am an orphan because of death and it'd forever be my enemy until it decides to take me too. This is one hell of an expensive funeral I have ever been to, there are too many white roses that are placed around the room where her casket is placed in – though on top of it, there are white lilies and they're all fresh flowers, not plastic. It smells like a garden in here. She looks really beautiful in the picture that

is displayed in front of us, she was a beautiful girl with beautiful eyes that glittered like the black sky filled with a thousand bright, glowing stars.

It is an intimate gathering with only close friends and family members which are not more than ten, I guess they are not a big family. Nozipho is a mess, when I first saw her, she looked like those feisty girls that you don't want to mess with and I was one of the people she didn't like very much, and she wasn't afraid to show it. Maybe she saw me as a threat like Inganathi did, I don't know. She stands up and walks to the front to say her piece, to say goodbye to her friend for the last time.

“Miss Obennebo, that's how I'd address you every time you became cheeky and stubborn. You always saw the best in people, I didn't think you'd be my friend since I didn't meet your standards or status but you looked past that and chose me to be your best friend, your sister, companion and partner in

everything. I saw you as my little sister and you saw me as your big sister, we had great times together and we have the best memories which outweighs the worst. You were my everything and I'd have done anything to protect but this time I failed," she says breaking into tears but quickly composes herself. "I love you Inganathi and ulale ngoxolo mnganami."

She cries out and hurries out of the room with a woman who I believe is her mother following behind her. This is heart breaking, even Inganathi's mother is crying in the front and Simbonga's hand tightens around mine. He has shed a few tears today and that is progress, it is exactly what I want to see – he has cried too much and he needs a break. He also stands up and walks to the front to say his part.

"No amount of words can express just how deeply hurt I am about losing her so soon, we had a big, bright future planned for us but God also had other plans for us. Inganathi, I love you...and I miss you

Buggie. The pain in my heart is just too much, I didn't spend much time with you and I feel robbed – I want you to come back and if not then death must just come for me too. I can't go through a day without thinking how far we would have been with our wedding arrangements; that day...you were going to tell me the date of our wedding day. You were so happy, the smile on your face is the one thing I'd never forget and the way you were so full of energy just brought out the best in you and it rubbed off on me too. You made me happy Inganathi, in a different way that I, myself, don't understand. I love you sthandwa sami; until we meet again – rest in peace.”

I have also shared my fair amount of tears when her coffin goes down to the ground, six feet under. She was loved and there is no doubt about that.

Simbonga's parents left the next day and Simbonga was left alone in the house so I came to check on him and found the house in a mess. I don't know how one person can create such a mess in a space of a few hours, I am sure his mother cleaned the

house before they left but this looks like a whole month's of dirty. I don't know what is going on but the man I came to check on is not on sight. I throw the bag on the couch and head to the kitchen, well at least there are no dishes in the sink but what am I saying because they are on the coffee table, the couch and the floor instead of in there.

“Simbonga!” I call out.

I walk out of the kitchen and scan the lounge again with my hands resting on my waist. I was about to call out again when he descended down the stairs looking fired up about something.

“What is going on?”

“That man, Weymouth or whatever his name is, is going to pay for what he did.”

He says sitting down on his mess and opening his laptop. The police have no lead on the suspects. Actually no one has been a suspect since the day they started investigating, Simbonga must have told them about that Ryan Weymouth guy but it seems like they didn't get anywhere with that information because till now the guy is not arrested. I don't know what makes Simbonga think he can get this guy – he sure knows how to play dirty and Simbonga is not about that life but I will have to wait and see where this one ends up. I also want whoever did this to pay but not at an expense of losing another life, I saw what happened when that Nomagugu woman was arrested and I don't want a repeat of that.

“What are you going to do?” I ask while trying to clean up the mess that he doesn't seem to notice.

“He wants to play dirty right? Then that's what I am going to give him – the police are useless so I am going to take the law into my own hands. I am going

to bring Inganathi's killer to their knees.”

Trust me, he is fighting a good fight but I hope he gets to them before they get to him. I don't want him to be the one ending up on his knees instead of those evil creatures.

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Nomagugu

The light shines brightly, almost blinding as she steps outside the building – she could feel freedom in her finger tips, she could taste it and it is something she has always wanted. She took another step and winced, Soso hasn't been giving her much of a break and she could still taste Soso's salty

juices in her mouth. She has been everything but someone's sex slaves but jail taught her one thing already and that is karma is a bitch. When she lifts her eyes up again, there he stands with his hands buried deep inside his pockets but he is on the other side of the fence. The warder pushes her until she comes face to face with the man.

"You don't have much time, take this and I will give you a call. Be ready to leave this place tomorrow," he says and her jaw drops.

He better not be playing games with her because it won't be funny.

"Eight o'clock sharp," he tells the warder who nods to him and he slides on his shades before turning to walk away.

In her hand is a piece of paper with an escape plan

and a burner phone – patience is virtue and good things come to those who wait. God hasn't forgotten about her yet and when she gets out of here, she wants to make her mark and make it known that she is God.

Uthando: Thirty-Five

At Lizoville Psychiatric clinic

She rocks her body back and forth, staring at the glass on water that is on top of the table while she is curled up with her knees to her chest on the single bed that has been hers since the day she stepped into this room. The walls are plain white with no stains on it or whatsoever and that's is how she likes it. As the voices get louder, she clings on Mr Fuzzy Wuzzy, the stuffed bear that no one else dears to touch – it hasn't been washed in years because if it gets into the water then that means all the memories she is holding on so dear will also be washed away. The bear is the only thing she has that makes her feel close to home, it makes her remember whenever she looks at its feet with the words written – 'Abbie' on the other foot and 'Ingie' on the other.

The door opens and she doesn't dare move a muscle to turn to look at who is at the door but judging by the strong smell of mint, she already knows who she is. She is a minute and 38 seconds late today – that's how calculative her mind can get. "Hey sweetie, your lunch is ready and I made it just the way you like it," the nurse says as she makes her way further into the room. "You have to eat before you leave," that gets the girl's attention and she shoots her eyes to the forever smiling nurse.

"What do you mean?"

"You are being transferred to a new home, now eat up."

The girl's face twitches, the voices are getting louder as they continue to chanting inside her head – no one wants to leave the place they have been calling home for the longest time. "But you said this is my home," she says with a breaking voice and teary

eyes. This can't be happening again. It is way too soon for it to happen, she still remembers the exact day she had to leave home, the exact last words that were said to her, the sad look on her mother's face, she can still feel the grip of her aunt's hand as she forcefully pulled her out of the front door while she cried for her mother "I don't want to go," she said but her words fell into deaf ears and by the time she opened her eyes again, she had a new home – away from everything that she ever knew. She doesn't want that to happen again – it can't!

"You will love this new home," the nurse says smiling sweetly. She is the only nurse she likes but not today, not when she wants to take her home away from her. She holds on to her head as it feels like it is going to explode, there's a lot that is going – the voices are now speaking at the same time, over each other and what they say can be true and can be false but she can't make out which one is telling the truth. There is no space to fit herself in, her own thoughts, as the voices try by all means to take over her whole being,

they want to control her but she keeps on fighting, again and again. A short of Lithium would make her feel better but that thing makes her feel out of place, even though it can quieten the voices – it also takes over her body and she doesn't like that very much, she wants to be her own person.

“He also said...he said...” the voices chant louder, breaking up her speech and the thought she just had has flew to the back of her mind. She shakes her head to get it back but it is gone. She looks up to the nurse with bloodshot eyes – ‘you can kill her and that way you won’t have to leave!’; ‘that apple pie looks nice, don’t you want to try it out sweetie?’; ‘I can’t believe she is wearing shoes again’; ‘look at that necklace, you can use it to strangle her and no one will know’; ‘the door is open – oh my God the flies will come in’; ‘kill yourself, you can’t leave home again – you just can’t!’. The female and male voices take over every inch of her mind and thoughts. They say a lot of things and she could focus on one but it may be lying to her and she can’t think on her own

because they won't let her.

“Abenathi?” the nurse snaps her fingers in her face because it looks like she has zoned out again. The girl shifts back to the far end on the bed, she doesn't want to leave and if they want her to leave then they will have to drag her out of here because there is no way she is leaving this place on her own free will. The nurse looks at her with eyes filled with pity, she is crying again and her face looks screwed with her eyes moving around a lot. On her worst days, her face can become really bad, it'd twitch almost like she is having a stroke and when she speaks she'd sound almost like Mr Bean; it used to be funny but that was until she got to know her and she actually felt sorry for her. Such a beautiful girl with a mind that has its own feet and brain. The nurse walks out and leaves her to eat – they will have to sedate her before she leaves.

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Zobuhle

Things are not getting better, they are only getting worse – one of the patients left in a body bag last night. Finally he managed to kill himself after many failed suicide attempts. It is a sad thing to witness and I am glad that I wasn't around. He must have been really tired of living that kind of life, I would also want to tap out when I start forgetting which way is the toilet or forgetting my own name.

Believing aliens are real is the worst, some are dealing with the worst paranoia, I mean why would an army of soldiers be looking to kill an ordinary person if they are not terrorists? God was cruel when he created something as mental illness and when I die I have a lot of questions to ask him.

I drag the bucket with the mop down the passage leading to the front door and someone spilled coffee on the floor. I just know that it is one of the nurses because I have never seen any patient drinking coffee and I doubt they look twice in the direction of a glass of water, I mean surely they do think they'd drown in there. I crouch down to wipe of the coffee stain with a damp clothe, then rinse it in the bucket and wipe the floor again. I have mastered cleaning and I should win the 'Cleaner of the year' award at the end of the year. If it wasn't for me, someone would've slipped here and they'd have had to bury another person, a tiled floor is not really kind to any human skull.

When lift my eyes up as I turn to the bucket again, I am met with brown and orange socks, each one on a different foot and they look dirty and worn out like they have spent more time on those feet than not. I slowly lift my eyes a bit further up and she is wearing a knee-length yellow dress with small white flowers, it is short-sleeved and whoa! I back away nearly

falling on my butt but I quickly managed to balance on my hands. My jaw is literally on the floor and she blinks rapidly. Her long curly hair looks unkempt, it sure hasn't been washed in a long time but with and without a doubt this is Inganathi. Sister Martha comes to us and pulls her away from me, and that is when I realised that she has a stuffed grey bear in her hand that looks just as dirty as her socks.

She is stumbling all over the place like a drunk person and I am looking at them as they disappear down the hall. I thought I have seen it all but I didn't think they resurrected people here too! I do a cross over my chest mumbling a short prayer thanking God that I am still alive. I quickly stand up and pull the bucket through the front door. I can't believe I have just seen a ghost, she looked much fuller than the last time I saw her but why would Sister Martha take her away or maybe she saw her too? Working here has made me crazy too; I got rid of the water and went back inside the building so I can take my bag, and leave this place.

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In the taxi, I kept reminiscing what I saw earlier, I mean it was really her – she was there. I saw sister Martha pull her away and that means she was real but why would she look so disoriented, she didn't even say a word to me or did they do something to her so she won't remember me? I don't even know why she was there in the first place, I have to talk to someone about this – the taxi gets to town and I get another one that will take me to Glen Ashely. If she is alive then that means we buried the wrong person! The drive takes longer now because I can't hold myself, if I don't get there now then I will start blabbering everything right now and I might find myself back in the facility but not as a cleaner but as one of their patients.

I get off the taxi and start walking to his house. His car is parked outside so that means he is home. I

knock on the door and he is the one to open the door for me. I don't know what I was expecting but I can't be here to clean after him again kanti what I wrong with this guy and it doesn't look like he had a bath today. He walks to sit on the couch which I believe he slept on last night and hasn't left it besides when he needs to go to the toilet – he has turned into a rich hobo seriously.

“Are you okay?”

“I am not okay,” he chuckles bitterly and now I am more interested in knowing what exactly is going on in his mind because I am losing him – I am losing the Simbonga I knew at this point. “She got out, they let her go just like that – I can't believe this!” he bangs the coffee table and I am shocked by the sudden change of his mood. He was calm just now.

“Who and what are you talking about?”

“Nomagugu, she got out – it was all over the news this morning,” he says and then stands up. I thought that woman got a life sentence. “Inganathi must be turning in her grave.”

Um about that, how do I tell him this and where do I start? I have to tell him right? He needs to know so he can stop acting like this – Inganathi is not dead, instead she is in that nuthouse. I open my mouth to say something but he is walking away, I rush behind him and...

“God damn I am so angry Zobuhle I want to kill someone, how can they do this?! How can they let her get away with everything just like that? Till to this point they haven’t found her and lock her back inside that cell, and I am sure they are not even bothered to look for her!” a cup that I don’t know where it came from comes crushing at my feet and I scream taking a few steps back. “Can't we just get what we need – justice? Is God that cruel that he can stomp on my

heart time and time again, and deny me everything that I need? First it was Sisanda, then my relationship with my son, then it was you, Inganathi followed soon after that – and now this!” he sounds more upset than hurt.

“Where are you going?” I ask as he climbs up the stairs.

“I am going to shower then I am going out there to look for that woman myself and if I find her first then I am going to kill her. Mark my words,” he says, disappearing upstairs.

And now how am I going to tell him about Inganathi?

Uthando: Thirty-Six

Zobuhle

He just left like that yesterday and he didn't come back. I also couldn't wait for him till he came back, though I really wanted to talk to him about the events of yesterday but I guess I will have to postpone. I went to my place in the morning so I could change into clean clothes before I made my way to the facility. I had to put on my detective cap and start investigating, a dead person can't just walk into the building and stand in front of me, and I don't do anything about it – I have to dig the truth. I can't be losing my marbles and I am too young to be going through that trauma. I get out of the taxi and thank the driver for dropping at the gate, they can be nice sometimes and it is by luck that he did it out of kindness and not because he wants my numbers.

“What are you doing here Zobuhle, I thought you

weren't working today.” That’s sister Martha, she keeps tabs on every staff member around here like she is the one in charge of the hiring and firing but I am not there.

“Where is that girl from yesterday?” I ask, scanning the open area where the patients sit to have their breakfast and she is not amongst them.

“Which girl?” she looks at me a bit confused, I have never been interested in the patients before and this is new to her. I wouldn't ask about anything besides gossip or the insane events of the night before but today none of that interests me; I am here to see one person only.

“The one that came in yesterday, she was wearing a white flowered yellow dress, her hair was just a mess...and oh yes she wasn't wearing shoes,” I say the last part while snapping my fingers. I had to add it because I found it very weird but she looked

comfortable in her unmatched socks.

“Oh Abenathi!” that’s her name? “She is in room thirteen, she is a shy one so she will be having her breakfast in her room until she gets used to this place. She is a very pretty girl, I know she is...” I leave Martha to continue talking to herself, I am not in a mood for her stories – she said room thirteen right?

I walk down the passage, the smell of pee is still very much strong and it is going straight to my gut. I can’t eat in a place that smells like this but to them it doesn’t matter if the sun is rising or setting, if there's light that means they should be awake and if it is dark then they should be sleeping but there’s a few that get it wrong many times. I will not get into it I have to find this girl, I bump into a nurse and I wave to him – he is one of those people you can easily mistake for a patient if he were to remove his uniform. When I first came here I really thought he was a nutcase that was undercover but that was

before I got to know everyone around here.

I get to room thirteen and the door is closed. I knock once and open the door. There she is. I blink rapidly before stepping inside, her room smells clean and better than the rest of their rooms. I close the door behind me – I know Martha called her Abenathi but to me this person is Inganathi in a flesh and my heart is pumping at the thought of a possibility that she could be a ghost or woke up from the dead and changed her name. She is staring at the tray of a bowl of oatmeal and a glass of orange juice that tastes like water next to it. I know it tastes like water because Martha once fooled me to think that it was a 'normal' juice.

“Hi,” I greet but I don't move from my spot, I want to be close to the door should she try to do something funny. I have seen how violent they can get when they feel threatened.

She raises her index finger to her mouth to shush me and starts mumbling something to herself. They have really messed up her head, she looks nothing like the Inganathi I knew...well that is if it is really her. I move closer with calculated steps with my head tilted to the side as I observe her face as it continues to twitch and twist to the side but she looks calm with her breathing really steady. The bear is in her hands, sitting in between her leg like it is its own person. "Inganathi?" I call out taking another step and she snaps her head to me, looking rather angry for some reason – is this the part where I rush out of the room before she gets her hands on me?

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Abenathi

At the sight of light the voices start talking again, it is the worst part of everyday but she can't get them out – they are a part of her as much as she is a part of them. When she heard the lady call her Inganathi, the voices vanished and for the first time in a long time her mind was clear. She has been longing for her sister for a long time because she knew how to keep her sane, she was the only person who understood her and the voices in her mind and she managed to keep them away but since from the last day she saw her, the voices came back twice as hard and there was no escape. Does the lady know where she can find her sister? Finding her sister would be her finding her sanity, her safe place and her peace.

“Do you know Inganathi?” the lady asks and she doesn't know whether to nod or speak – the voices have done most of the work for a long time so sometimes she loses the ability to function on her own.

She lays back down on the bed and the tears escape from the corners of her eyes as she settles down on the mattress that still feel foreign but she slept like a baby last night. The voices gave her a break and that is the best welcome gift she could have ever received. Zobuhle walks towards her still keeping a safe distance, she has been close to patients but she has never been in such a small room with one so she had to be careful. “Are you okay, why aren’t you eating?” she asks looking at the girl. She looks so much like the woman she knew and it is hard for her mind not to freak out, her adrenaline is on a high level and she is not sure what to expect from the girl in front of her.

“I like my oats with milk and honey,” she says in a low tone and points to the bowl, “they added peanut butter and I don’t like it – it doesn’t make me feel nice.”

The nurse from her old home knew how she liked

her breakfast, lunch and supper – she could have the same thing everyday, the person making the food just has to make it right then she'd be happy but today they messed up her order. This is not what she eats in the morning, her body will reject it before she could swallow it down and there is no way she's going to allow her tastebuds to taste that thing. She looks at Zobuhle, who looks uncomfortable to be around her and shifts her eyes to the tray. They could've added the Lithium in the juice, that way she wouldn't be able to taste it and then when it gets into her system she will turn into an automated robot. She will be swimming in the clouds, free from the voices but the Lithium will still be holding her back from her being her own person.

“You're beautiful,” she says and tries to pull a smile but she is not getting it right instead she looks like she wants to scare Zobuhle off.

“Thanks,” Zobuhle says trying hard not be awkward

but she has been in this room more than she should have and maybe she is crossing the boundaries by invading her space like this. “You look like someone I know,” she has to tell her.

She shifts to lays on her back and the bear hasn't left her hands.

“I used to have someone who looked like me and I looked like them. Sometimes I didn't know which one was me because we were so alike, I looked at her and it was like I was looking at myself,” she says with her eyes still on the ceiling and there's a smile on her lips but it doesn't look forced like the one she pulled earlier. This one is more natural.

“You were twins?” Zobuhle asks, a bit confused. She has never thought of it and Inganathi has never mentioned anything about having a twin sister or is this girl playing games with her?

“What we had was deeper than us being twins, our connection went deeper than that of sisters, we were one in a very unique way and that is what set us apart. I was her and she was me; I am nothing without her and she is nothing without me,” now there is pain laced on her voice with a pinch of anger. She is angry that she had to spend the rest of her life without her other half, it has been nothing but torture and she has been holding onto their moments together for the longest time and seeing her face in her mind is what gets her to fall asleep, identical twins or not, looking between them there was nothing you could find different about them but they were different if you looked deeper. Her sister was able to think on her own and she couldn't.

Her sister was her sanity, she could function with her around and Inganathi never complained. Her father didn't like that very much, he'd always scold her when she'd ask Inganathi's opinion before she could do or say something. Inganathi couldn't do all the thinking for her, she had to be her own person and

when she failed to do so – she had no place in that house. God gave her a brain and she failed to use it and there was no way their father would allow his sane daughter to suffer because of her. They told her that her home was with her aunt from that day onwards and she wasn't allowed in that house for as long as she was a lunatic. As young as she was, her father didn't sugar coat it, he told it like it is and he kicked her out. He took away her home, her other half, her sanity and peace.

When the voices are kind they remind her that she is important, that she matters but it never lasts for long before the anxiety rushes in and the paranoia takes over her mind. The voices could tell her that her left face doesn't look like the right side and she'd believe it, sometimes they'd say someone is out to kill her and she should watch her back and she'd literally take two mirrors, place one at the back and the other one in the front so she can see her back. Everything with her is overanalysed, she over thinks to the point where she feels like her mind is about to explode

and that is where she'd stay awake for three days straight with no sleep. The doctors have misdiagnosed her many times, they called it intense depression, then bipolar until they said it was schizophrenia but Abenathi is none of that.

“Can you tell me about your sister?” Zobuhle requests kindly and sits on the bed while the girl tilts her head to look at her.

It is the first time anyone has ever been interested in knowing about Inganathi, about their time together or how she feels. She leaps up with excitement flowing through her bones and starts talking about how they used to play catch in the front yard, how high Inganathi used to push her on the swing that was in the back yard. The good chat they used to have during the late hours of the night, how she used to tell her sister about the voices and what they said to her. Inganathi told her not to believe a word that they said, she should listen to her because she'd

never lie to her and she believed her but that was taken away from her though she doesn't dwell on that part instead she gets out of the bed and starts singing a childhood song.

Zobuhle is laughing as she is missing all the notes but her words are right. Then she makes things worse by dancing, that makes Zobuhle burst out of laughter again. She is the worst dancer and should leave the dancing to its own people, it is by luck that she hasn't broken one of her limbs already. But there is something about her that reminds Zobuhle of Inganathi, her childish nature and the inability to stay put. The smile is almost the same – they are the same person but not exactly. Abenathi is tired and hungry by the time she concludes her dance with a bow at the end and Zobuhle claps for her. It was scary to be in this room with her but she is completely harmless. While they share a light chuckle, the door opens and Sister Martha appears.

Abenathi is sad to see Zobuhle leave, she gets too attached to people and she doesn't if she doesn't want to, Zobuhle just turned out to be one of the lucky ones. Zobuhle leaves the room, promising Abanathi that she will be back tomorrow – this is her workplace so she'd definitely be back. She knows that Martha is there to give her medication which might knock her out till tomorrow.

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Nomagugu

She has finally got her freedom and she couldn't be happier. And she is going to make the most while she is out here, she has a lot of wrongs that she needs to right but she can't do that on her own because the police are out there looking for her.

Inganathi's death is the last thing she expected, the man she has been conspiring with her left soon after she was declared guilty but that was until he pitched up out of nowhere and told her about the escape plan. She still doesn't know what he plans to do with her but she has plans of her own and she has this one person that she desperately wants to make him suffer.

"Inganathi is gone, now it is time to take away what is dear to him – the team," she says dialling a number on her phone. Her fight with Simbonga has always been about business but he made it personal by sending her to jail so she is also going to go personal on him but for now she is going to hit him on the business side, take away everything and leave him stranded before hitting him on what hurts the most.

"Hey man, listen I need a favour from you," she says after getting over the greetings with the person on

the other side of the line.

“Nomagugu you know I don’t favours for people like you – get over yourself and delete my numbers.”

“I will pay you!” she says before he hangs up and he stays on the line to hear more of what she has to say.

“I need you to get rid of some people, get them out of the country before the end of the month and I want you to start with Zobuhle Thabethe,” she says. She has people following Simbonga, she knows that he is out there looking for her but he won’t find her and she knows that Zobuhle has been spending more time in his house – she even slept there last night.

“What do you want me to do?”

“She is a soccer player so find something, an internship or something but make sure it is an offer

that she won't be able to refuse. I will send you the details of her and the other girls. Expect the deposit before the end of the day," she tells him.

"It is always a pleasure to do business with you Nomagugu."

"You are my man Weymouth and I will always take care of you, don't ever forget that."

Uthando: Thirty-Seven

Nomagugu

She has one last call to make.

“I heard you are back,” the voice said through the speaker.

“You know you can’t hold a wild dog down for longer than a minute – I am back and I am ready to make it known,” she says with a grin on her face.

“What do you want me to do?”

“I will send you the photos and details of the target; make sure to make it look like an accident, I don’t want any flops or any investigations that will lead

everything to me.”

“You have known me for a long time to doubt me Nomagugu, send me everything and I will make you proud.”

Her smile stretches wider as she cuts the call. She is the God that never forgives but repents when she has been wronged and those who have wronged her will feel her wrath, oh no she's not done yet, there's more to come and this is just the beginning of everything. She sits back on the couch and exhales softly – revenge has never tasted so good.

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Zobuhle

It's exactly seven days; seven days and I haven't seen or heard from Simbonga. As young as I am, I swear that guy will kill me of an heart attack because he's not even bothering to send a text to say that he is okay and safe. I don't even know why I worry about that old man when he can look after himself and if anything happens to him, I will know as well as the rest of the world but I am still worried. I call him again and it takes me to voicemail – again. I huff and find my feet, I have to dash to work I will worry about everything else after that. My phone rings as I am making my bed and I jump for it, thinking it is Simbonga returning my calls.

“Hello,” I answer, it is an unsaved number so I have to be neutral until the other person says something but my fingers are crossed that it be Simbonga.

“Hi, you're speaking to Ryan Weymouth. Am I speaking to Zobuhle Thabethe?”

Ryan who? The same guy that Simbonga has been accusing of killing Inganathi, why the hell is he calling me or maybe he has come back with more threats – he can't reach Simbonga so he is calling me to pass on the message. Well he came to the wrong girl because I ain't doing shit for him, I wish I was into voodoo stuff then I'd have killed him through the phone and no one would know but death will be too easy for him, maybe I should send lightning to cause him to have a stroke then he'd see that life is not here to make friends with anyone.

“What do you want?”

“It is not what I want but what I can offer you miss Thabethe,” he says and I exhale sharply, he better talk fast because I can't pause my life for a second longer for a murderer and a fraud. “I have been speaking to a lot of people about uplifting the youth, I know you don't have much going on, I mean being a

cleaner in that nuthouse and playing soccer without pay is not exactly what anyone with your status would want to do for the rest of their lives.”

I don't know which status he is talking about because I am an ordinary person living like every other person. That status he is talking about died with my father and it was buried with him, after that I have been my own person nothing special. But that doesn't mean I am not looking for opportunities to uplift my life – I have been stuck in a can for a long time waiting for an opportunity to show itself.

“Talk fast, I don't have the whole day,” I say, sitting down on the bed.

“I like your attitude and I am sure you are the perfect person for the job. I have a small team in Brazil that is looking for a player, you know how those people are eager when it comes to football so they are always looking for new talent. When I told them

about you and showed them your work they were interested to take you in.”

“But why would they take me when I am just a nobody?”

“You have talent Zobuhle and they are willing to help you realise it. I don’t know about you but I really think this is a great opportunity and I wouldn’t let it go. But the ball is in your court my lady,” he says.

“I am afraid I will not be taking anything. I already have a team here and I am happy right where I am.”

“I know your loyalty lies with that boy Simbonga but have you thought about what you want – he is good at what he does no doubt about that but where is he now? Are you really happy Zobuhle or you’re sacrificing your life for a man who is living his best life while you’re living in the backroom? This is Brazil

that I am talking about here and you don't have to give me an answer now, you can just think about it and get back to me so I can make the necessary arrangements for you."

I remain silent for a few seconds, he is sure playing with my mind right now and I am afraid because he is winning. He did his homework and this is what I need and have always wanted. I didn't play that well to end up playing for a township team for the rest of my life. This is what I need to make my breakthrough but then there is Simbonga – he has always been there for me and this would be unfair on him. I don't know what to do, I am literally stuck between a rock and a hard place.

"Let me think about it and get back to you."

"That's all I am asking," he sounds really happy, "don't take too long but always remind yourself that you are doing this for you and you have earned it.

Until we speak again miss Thabethe,” he says his goodbyes and hangs up.

I put the phone down and look up to the roof. I have a lot of thinking that I have to do but for now I have to get to work. I take my bag, leaving the bed unmade and step out of the room. Outside there is Ntombi and the other girls, they don't look happy and I know what this is about. I lock the door and head to them.

“Where is Simbonga? We have been coming here for practicing and he is never here,” that is what they say as soon as I stand in front of them.

“I don't know what is going on, I am also in the dark just like you guys,” I tell them but they are still not happy – they want answers.

“Should we look for a new coach or just forget about

playing football as a whole because what is happening here is not working for any of us. He promised us the world and now where is he?" after Slindile, Ntombi is the one who has always had a big mouth with a lot to say and with Slindile no more, she is the boss now and the rest of them bezwa ngaye.

"Angazi Ntombi, do what you want to do but what I know is Simbonga didn't just ditch the team, he has things that he needs to deal with and when he is done he will be back."

"You have just told us that you don't know where he is so why do you sound so sure that he is coming back? And when he comes back, when will that be – next year or the year after that?"

I huff, there is no way to get through her when she is in her fighting mode but she is fighting the wrong person and I don't have the answers. I don't work in

Simbonga's mind. I leave them standing there while they shout more questions that I don't have answers for; Simbonga where are you? I get a taxi and I need to go to Simbonga's house, maybe his body is decomposing in his house and no one is there to find him. I just can't help myself but think of the worst that could happen to him. The ride gives me time to think about what Weymouth told me, I will need to think more about this with a clear mind and knowing Simbonga is okay will give me that peace of mind.

I get to his house and the place looks deserted like he hasn't been here for the whole week. On the coffee table there is a note, which I guess is addressed to me and it says, 'I am not dead yet, still out looking for Nomagugu. Take care of yourself,' that's all it says. I don't know what is going on with him but he can't be out there looking for that woman on his own, I mean he could've hired a private investigator to do all the work for him. What he is doing is not healthy, now it is just an obsession and

maybe it helps him forget about focusing on the pain of losing Inganathi but he is also losing himself. The more he is out there, the more he is putting himself in danger but who am I to tell a grown man what to do – he said I should take care of myself and that is exactly what I am going to do.

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Spending time with Abenathi has been great and the more I talk to her, the more I actually realise that she is not crazy. Yeah she has issues but they run deeper than a mental illness or maybe she is like this because they made her believe that she is crazy, I don't know. Sister Martha told me that the doctor is actually happy about how Abenathi is doing, I don't know if I should call it progress but Martha told me that in her condition – people never get better, they only get worse – so I don't know what to think but I believe that she is more than just her illness and I want her to realise that. I get into her room and she

is happy to see me, I haven't yet seen her in her worst and I don't think I wish to.

"How is my favourite patient doing today?" I ask, making my way in and she is busy with something on the painting board.

"Good." I have gotten used to her one word responses. It happens often when she isn't interested in talking but blabs a lot when she is in the mood.

"What are you busy with?" I walk around to have a good look on the board. "Oh wow," I am stunned. How can she do that? I mean they called her crazy so shouldn't she be scribbling whatever that is going on in her mind. For an insane person, the eyes should be on the chin and the chin should be somewhere behind the person's head but this painting looks almost perfect. "Who taught you to do this?" I don't know who this person is but she has

given life to the painting board.

“Me.”

I want to ask how but I don't, it must be good practice and looking at this makes me wonder what more she's capable of. I have seen the dresses she wears, they don't look perfect like she bought them somewhere and they fit perfectly on her body so a thought has popped in my head that probably she made them herself but I have always pushed it to the back of my mind. This is exactly what I needed to go through what I have been thinking about, she can't be here for the rest of her life – she has to go somewhere where they won't hold her back and call her crazy. I know her parents are not an option because they have already proven that they didn't accept her, I mean what kind of a parent moves on with their lives not knowing how their child is doing, they abandoned her so I can't take her there but there is a place where she can go to.

“Abenathi,” she turns to look at me. “Do you want to get out of here?” I ask.

She looks at me, like she is thinking really hard and turns to look at the board, continuing with her painting.

“No, this is my home,” she says still focusing on what she is doing.

“Okay but if you ever change your mind, there is a place where you can go and they are lovely people. Your sister knew them and they loved her so I am sure they are going to love you too,” I look around for a piece of paper, I find it and used the paint to write the address down. “I am going away for a while so I will be happy to know that you are safe and you are living your best life. You are too young to be stuck in this place – I wish you had time to see the world and be your own person, not have to take medication or have people fearing you because they think you are

crazy. I don't think you are crazy, it is just that you see life in a different light and angle. I know Inganathi would've been happy to see you," she doesn't turn to look at me at all and I sigh, making my way to the door.

When I open the door, she looks up but with a blank stare and I hope this is not goodbye. I walk out and close the door behind me.

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Simbonga

I have been to all police stations to make it known that it is important for them to find Nomagugu. That woman is a danger to the society and the country as

a whole, who knows what she is up to. I am not worried about myself but I am worried about everyone who have suffered in her hands and those who are going to suffer since they let her go. They say she escaped but she wouldn't have escaped if they were watching her. These police are useless, they can't do one thing and that is their job but they will be quick to arrest those who take law into their own hands because they are doing what the police failed to do. I wish execution was still legal, Nomagugu is a waste of space and she deserves to die!

My phone has been off since last night but now I switch it on. I tried getting a hold of Mr Obennebo and he is not around, he left the country just after the funeral. His wife says it is a business trip but I doubt it, his daughter's death hit him hard and he is selfish enough to leave his wife to mourn on her own. I don't think he knows that Nomagugu is out because if he knew then he'd be here already, helping me to look for that dog – I hate her with

every fibre in my body and knowing she is out there sipping on cocktails instead of being punished for her sins makes my blood boil. My phone is flooded by messages and missed calls, most are from Zobuhle but there is one message that attracts my attention.

'I know where Nomagugu is, reply to this number and I will send you an address.' It says.

I quickly reply without thinking twice and another message comes in with the address. I have been living in my car for the past five days, always on the road searching and most of all trying to forget about the pain. I just need something to focus on that will numb the pain and alcohol isn't helping but looking for Nomagugu is what keeps me fuelled up and looking forward to the next day, to make progress and eventually find her. This address is what I needed, I quickly put it in my GPS and started the car. I make a U-turn and follow the GPS. This is a perfect

place for her to hide, I have never been there before but I have heard that there aren't many people who usually go there so hiding there is like being off the grid.

As I am driving, a message pops in and I think whoever sent me the message is following up but it is a different number with a photo of Zobuhle and it looks like she's going somewhere. Are they after her too? The text says, 'I told you to leave the game before it cripples you,' it doesn't say where or who sent the message but I remember the person who said those words to me and it's Nomagugu! I step on the accelerator and on the intersection the robot is green but when I am in a middle, a truck comes out of nowhere and with one blink it hits my car, and the car started rolling. One second it was up, the next it was down – it happened so fast and the next I knew my lungs were burning and I was drifting in and out of sleep. I fought the urge to close my eyes but I was losing and a second later, everything went dark.

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Uthando: Thirty-Seven

Nomagugu

She has one last call to make.

“I heard you are back,” the voice said through the speaker.

“You know you can’t hold a wild dog down for longer than a minute – I am back and I am ready to make it known,” she says with a grin on her face.

“What do you want me to do?”

“I will send you the photos and details of the target; make sure to make it look like an accident, I don’t want any flops or any investigations that will lead

everything to me.”

“You have known me for a long time to doubt me Nomagugu, send me everything and I will make you proud.”

Her smile stretches wider as she cuts the call. She is the God that never forgives but repents when she has been wronged and those who have wronged her will feel her wrath, oh no she's not done yet, there's more to come and this is just the beginning of everything. She sits back on the couch and exhales softly – revenge has never tasted so good.

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Zobuhle

It's exactly seven days; seven days and I haven't seen or heard from Simbonga. As young as I am, I swear that guy will kill me of an heart attack because he's not even bothering to send a text to say that he is okay and safe. I don't even know why I worry about that old man when he can look after himself and if anything happens to him, I will know as well as the rest of the world but I am still worried. I call him again and it takes me to voicemail – again. I huff and find my feet, I have to dash to work I will worry about everything else after that. My phone rings as I am making my bed and I jump for it, thinking it is Simbonga returning my calls.

“Hello,” I answer, it is an unsaved number so I have to be neutral until the other person says something but my fingers are crossed that it be Simbonga.

“Hi, you're speaking to Ryan Weymouth. Am I speaking to Zobuhle Thabethe?”

Ryan who? The same guy that Simbonga has been accusing of killing Inganathi, why the hell is he calling me or maybe he has come back with more threats – he can't reach Simbonga so he is calling me to pass on the message. Well he came to the wrong girl because I ain't doing shit for him, I wish I was into voodoo stuff then I'd have killed him through the phone and no one would know but death will be too easy for him, maybe I should send lightning to cause him to have a stroke then he'd see that life is not here to make friends with anyone.

“What do you want?”

“It is not what I want but what I can offer you miss Thabethe,” he says and I exhale sharply, he better talk fast because I can't pause my life for a second longer for a murderer and a fraud. “I have been speaking to a lot of people about uplifting the youth, I know you don't have much going on, I mean being a

cleaner in that nuthouse and playing soccer without pay is not exactly what anyone with your status would want to do for the rest of their lives.”

I don't know which status he is talking about because I am an ordinary person living like every other person. That status he is talking about died with my father and it was buried with him, after that I have been my own person nothing special. But that doesn't mean I am not looking for opportunities to uplift my life – I have been stuck in a can for a long time waiting for an opportunity to show itself.

“Talk fast, I don't have the whole day,” I say, sitting down on the bed.

“I like your attitude and I am sure you are the perfect person for the job. I have a small team in Brazil that is looking for a player, you know how those people are eager when it comes to football so they are always looking for new talent. When I told them

about you and showed them your work they were interested to take you in.”

“But why would they take me when I am just a nobody?”

“You have talent Zobuhle and they are willing to help you realise it. I don’t know about you but I really think this is a great opportunity and I wouldn’t let it go. But the ball is in your court my lady,” he says.

“I am afraid I will not be taking anything. I already have a team here and I am happy right where I am.”

“I know your loyalty lies with that boy Simbonga but have you thought about what you want – he is good at what he does no doubt about that but where is he now? Are you really happy Zobuhle or you’re sacrificing your life for a man who is living his best life while you’re living in the backroom? This is Brazil

that I am talking about here and you don't have to give me an answer now, you can just think about it and get back to me so I can make the necessary arrangements for you."

I remain silent for a few seconds, he is sure playing with my mind right now and I am afraid because he is winning. He did his homework and this is what I need and have always wanted. I didn't play that well to end up playing for a township team for the rest of my life. This is what I need to make my breakthrough but then there is Simbonga – he has always been there for me and this would be unfair on him. I don't know what to do, I am literally stuck between a rock and a hard place.

"Let me think about it and get back to you."

"That's all I am asking," he sounds really happy, "don't take too long but always remind yourself that you are doing this for you and you have earned it."

Until we speak again miss Thabethe,” he says his goodbyes and hangs up.

I put the phone down and look up to the roof. I have a lot of thinking that I have to do but for now I have to get to work. I take my bag, leaving the bed unmade and step out of the room. Outside there is Ntombi and the other girls, they don't look happy and I know what this is about. I lock the door and head to them.

“Where is Simbonga? We have been coming here for practicing and he is never here,” that is what they say as soon as I stand in front of them.

“I don't know what is going on, I am also in the dark just like you guys,” I tell them but they are still not happy – they want answers.

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playing football as a whole because what is happening here is not working for any of us. He promised us the world and now where is he?" after Slindile, Ntombi is the one who has always had a big mouth with a lot to say and with Slindile no more, she is the boss now and the rest of them bezwa ngaye.

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Uthando: Thirty-Eight

Zobuhle

Right after closing my shift I got a call from Aunt Nomsa, she sounded distress and she said I must come home. I don't know why because I was banned from setting my foot there but she insisted, saying that it is urgent. Now I am here, again, standing in front of the gate in disguise. I couldn't really show my face while walking down the streets because the villagers would've surely chased me away. I walked through the gate and headed to the house. The door opens quickly after I knock like she has been waiting for me but she doesn't look good – something is wrong. And finding her here must mean that she agreed to marry that man who killed my mother, she betrayed her sister just for the family customs but what am I saying because now things have changed – blood is no longer thicker than water – you can trust a stranger but not one of your own.

“What happened?” I haven't asked how she is, what I want to know is why am I here.

“He...” she is struggling to talk now and her eyes are watering with each passing second, what could be so bad? “He is in the bedroom,” she points down the passage and walks past me surely wanting me to follow behind her.

We walk to the bedroom with her keeping glancing at me and I feel uncomfortable for some reason. This house feels cold and empty. It is no longer warm nor a home, it is just walls with a roof. Even the expensive furniture I saw when I came for my mother's funeral doesn't glitter anymore, it is like they were hit by a heavy storm or lightning and all its value vanished instantly. I wouldn't buy it even if they sold it next to nothing. I don't know how Aunt Nomsa survived in this place living with that monster. She opens the door for me and I look at her, I am not

going in there first – who knows what is behind that door. She gives me a faint smile that is too weak, it doesn't even reach her eyes and she steps inside the room.

I follow behind her and a very bad smell hits my nostrils, sending me back to the open door. I haven't seen anything but I don't think I wish to right now.

“What the hell is that?” I ask her, she is standing in the room like she doesn't smell any of that stuff, it is so bad it is like something died in there. I want to vomit but my body won't allow me.

“Come Zobuhle,” she is waving for me to come closer. I don't think I have the strength but I have come all this way so I have to do what she called me here for.

I walk in again with my t-shirt pulled up to my nose, covering both my mouth and nose. I turn on the bed

and there he is. There is nothing left of him but his skeleton even his skin looks too thin with just a scratch I can get the whole thing off his body. I don't think there is any meat left in there, it's just water and blood – oh don't forget air. But where is that smell coming from? Aunt Nomsa wants to leave but I don't allow her to, she needs to explain to me what happened here and why he is like that.

“I woke up one morning and I couldn't find him around the house. We don't sleep in the same bed so I wasn't even sure if he slept at home the night before. But when I walked into the garage, I found him on the floor but that was after a horrible smell greeted me first, I also thought he was dead but it was too soon for him to decompose so I went over to him and he was good as dead but still breathing. We went to the hospital, they didn't find anything wrong with him, the traditional healer didn't see anything either but one thing for sure is that he is paying for his sins and that is all we got from the healer. They couldn't keep him in the hospital when

there was nothing to help him with so he has been here and it's not looking good Zobuhle. Each day I wake up thinking maybe I will find him dead but he'd be alive, he breaths but doesn't talk – the last time he spoke was the night before I found him on the garage floor,” she informs me.

The story sounds so good, I could make a movie out of it and get paid real hard money. He looks really bad but I don't feel anything about it, this man made my life miserable, he took away everything I have ever known – my home! I don't know what to say or think but he deserves this and he is paying a good price. Who said God doesn't repent for his people? He is doing a lot right now and I couldn't be happier. I know it is bad to wish another person bad but I wish for him to die like a dog he is. If it is my forgiveness that he is waiting for before he dies then he will wait like we all have been waiting for Jesus, son of Maria and Joseph, to come back. I am not giving him shit!

“Zobuhle?” Aunt Nomsa calls for me as I make my way out and I don’t turn to look at her until we are in the kitchen, away from that horrible smell. “You have to forgive him,” she tells me and I chuckle bitterly.

“I will not, not now, not ever! Do you know what he did when we needed him the most, you know what he’d do to my mother behind closed doors every single night, the way he’d pretend that he loves us when people are watching, the way he didn’t think twice before chasing me out like a dog in my own home – do you know Aunt Nomsa? Do you?”

I don’t want to cry, that is the last thing I want to do right now and that man doesn’t deserve my tears, he is nothing to me but I sure want him to suffer. I know he is hurting while looking like that but the emotional pain he inflicted on me is much more than what he is feeling right now. Couldn't he just die? Die before he killed my mother – why did God have to let him get away with it? Even now, laying on that bed he is still

making my life a living hell, why is he forcing me, putting me in this position in order to get my forgiveness? He was never kind and right now it shows that he is not willing to change. If there is afterlife then I feel sorry for anyone on that side but I am not worried about my mother because I know that my father will be there to protect her.

“I know.”

“No, you don’t. You are just buttering me up so I’d forgive him and you’d be free from cleaning after him – I am not doing this to punish you Aunt but I am not going to forgive that man,” I say pointing to the direction of the bedroom we just came out of.

“He is good as dead Zobuhle, you know that you forgiving him will set him free but it will also set you free my baby,” she says sweetly, I want to believe her I really do but it is hard to even think about it. It feels like forgiving him will make me vulnerable for him to

continue to hurt me. He will be taking a part of me, again and I don't want that.

"He is not worth my forgiveness," I shake my head while taking a sit on the chair next to the counter.

"But you are worth of peace, aren't you tired of all this anger you have buried inside your heart, all the heartache and pain?" she asks sitting right next to me. "I can see it in your eyes Zobuhle, you have too much going on inside you and you need to let it go. Forgive yourself, forgive your mother, your father and him." She takes my hand and I turn to look at her.

"I am not ready."

"Take your time, I am here for you and this is your home where your mother and father are. And no man can ever take it away from you, he tried but see where you are now – you deserve to be here

Zobuhle.”

Looking at her makes me realise just how much I miss my mother.

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Abenathi

Her new home looks much better than the clinic she was in but the treatment is not as nice. In the clinic she got what she wanted, when she wanted it but here they are treating her like a patient and not a human being. She takes more medication than she ever did in her life and spends more time asleep than awake. She doesn't even get time to do her activities – the painting, sewing – it gets better when she gets

her hands into scientific experiments though she doesn't get to do it much since she is still labelled the 'unstable creature' that people believe can't do anything tangible than talking and acting crazy. She loves science because it makes her use her brain a lot, that way she can keep the voices away but with no option to get close to any scientific experiments, sewing and painting keeps her busy.

She reaches for the piece of paper that Zobuhle gave her and looks at the words written there. She dropped out of school on the 9th grade and that is where her aunt lost it, she was a rebellious child so she was going to be treated as such and she got a few spanks and a lot of shouting which her aunt believed she deserved. Her parents sent her to her aunt because she could set their daughter straight and when she is done Abenathi could come back home but she didn't need fixing because she wasn't broken. The words made sense but where to from here and how would she get to the address? The flies are having a feast on her food that is laid on a

tray which she knows as been laced with more medication.

The walk to the bathroom feels like a day and a half, the medication from yesterday hasn't wore off completely but she braces herself and tries to walk and look normal. It happens rarely where she'd be act like a normal person, it could be on one particular week once a year and after that the voices will take over waya-way. In the bathroom, she looks at herself in the mirror and her hair is all over her face. She reaches for it and pushes it to the back, revealing more of her caramel smooth skin which looks clean for someone who hasn't washed her face since...she can't remember when was the last time she washed her face. It could've been a minute ago, a week ago or two years ago but it doesn't matter.

She still remembers how to plait so she plaits one single knot behind her head, there is a few strands of

hair that is still on her face but most of her face is visible now which makes her look different and more sane. She drops her eyes to her feet and the socks look dirty as always but she can't remove them, she doesn't know why but she just can't. She makes her way out and the patients are scattered all over the place, all of them look old and she is the youngest – the one who is said she doesn't belong here but her brain says otherwise. The front door is open and there is no nurse on sight. She walks towards it and a nurse appears but he doesn't seem to recognise her. She has spent most of her time in her room so it'd be no doubt if the nurse doesn't even know her.

The security guard is whistling while pacing up and down, as she approaches the door he smiles in her direction and continues whistling and minding his own business. The patients can make their way to the park but not to the gate. That is forbidden but she makes her way there while looking over her shoulders. It is a surprise to her that she has made it this far with no one seeing her, at the gate there's

another security guard who is busy reading a newspaper and she walks to the gate without looking at him but the gate is locked.

“Can I help you ma’am?” he asks, squinting his eyes as he looks up to the woman in front of him – when did she get in because he didn’t allow anyone who looks like her since his shift started?

“Yes, open the gate.” It is a bit of a struggle to get the words out without pausing in between so she keeps what she wants to say short and straight to the point.

The security guard closes the newspaper and stands up. He walks towards her and says, “I didn’t see you walking in, why are you here?”

“My dog...cat...” she says trying to figure out a lie to tell but it is not easy. It is better when it is the voices

lying to her and not the other way around. The security guard is confused, this is not SPCA so why would she be here for her dog and cat? But she looks better to be one of the patients, she must have come in during the morning shift while there was his colleague here.

“The SPCA is in Springfield park, I don’t know where exactly but I am sure you will find it,” the guard says while walking to the gate to unlock it. “Have yourself a good day.”

She looks at the man and the open gate – this is it but why is it so easy? She walks out without saying another word and when she is a few feet away the guard notices that she is not wearing shoes but is rather wearing socks only. He shakes his head while mumbling to himself as he locks the gate – anyone who enters that building surely comes out with a few screws loose. She walks to the main road, not knowing which way to go – north or south? They

both look the same but she has to get to the address and the other side of the road looks much better to walk on so she crosses the road. A car hoots loud, deafening her ears and she comes to a halt while holding onto her ears blocking the howling loud sound from reaching her eardrums.

The driver gets out of the car, worried that she might be hurt even though the car didn't even touch her. The passenger is curious so she also steps out of the car, leaving a young boy in the backseat. As they approach Abenathi, they can see that she is shaking and probably crying.

"Are you hurt?" the driver asks and Abenathi shakes her head.

"Are you sure?" the passenger asks, while tilting her head to the side in order to get a better view of the girl's face. Abenathi nods.

“Let's get back in the car, we still have to get to the hospital,” the driver says while turning to walk back to the car but the passenger walks to the opposite direction and when she sees Abenathi's face, her chest closes in as her body gets the shock of her life.

“Baba!” she calls out with her hands over her head.

The driver is a bit annoyed but turns back, what is taking her so long and why does she look like that, like she has just seen a ghost? He hurries to her, he wants to push the girl out of the road so they can continue with their journey but he also gets the shock of his life – it can't be. Abenathi lowers her arms like she was told to and she hugs her body, the piece of paper that was in her hand falls down to the ground. The boy in the backseat shifts to sit on the edge of the seat, they have been here for a long time and the cars are hooting for them to move so what could be so important that both his grandparents

had to get out of the car? The passenger bends to take the piece of paper and reads what is written there, shock washes over her again and she gives the man to read as well.

“Where did you get this?” the driver asks.

Abenathi is slowly drifting back to being herself, the voices are slowly coming back and she is shivering while trying to collect her thoughts.

“Zo-Zobuhle,” she finally says and the man and woman look at each other.

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Nomagugu

She has just received a phone call from his contact to update her that the job has been done and the target is in hospital. Things are not looking good for him so it is a job well done. She is busy sipping on her whiskey while giving herself a pat on the back. Things are going well and it is time to move to the next step. She wants to be the one to finish him off, she wants to be the last thing he sees when he takes his last breathe and send him to hell. After that she will buy herself a ticket to an island where no one will ever find her, she has enough money to survive and there are people who still owe her so she has more than enough.

The door opens and she nearly spills her drink at the sight of the man who appears behind the door. He doesn't look happy and why does he have a...

“What did I tell you Nomagugu? Didn’t I tell you that I

don't want him dead?!" he roars and she finds her feet. She knows how crazy he can get when he is angry, he sure does look high and him having a gun in his hand makes matters worse. It'd take Nomagugu a long calculated step for her to reach for her own gun – she has to shoot him first before he shoots her.

"You are too soft on that boy, he needs to be taught a lesson – no one messes with me and lives to tell the tale. He will die and I will be the one to do it!" she shoots back.

"Over my dead body, I still want to see him suffer and you have messed with the wrong person Nomagugu for what you did. Don't you understand how him being alive is valuable to me?" he sounds like he is about to breakdown – is he losing his mind too, who cries over another man, a man that he hates?

“Don't be crazy man, just kill the bastard and we c–” she doesn't finish what she wanted to say as the man raises the gun and points to her. He can't be thinking of killing her, no he is bluffing. They make a good team and he needs her.

“First of all I am not crazy, secondly I thought you're the man I needed on my side but I can see that the famine hormones are going to your head and I will tell you now – you are no use to me right now,” he says and cocks the gun, it dawns on Nomagugu that shit has hit the fan.

“No Enz–”

Bang!

The blood and human brain pieces paint the plain white painted wall opposite him. He lowers the gun and reaches for the whiskey on the table. “Cheers,”

he says before throwing the content in his mouth.
This is his game and he will be the one who says
who needs to participate and who needs to be
eliminated.

Uthando: Thirty-Nine

Abenathi

The woman and man she met left her in the car while they went inside the hospital and it took them an hour, 24 minutes and 38 seconds to come back. Her stomach has been growling since she sat there, she didn't have breakfast and she left her lunch to be eaten by the flies. The nurses in the facility must have noticed that she is gone now and they have sent a search party to look for her. The hospital is not very far from the facility so it won't take them long to get where she is but things work in her favour because when the people she is with come back and they didn't waste time – the car is on the road within seconds. The small boy is sitting next to her, he is not young but she still crawls to sit far away from him – she is not much of a fan of children and being around one freaks her out.

The car parks in front of a house and Abenathi was expecting a long drive, she was hoping that she'd be far away from that place like the address on that piece of paper had said so why is she still here? The woman helps her get out of the car since she stayed inside even when she saw that everyone has stepped out of the car. The woman pulls her to the door and the small boy has been stealing glances at the woman who looks exactly like his father's dead girlfriend. He has watched many movies but this is the last thing he expected to happen in his life – the woman hasn't said a word to him and that makes her even more creepy but his grandparents are making it look like it is a normal thing to have a ghost amongst them.

They all walk inside the house, their son is not awake yet but when he visited he told his parents where he lived. What is his is his parents' so that's why they have the key to the house. Abenathi sits on the couch at the woman's instruction, the boy is scared to sit next to her as much as she is scared for him to

be close to her. Instead of sitting down the boy runs upstairs to look for a room to mark as his before his grandma dictates for him. The woman and man look at each other, none of them know how to approach the situation – she was dead so what is she doing here looking well and alive but disoriented – they could call Zobuhle but they don't have her number so they have to deal with the situation themselves.

“How are you child?” the woman asks, walking towards her but Abenathi doesn't answer. If you are not in front of her, looking into her eyes she wouldn't know if you're speaking to her or not. The woman walks around and looks at her then repeats the question.

“I'm hungry,” she says, looking at the woman in front of her. It's like there is something in her stomach eating up her intestines and she doesn't like how she is feeling.

“I will make you something to eat. Do you mind telling me your name?” the woman's approach is very soft and warm, it makes her relax and feel safe around these people she doesn't know. She looks around and meets the eyes of the man standing over them, she quickly looks away and looks at the woman in front of her.

“Abenathi.”

The woman nods, “your surname?”

Abenathi thinks for a while, thinking really hard about what she will say but nothing pops inside her head. She has been Abenathi with Mr Fuzzy Wuzzy next to her...thinking of Mr Fuzzy Wuzzy – where is he? She finds her feet really fast, losing the bear means losing her memories. She needs the bear with her so it'd help her remember maybe it will help her remember her surname but with it not here she is just Abenathi, with no past, no sister and no identity.

“What is wrong now?” the woman asks at the sight of the girl's face. Did she say something wrong by asking her surname, she has to know who she is in order to connect the dots – she looks exactly like the person they know is dead so they need answers but now she looks in distress.

“Get her something to eat mkami maybe that will calm her down,” the man says.

The woman walks away, heading to the kitchen. Abenathi is crying hysterically now, what will she be without her bear – she needs to find it even if it means going back to that place then so be it. The man walks to sit on the couch and switches the tv on. Abenathi moves to the other side of the room – she doesn't like the noise it is making, it makes her head a bit fuzzy even when she can't think on her own she hates having a lot of things happening around her and she likes quiet spaces. The woman comes back with a sandwich and hands it to

Abenathi. She takes it and sinks to the floor, without a word to the woman she starts eating like she had been stuck in some dungeon and they denied her food. Within exactly four minutes, she was done, she looked up to the woman and said thank you.

“Do you want more?” she asks.

“No I would like to sleep, then a glass of water when I wake up – I don’t really like it when people wake me up from my sleep and that thing is making a lot of noise,” she points to the tv.

“I am sure from upstairs you won’t hear a sound, sit up and let me find you a room so you can sleep.”

The woman is too sweet, there is something about her that reminds Abenathi of her sister, yeah she reminds her of her sister and not her own mother. Her mother wasn’t close to her because her father told her not to, she wasn't their child because she wasn't sane enough to be but this woman doesn't

even know her and she feels comfortable around her.

The bedroom is plain white, the same as the one she spent seven years in in that clinic and she loves it already. She crawls on top of the bed and lays on the bed facing up with her hands laid on her chest.

Within a minute of closing her eyes, she was already snoring softly. The woman closed the door and went downstairs. She has to talk to her husband about this and find a way forward before their son wakes up in that hospital bed.

“She sleeps like she is laying in a coffin baba, it is scary,” the woman says as she settles next to her husband.

“Who is she? Inganathi is dead and we were there when they buried her.”

“I know, there is more to this than it meets the eye,

worse she looks disturbed maybe it is Inganathi and they messed up with her head.”

“I doubt it, why call herself Abenathi if it is her? I thought about it – the two names sound similar, Inganathi and Abenathi, my guess is that they are actually twins,” the man says sounding really convincing.

“But then why no one ever said anything about Inganathi having a twin sister? Simbonga also didn’t say anything so that means he doesn’t know,” it all makes sense now.

“It is a messed up situation but what are we going to do about her, she surely escaped from the hospital and we have to take her back.”

“No we can’t, ngiyala baba, she wouldn't have left that place if she liked being there,” the woman

argues and the man turns to look at her.

“Have you ever lived with a mentally unstable person? Those people are unpredictable, she might wake up and decide that she wants to kill all of us and we have a child in the house; don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

The woman sucks her teeth, stealing a glance at her husband, “I will handle it – leave her to me.” There is no way she will take that girl back, she looks troubled but she doesn't need a hospital, she needs to be understood.

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Zobuhle

I feel a presence of someone in my room so I open my eyes and she is here, "ma," I say sitting upright and she walks closer to me. The room is dark but I can see her clear like she is the light and she is smiling which means that she is at peace. Her presence is overwhelming and I feel myself already tearing up. "Zozo," I hear his voice coming from behind my mother and he is here too. I have my parents both in one room, God knows just how much I missed them and I want them to stay, stay with me and never leave me ever again. They appear to be close to me, I still can't believe my eyes and I want to cry more. "You're really here?" I want to touch them but I can't reach to them.

"We are here, we have always been here but you weren't." She makes it sound like it is my fault when she conspired with her second husband to get me out of the house and she didn't bother to go out

there and look for me. She moved on like she never cared about me. Baba is betraying me for forgiving her, he should've punished her a little while longer – who chooses a man's side over her own child? “You know why I wasn't home, you both left me with those people and who did you think would protect me.” I say getting upset, I am very angry at both of them. “You are stronger than you think Zozo and you weren't alone like your mother had said we have been here all the time. We're watching over you, everything that happened was meant to happen for you to realise your strength.”

“I am sorry for what I did to you my baby, I was wrong and I know it – please forgive me,” she is crying and my father is comforting her. “I have forgiven you.” I say. “But not wholeheartedly,” the man I call my father says much to my frustration and I sigh deeply. “I forgive you, I really do I mean there is no point of holding onto what happened in the past against you. You are in a better place and I have to move on,” I say and I mean it. “You also need to

forgive Bheki,” my father says and I look away. I don’t want to talk about that man with a mention of me forgiving him, all I want to know is how he will be punished on the other side that’s if he will get there because he is not going anywhere because I am not forgiving him any time soon. “You have to forgive him so you be able to move on, don’t punish yourself honey, he is not worth it. Allow your heart to forgive, I will rest easily knowing well that you are happy and well inside and out.”

“I don’t think I can,” I say. “I know you can, make us proud and yourself proud by breaking the chains that tie you to that man,” he says looking at me with a look that makes me feel guilty. “Forgiveness will heal you and you will be in a better place,” she reaches out for me and I swear I felt her touch me without her actually touching me. “You're our treasure, old as you are you will always be our little girl and we will watch over you, never forget us Zozo,” I can feel it that he is saying goodbye but I don’t want them to leave just yet. I want us to talk about something else

besides forgiveness and that monster. I want to talk about us. “Ma!” I call out, “Dad?” – they are gone.

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Simbonga

You know when you are in a bad dream and you feel like something is pulling you down? Well that is exactly how I am feeling and it is hard to get out of the small box my body seems to be stuck in. I flip my eyes open, the room is dark, I blink rapidly – am I in hell? They said that place is dark and now I am in a dark room so no one can blame my paranoia.

There is someone walking towards me, it is all happening in slow motion and I am still trying to make up my mind as to what is going on here. Next thing there is a doctor standing over me, asking me

my name and I say the first thing that comes to mind.

“How long have I been here?” I ask when my head has cleared a bit.

“You have been here for a week and three days, and to be honest with you I wanted you to stay in coma for a bit longer but here you are wide awake,” the doctor says but he looks happy than disappointed.

“His vitals look good doctor,” the nurse says and the doctor nods.

While the nurse is busy writing something on file, the doctor moves to stand by my feet and looks at me.

“You were in a very bad accident and it is by luck that you didn’t suffer any brain damage, like I said you need to be in coma but I am happy with your progress though there is something else,” he says flipping off the sheet that is covering my lower body,

“a nerve was disturbed during the crush so...” he pauses for a second looking at my face for a reaction but I don’t give him none. “...it is confirmed Mr Masuku that you have a paralysis, you didn’t feel anything when I touched your feet,” he says raises a mental that I don't know it’s name.

“What...” I try moving my feet thinking he is messing with me but I can’t move them even my toes. It is like I am looking at someone else's feet. This can’t be happening, no it can’t.

“The situation could be temporary sir but time will tell. You look good so I will be discharging you soon, put you on a wheelchair and once you have fully healed we can start on physiotherapy.”

He turns to the nurse and I am busy looking at my feet. Without my feet, I am nothing and I remember Nomagugu’s words very clear – “leave the game before it cripples you” she was right and she has

won once again.

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My parents came to pick me up three days after I had woken up and I was happy to be going home but they were weird for some reason. My mother set a room for me downstairs and that is where I am sleeping. My first nap at home never felt so good, the hospital bed was less comfy despite of how much I paid for comfort. When I open my eyes after a good nap, I am met by the doe brown eyes I have always loved looking into, her hair is on her face so I extended my hand to remove the hair off her face. I thought I was dreaming but her hair feels real, she is really here even her skin is just as smooth as I remember. As she blinks, I realise just how close I am to her.

She has come back for me and I can feel relief washing over me. I had to go through that accident

to wake up from that horrible dream. She never died, I was dreaming the whole time and right now she is right next to me. There is no way I am ever letting her go from now on, I am going to hold onto her tightly and I will protect her with all of me. They will have to go through me to get to her. She doesn't say anything as I caress the side of her face, she looks peaceful, looking deep into my eyes like I am looking into hers. I scan her face, looking for the scar of the bullet but it is not there – my Buggie is really here. I pull her closer to me to kiss her but she flinches and fear washes over her face. I blink rapidly, I am in my house and I am wide awake so I can't be dreaming.

My eyes fall back on the doe eyes again and “Hhaa!” I screamed pushing myself away from her instead of pushing her. She looked so scared, she ran out of the room without looking back while I fell off the bed hitting the floor head first, “Ma!”

Uthando: Forty

Abenathi

She woke up in her room after her daily nap and the house was very quiet. Even in the lounge the tv was off, the sweet old lady was not in the kitchen and the boy was not in his room. She hasn't been able to concentrate on anything, the medication she was taking is completely off her system and the voices have become aggressive – 'kill yourself, you're not worth living'; 'this is your chance to run away and no one will know'; 'I have always known that you can not trust those people, look she is coming with a knife behind you!' she turned to look back but there was no one there; 'kill them before they kill you'; 'you're not worthy, you are stupid, dumb, slow and you stink!'; 'the world would be a better place without you'; 'cry baby, cry that's what you're good at anyway' – the voice mocks and just like that she starts being overwhelmed by a lot of emotions.

She needs a place to hide, to hide from herself because she can't take it anymore. She turns around to climb up the stairs again but a closed door catches her attention, she remembers quite well that it was open the last few days she has been here so it being closed made her curious – ‘go check it out maybe we could find a treasure’; ‘a dead body is what you are going to find’; ‘you’re trespassing, the old woman told you to stay in your room!’; ‘she won’t do it, she’s too much of a scaredy-cat’ – the voices weren’t encouraging much but her feet had their own mind so she found herself right in front of the door with her hand on the handle. The door opens and the room is just as quiet as the rest of the house.

She walks in and closes the door behind her. It is white, just like the room she sleeps in upstairs and that gives her more reason to walk around and admire it. Then there’s someone sleeping on top of the bed, she tilts her head to the side and she hasn’t never seen the man before. On the other side of the bed there is a chair, from where she is standing she

can't see that it is actually a wheelchair but it doesn't matter to her because she doesn't like black very much. The man is sleeping peacefully on the bed but who is he? Without thinking twice, she laid next to him looking at and scanning his face, he was scarred because of the accident and that was fascinating to her. She has never seen a person like that before, he even has a Band-Aid on his forehead – it is similar to the one she used to have on her scratched knee when she was young so she touched it out of curiosity.

The man moved, he is waking up but she didn't mean to wake him up. Her eyes gobbled out at the sight of his opened eyes, he was still taking in short and steady breaths like he was still sleeping. The way he was looking at her was...there's no correct word to explain it but she felt compelled to look at him to. He touched her and she didn't even flinch – where did the voices go? The man seems to be drawn to her in a way that she can't understand, she doesn't know him so how does he know her – she

was waiting for him to freak out and chase her out of his room but he is not. He comes closer, hitting her face with his warm breathe; he looks harmless but is he going to eat her? He sees her face then he looks around and then at her. "Hhaa!" he screams and she panics thinking she did something wrong, he didn't only just scream, he is also trying to get away from her.

The fear on his face freaked her out, he screams out again and she runs to door without waiting to find out what happened or what went wrong. Her whole body was shaking, she feared for her own life and she could hear her own heart beating against her chest like a war drum. She runs into the lounge and there is a shadow of a person she didn't leave behind when she went into that room. She hasn't seen the person's face but the fear in her has doubled up already. Her face twitches and twists as the voices chant inside her head again, filling her head with more theories and fantasies. The person turns to look at her and it is a man she has never

seen before – huh, two male strangers in one house, where is she and what is going on?

“Hey sweetness,” he says sounding calm and anything but sweet. There is something about him that is unsettling, the man she left in the other room was sweet and peaceful it is just him screaming that freaked her out and he is still screaming.

The man she doesn't know walks towards her, he has a smile on his face and he is scanning her with interests. He better say something because all the things that the voices are filling her mind with are not really kind, the one thing she wants to do right now is to find a safe space, curl up in the corner and cry while waiting for someone to come to save her. “Hey I didn't know there was two of you – Simbonga has always been lucky. The woman he loved died and now he has been gifted with another one?” he chuckles and she is puzzled, nothing he said made sense to her but still it wasn't funny. He is coming

close to her and her eyes roam around, the room she was in is a bit too far from where she is standing and on her left...yes the bathroom!

She runs to the bathroom and tries to close the door but she is too late, the man has put his foot on the doorway, blocking the door from closing. He pushes the door to open and the force pushes Abenathi to hit the floor with tears streaming down her face. "Oh sweetness, we are going to have a lot of fun together," he says closing the door behind him and stepping towards her while she reverses until she hits the wall. He crouches in front of her and says, "get in the shower, you stink!"

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Simbonga

“Ma!” I call out again and it remains silent.

There is a lot of pain shooting through my bones and I just want it to go away. After full five minutes no one shows their face, not even my father – did they abandon me already? I thought they will stay until I am fully capable to do things by myself. I pull the wheelchair close to me, if no one can help me I will have to find a way to help myself and we all learn the hard way so I guess on my first day back from hospital I won't get to act like a big baby and have my mother feeding me her famous chicken soup or something close to that. It is hard to get on the wheelchair without stopping a few seconds in between because of the pain but I get it right and I wheel myself to the door.

The house is very quiet, like there is no one but there is a sound of running water coming from the

bathroom here on the ground floor. No one ever uses that bathroom, unless someone was too lazy to shower upstairs or their shower is broken. "Ma!" I call out again but no one replies. I wheel myself to the door and knock. The water continue to run and I knock again then it stops. The door opens revealing a face I haven't seen in years, he is smirking so I guess he is happy to be here but I don't clearly understand why he is here, in my house. He is fully dressed so who was in the shower, my eyes look past him and she is sitting on the floor, wet and shivering – I thought I was dreaming!

"Enzokuhle, what are you doing in my house?" I ask, slowly looking up to him and now I realise what a mess he actually is. He looks like he hasn't slept for days, his eyes are bloodshot red, he has dark patches under his eyes and his whole face says that he is fucked up really bad.

"I came to surprise you – are you surprised?" I see

he is amused by this whole idea of him being here in my presence. "Look what they have done to you," he points to the my legs, "the mighty Simbonga has fallen!" he chuckles and that makes him look really ridiculous, don't forget crazy. What is wrong with him and where was he all these years? I want to ask him all those questions but now is not the time to catch up.

"Where are my parents and my son?"

"They are upstairs, in a peaceful sleep but don't you worry we have plenty of time to catch up before they wake up," his smile irritates the shit out of me and I wish he could just close the door because seeing her face makes me feel some kind of way and it is not a good feeling – I am fuckin' angry!

"Please get out of my house," I say, calmly.

“Oh the last time I checked you were renting the house,” he says trying to be funny but he is actually not, I look at him laughing like an idiot that he is. “You don’t get to tell me to do anything, nothing!” he has switched to being angry now and I am fully convinced that he is crazy or he is on something that’s why he keeps on sniffing.

“Are you high?”

He laughs, like really hard, he is high there is no doubt about that because I have never seen any person changing from being jolly to super angry then to jolly again in a space of just a few seconds. What happened to him? He was a good boy when we were growing up, I mean we were even close friends, I had his back and he had mine. We went our separate ways after passing matric and I have never seen him since. I thought we’d be on the national team together, you know two good boys and best friends from the village doing great things to level up in life

but he never showed up, like on anything - I never thought he'd be off football like ever.

"What happened to you?" I don't know why I sound so worried and sincere to a man who broke into my house, drugged my parents and son, and then did something to...Her.

"You happened Simbonga," he says. He has gone back to being upset, I don't know what he is talking about because I haven't seen him in years so what would I have possibly done to him without even seeing him.

"You're crazy man, get out of my house and come back when your head is clear because right now you are not making sense."

"This is exactly what I am talking about, you have never taken me seriously you think I am dumb, slow

and not worthy that is why you took everything from me! We were both good in the field but you got all the praises, you are the one who got the first boots from Disky, the first one to be chosen to take be in the Academy in Johannesburg and guess who also got to play in the national team – Simbonga Masuku!”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!” I shoot back.

The mention of Disky and the way I was chosen for the Academy just brought back painful memories, I don’t know he had to be jealous of that not knowing what hell I went through to get all the things I got. I was naive, I had no desire to get any favours and all I ever wanted was to play ball. They fooled me to believe that I wouldn't go any where if I didn't do all the things they forced me to do. If he understands the pain I went through then he will understand that everything that glitters is not always gold. I suffered

a lot before I got where I am, not that I didn't work hard to achieve it all but it came with heavy baggage to carry. It costed me a lot of heart ache.

"I know exactly what I am talking about Simbonga; those boots were mine but you took them away from me! That captain position was mine before you but again you took it away from me! I was the best and...again Simbonga, you took it away from me, you stole my shine and you have never thought of how that would make me feel. I lost myself while watching you find yourself at my cost. You kept on taking and taking, and I am fuckin' tired of watching you living my life!"

"Enzokuhle Mashaba!" I roar.

"You can recite my clan names, appease with my ancestors but I am not going back Simbonga. I hate you so much and there's no coming back from it. I want you to suffer, I want to watch you lose

everything and when I am done seeing you feel the pain I felt then I am going to kill you and myself.” He is serious and there are tears welling in his eyes.

“Don't you think I have suffered enough? I am on a damn wheelchair!”

“No that didn't break you enough like Sisanda's death didn't break you or being in prison for something you didn't do nor did Inganathi's death break you Simbonga – you are still here willing to fight to get back on your feet. You keep on breaking me each time you get back up because I failed to do it; you managed to break me but I am failing to do it to you. Why are you doing this?”

“Enzo what have you done?” my mind is still stuck on that Sisanda's death didn't break me so that means he was behind it? Inganathi's death too? So I have been blaming the wrong people while he is the one who has been doing this – why?!

I look up to him and he is worse than a mess, he is crying hysterically and I feel anything but sorry for him. There is banging on the door upstairs and a faint voice screaming for help, that should be them – they are alive. And she is still shivering, looking all pale and sad. I am still very angry at the idea of her being in my house when I don't know who she is because one thing I know is that she may look like Inganathi but she is not my Buggie. I will deal with it after this Enzo has left my house, he is also another problem I don't even know how to solve and he is high so that makes him unpredictable. I don't even know how much he has changed over the years so he is good as a stranger right now.

“I haven't done anything yet,” he says reaching for something behind his back but before he reveals what it is, he starts gagging not like he wants to vomit but more like he is in pain. He groans holding onto his chest and the gun that was in his waist falls to the ground before he falls onto his knees.

“Hey are you alright?” I ask, he doesn't look good – why is blood coming out of his mouth? I look up and the girl is on her feet now, fear very much visible on her face. Enzo is groaning in pain, he sounds like a bull being slaughtered and the blood is trailing down to his chin with a few drops on the floor. If he overdosed, shouldn't the blood be coming out of his nose and he should be holding onto his head not his chest. But he can't die – I want to know what really happened to Sisanda, I have been looking for closure and I haven't found it. He can help me with that that's why he can't die.

“Hey!” he is on the floor, gasping for air, the way he is holding onto his chest tells me that is where the pain is coming from. “Hey!” she quickly snaps out of it and looks at me with her big eyes gobbling out of their sockets, she reminds me a lot about Inganathi and I can't look at her. “Go open the door, the one they are banging on and tell my mother to call an ambulance,” I tell her and she doesn't move. “Hey!” she jumps, looking startled then she starts moving.

She walks past me and climbs up the stairs. My eyes are still on Enzo, I wish I could help him he looks in so much pain and I don't think I will be able to bear watching him die. The smell of his blood...is just, it is the same as when I walked into the house to find Inganathi on the floor, laying on the pool of blood – pale, cold and dead. Footsteps come from behind me and Enzo has stopped moving, his eyes are wide open but there's no light in them – he is gone. No one says anything, Kwando comes in front of me and throws his arms around my neck, I hug him back.

Moments later, the paramedics are here and they declare him dead. A group of other people come to take him away in a black plastic bag. There's a lot that has happened in the last hour, I have just found out that there's another Inganathi, the person I thought of as my childhood friend was actually jealous of me not only that but he also killed everyone that I have ever loved and I don't doubt that he was working with Nomagugu and Weymouth. He also died in front of my eyes; with all of that going

through my head again and again there is one thing that weighs out all the other things and that it why is this girl in my house and why no one told me about her?!

“We were going to tell you?” my mother says.

“When?” I am very upset even my voice is higher than normal. I don’t want to shout, I respect my parents very much but I am angry man.

“We were waiting for you to settle in before we burden you with another problem.”

“Oh she’s a problem?” I look at the girl and she is looking into space, busy mumbling to herself with her face twisting all over the place. “What is going on here and where did you find her?” I heard there is a nuthouse close by and this girl rubs me off like a person who has a few screws loose, there is no

adult person who acts like her.

“She...we found her on the road and she looks like Inganathi so she has to be Inganathi’s twin sister. She is not that bad,” my mother says like she is trying to convince herself more than me and my father is silent like he doesn’t want to be a part of this conversation.

“I am not interested mother and I don’t want to find out if she is bad or not. I want her out of my house, Kwando go get my phone if those people don’t want to come and get her then I am taking her back myself,” I say and Kwando runs off to take my phone from the room that I am currently using.

“Simbonga, please don’t do this. See you are already upsetting her,” she points to the girl who is crying now.

“I want her gone ma, do you know how her being here makes me feel, do you know the pain I felt when I realised that she is not the person I thought she was – I want her gone!” I take the phone from Kwando and called a cab.

“Baba please talk to him, she doesn’t want to go back to that place,” she goes on to beg my father but he looks like someone who agrees with me, I am not keeping this girl here no matter what they say – she is leaving.

“The cab is here, let’s go.” Instead of looking at me she is looking at my mother with a sad face. “Hayibo asihambe!” I shout already heading to the door.

There is nothing anyone can tell me to do, if my mother wants to keep her then I am leaving, she will have to choose between her and me because I am not willing to stay in one house with a person who reminds me of a dead part of me. Someone that I

will never get back, it hurts to be around her than to actually think of how much I miss Inganathi. The cab heads to GlenLands and she is looking outside the window still crying. Her sadness is rubbing off on me now but I am working on building a wall around my heart, I can't be feeling sorry for her, I can't. We arrive and the driver helps me out of the car. She remains at the gate, afraid to walk in but I don't have time for her nonsense.

"Hey I don't have the whole day, come!" I shout and the security guard looks at me like I am the one who is crazy between the two of us.

I don't know how these people stay in a place that smells like this but that is not a factor right now and it turns out that they have been looking for this girl for over a week now. They were worried because when her medication flushes out of her system it can make her very paranoid and aggressive – that got me thinking because she was nothing like that.

The lady who introduced herself as sister Martha pulls the girl away and the girl turns to look at me with tears streaming down her face, she doesn't look like someone who is happy to be home. In my house she looked like someone who is leaving home even when that wasn't actually her home. I don't know what is happening to me but it suddenly feels wrong to leave her here.

Uthando: Forty-One

Simbonga

When the nurse comes back I ask her to show me the doctor's office and she gladly shows me the way. I am the hero in her eyes now and she is forever smiling. She opens the door for me and I thank her. The doctor is an old white man, with a grey beard and a bald head. He is pleased to meet me, news fly around here, I have been here for less than two minutes and he already knows my name.

“I wanted to find out about the girl, who is she and why she is here.”

He sighs and takes off his spectacles, “She was diagnosed with schizoaffective, a sickness that doesn't get better but gets worse and she has been in the care of the professionals for seven years now.

She is our new patient here so that is why it was easy for her to go missing,” he says.

“How bad is she?”

“It is hard to say but trust me Simbonga, she can get worse and it was very risky for her to be out of the building without her medication. If she feels threatened, she can easily attack to defend herself – she wouldn't be herself but it'd be the voices telling her what to do even in danger or not, if she feels threatened then...”

But with Enzo in the house and she didn't feel threatened, I mean his presence was really not friendly at all so why didn't she attack – does this doctor know what he is talking about?

“She is anything but nothing of the things you have said,” I tell him.

“What is this?”

“Don't get me wrong it is just that, when she was at my house not at one point did she get aggressive, even my mother speaks highly of her, I really think this is not as it seems and maybe the problem is not only with her mentality it goes deeper than that,” I say as I absently think of how her face was when she left my house and how comfortable she was around us, and how she was uncomfortable to be here.

She was crying her eyeballs out when the nurse disappeared down the passage with her and I can't help but think that she doesn't want to be here. It is not a place she wants to be in, not that anyone would want to be here but how can a person feel at home at a stranger's house. I pause for a second, rewinding my thoughts to where I actually thought that she felt 'at home' in my house – so what if that

is what she is missing, it can't be the pills that they are giving her that keep her calm, she was calm in my house because she was at home and that is exactly what she needs! I look at the doctor and he is oblivious to know why my face is like this, like I have won a million dollars.

“Can you take me to her?”

He doesn't argue, he leads me down the hall through the rooms of other patients, it is dark now so everyone must be sleeping. He opens the door for me and I peep in, she is on her bed. There she lays on her back with her hands on her chest, from where I am I can see that she is in deep sleep, a peaceful sleep that every adult craves for. I have made up my mind – I won't leave her here.

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“Make sure that she takes her medication and call me should anything happen,” the doctor said when I told him that I will be taking his patient from him. He wasn't happy with that but he had nothing to say because from now on I am her next of kin. I don't know who put her in that clinic but no one was listed as her guardian. If she died or something happened to her, they had no one to call, I knew people can be heartless but I didn't think it was this bad. I spoke to my parents last night about this trip I am planning for today, Abenathi doesn't know about it yet but I am sure it is what she needs – her home.

“I want to take you somewhere,” I tell her and she doesn't look comfortable to be around me, it must be because of how I behaved yesterday – I was just too angry to keep my emotions in check, everything was just there at the same time and I didn't know how to react. I have no excuse for not apologising to her so, “I am sorry for how I spoke to you yesterday, it was wrong and uncalled for.” She looks to be thinking hard about what I said, I don't think I am

ever going to get used to looking at her while I am still mourning.

“I am sorry too for making you angry...” she says but it looks like she wants to say more but it doesn’t reach her mouth and instead she nods.

“Okay let’s go.”

My father wanted to drive us but I declined his offer, I am very kind so I got someone to drive us – it is the same as hitting two birds with one stone because I saved him the trip and I hired someone so they’d make a quick buck, I am all about uplifting people and creating jobs is another one of my specialties. It is a long drive since we are sitting in silence, each person minding their own business and thoughts. When we arrive, I was about to fall asleep that’s how bad the medication I am taking can get. Abenathi looks fazed at the sight of the house, she is blinking rapidly while every inch of her body remains frozen

and glued to the ground.

I press the intercom to announce my arrival and I don't say that I am with someone. I don't know how they will react since they didn't mention anything about her, Inganathi also didn't say anything and I hope they don't chase us out at the sight of their daughter. The gate opens and I wheel myself in, Abenathi is falling behind and I get to the door which opens before I could even knock and Mr Obennebo is the one who opened it.

“Simbonga, what brings you here?” he doesn't sound rude but surprised by my presence, he thought he got rid of me when we buried his daughter and said goodbye to each other but he thought wrong, I am here for his wife's beans stew and steamed bread. That will take me forever to forget about so he better chill because he is still going to see this face for a long time.

“I am here with someone –” I turn to look behind me but she is not there, I check on my left and right she’s not there either.

Mrs Obennebo appears to and says, “you will find her on the swing behind the house.” I look at her with a look mixed with shock and surprise, I mean how can she be so chilled, I thought she’d freak out and scream ‘witchcraft’ or she knows about her daughter being alive. I look at the man next to her and his face is unclear to me, I don’t know what it means but I don’t think he is happy.

I want to know what is going on and I want every little detail of it. I wheel myself around the house and she is on the swing like her mother had said but she’s is not swinging. As I get closer, I can hear her sniffing and she sure sounds like someone who is crying. I get in front of her and she is a mess even her hair is a mess – I should've asked one of the nurses to fix it before we left.

“Are you okay?” I ask and she nods, I don’t think she understands my question what I want to know is why she is crying so I rephrase, “Why are you crying?”

She wipes off the tears on her cheeks and sniffles one more time before she opened her mouth to speak, “I miss her,” she says. I miss her too. “I never got to say goodbye to her then and I didn't get to say goodbye to her now that she is really gone. He told me I will see her again if I become a good girl, if I become like her but I didn’t. He always wanted me to be like her so now with her dead, does he want me dead too?” she asks, breaking into tears again.

I don’t know what is happening but the ‘he’ could be her father and it comes as a shock to me for her to refer to her father as ‘he’. She doesn't have any connection with the man and I know that he has a hand in that. He called his wife emotionally unstable

when she mentioned something about Inganathi's sister. I don't know what he has against his daughter but no human being can be this heartless and throw away their child like she never meant anything to them. I reach out to her, to wipe her face and it looks like she is calming down.

"Do you want to come in?" I ask and she shoots her eyes to me.

"Am I allowed to?"

I don't know why this question hits me the same way as when Kwando asked me if it is safe for him to hug me, she is her parent's daughter and she shouldn't be asking if she is allowed to enter her own home. She should've grown up with her sister with both her parents by her side in her home where they are all in. No matter how different she may be, they didn't have a right to exclude her for that and if my guess is correct than I'd say that this is what drove

her over the edge. She might have been slow than her sister but she wasn't mentally ill. It must have been the emotional abuse and the constant pressure from her father wanting her to be 'normal' and act like her sister.

"Of course you are allowed to and we won't leave until you set your foot in that house. They owe it to you and we are going to fight for it if we need to," I say and she nods rapidly.

She follows behind me as I head to the house, we are going to use the backdoor now since it will take us forever to get to the front door with me in a wheelchair or we could say I am just too lazy to go around again. The door is open and we make our way in, there is no one in the kitchen but there are pots on the stove so I know that her mother is preparing something. I am glad she didn't scold me to make it known that I should've told her that I was coming so she'd prepare something nice. We find

them in the lounge and they both stand up as we walk in. The mood is less intense than I thought.

Her mother is already in tears, she too thinks it is not safe to hug her daughter, I can see at how she is contemplating, she doesn't know if she should and if she can then will Abenathi allow her to touch her. Mr Obennebo tries to pull a straight face but there's a lot of emotions going around. I don't think there are more words that need to be said, they owe it to their daughter to let her know and feel that she is loved and that she doesn't need to be more or less of who she is to qualify to be their daughter. Her mother couldn't hold back anymore, she pulled her daughter in for a hug and she cried like she cried for Inganathi. Such a heart breaking sight, sharp breaths are coming from Mr Obennebo and it won't be long until he sheds a few tears too.

"I am so sorry my baby, I didn't want you to go, I shouldn't have let you go like that and I should've

fought for you. I love you, I love you so much,” her mother says cupping her face after that tight squeeze that she’d call a hug.

“I am sorry too,” Mr Obennebo says taking a step towards where his wife and daughter are. “I am sorry for how I treated you, you are my daughter and it was never my intention to hurt you like that. I am even ashamed to say that I am your father, I failed you...” I told you he is going to cry, “I am sorry, please forgive me,” he also pulls her and hugs her for dear life. I wipe the tears in the corner of my eyes as I watch them continue with their reunion. I am sorry to be the one to break this beautiful moment but I am hungry.

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I feel a sharp pain shoot deep inside the bones of my lower body and it jerks me off my sleep. I quickly open my eyes and I am shocked to death to see her

sitting on my lap but facing the other way, when and how did she get in here? She turns to look back at me and she looks jolly for some reason. "They moved," she says pointing to my feet and her face shows just how fascinating it was when she saw that. I rise up a bit, balancing on my elbows and she gets off me and the bed. I look at my feet trying to move them but they don't move, I guess it was just a reflex but the pain is horribly painful. I turn to look at her and she looks smart, no she looks beautiful.

"Where are you going?" I ask seeing that she is well dressed very early in the morning even her hair looks clean and tied into a neat ponytail. I bet her mother worked hard to get her hair like that.

"We are going to church," she says excitedly, looking at her pretty dress.

I look at her thinking 'we' are going to church? Is that why her mother was so persistent that I also sleep

over last night? She said something about Abenathi being in distress if I left when I told her I couldn't sleep over kanti she was up to something. I haven't been to church in years, I don't think I remember how it even looks inside.

“My fa-ther brought this for you to wear,” she points to the grey suit hanged on the wardrobe that looks two-sizes-too-big I will look like the suit is wearing me and not the other way around. But I am still stunned at that she addressed her father as ‘my father’, a lot changed in a space of just a few hours but I am glad about the progress. Though I still wonder what would've happened or what would they have done if I didn't show up with their daughter at their doorstep – would they have looked for her?

She leaves and I drag myself out of bed. I need to eat so I'd drink painkillers, I also need to see the doctor, I don't think I am going to survive this sharp pain if it continues. It is like my legs are being

electrified, it is really bad. The suit doesn't look shabby at all, it is a bit big because it was made for his body and it is not a one size fit all kind of make but I look good in an expensive suit which I believe it's worth would've fed half of KwaMashu township. In the dining room, Mrs Obennebo didn't disappoint, the food laid on the table could be served to a king and he'd lick his fingers after wiping his plate clean.

“Thank you Simbonga for what you did, I don't know how I'd ever repay you for bringing our daughter home,” she is not about to cry again, I have seen enough tears and it is by God's grace that I slept last night after seeing Mr Obennebo's crying face and let's just say he shouldn't think of crying in front of toddlers because I don't want anyone's child to be traumatized.

“It is fate ma, if I didn't find her then someone would have and she was going to find her way home with or without me.”

“That is why we are going to church, to thank the Lord and ask for forgiveness. There is a lot of work that still needs to be done but we are all willing to put in the work and make up for the lost time,” she takes her husband's hand and they smile at each other.

Abenathi is not really interested in the heart to heart conversation that is going on here, her attention is on the food and she is the first one to stand up, saying we need to leave or we are going to be late. She looks happy and that is what I wanted for her.

“With this out of the way, I think it is time we focused on making that woman Nomagugu pay,” I say to Mr Obennebo and he turns to look at me.

“Didn't you hear, she is dead.”

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Zobuhle

Bheki died, I finally managed to let go of the anger and hatred I had for him and he died just like that. Some people will shock you I tell you but that is not something I want to focus on, my anger and pain was buried with him and right now it is time for me to move on. The first thing I am moving on to is checking on Simbonga, I was off my phone, I didn't even see that he was involved in a car accident and after I saw the news I caught the first taxi I got. I can't believe he nearly died and I didn't even know about it. Weymouth has been calling, I don't want to talk to him, I want to see Simbonga and I am not leaving – I am staying here. I know I will not end up in the backroom for the rest of my life, I will actually end up somewhere and I refuse to take corners to my success.

I knock on the door, no I actually banged the door and it opens, Simbonga's mother is the one to open the door.

"Hi ma, I am here to see Simbonga," I tell her and she is smiling, such a lovely woman.

"They are not here, you have just missed them – they are at the beach but if you go there now you will find them," she says with that sweet smile of hers, I don't know if she knows this but I love her.

"Okay thank you." I am off like that without even finding out who is 'they' but I am sure it's him and Kwando – the father and son day out kind of thing.

I am literally running down to the beach, it helps to be a player and have a high stamina. In a few minutes I am at the beach, I don't know which side they are at and it is time to blow my cover and ruin

the surprise because I have to call him to find out where they are. I call him and he tells me their location, it looks like they have just arrived. I run again to the I location and I guessed correctly because they are offloading the stuff from the boot. I come to a sudden halt when I realise that he is actually in a wheelchair then there is...is that Abenathi? What is she doing here?

I approach them with my eyes scanning them, I have met Kwando so he is not shy or awkward when he sees me. Abenathi is standing on the side of the car, looking cute in denim shorts and a pink vest, don't forget those brown socks that she doesn't seem to be able to walk around without.

"You nearly buried me," he says after I asked what happened to him.

"Don't joke like that, you know I still need you."

“Oh yeah? I thought you were doing just fine without me,” he chuckles but he is not funny, I almost got a heart attack when I read about his accident. They said it was bad so I quickly thought of the worst and truth be told, I am glad he is still alive – there’s a lot that I am going to need him to help me with.

We move the things closer to the beach, they have a small cooler box, a basket which I think has food in and beach towels. Abenathi is acting shy I don’t know why because we were best friends while she was at the facility or is it because Simbonga is here? Kwando is the first one to go to the water, it is quite a challenge to get Simbonga through the heavy sand and Kwando wasn’t willing to waste his precious time. We finally get close enough and I stand besides him while Abenathi stood on the other side. She is looking at Kwando probably yearning to do what he is doing but those socks are not going to work, not today.

I move to her side and Simbonga is digging for food in that basket.

“You will have to remove your socks so we can get your feet into the water,” I say and she shakes her head. “Trust me, it feels amazing and I don’t want you to miss out of that. Do you trust me?” she looks straight into my eyes but she doesn’t nod nor shake her head. “If it doesn't feel good then you can curse me to hell or anything worse than that,” Simbonga laughs while munching on his sandwich and Abenathi smiles, well at least I am getting some where.

I remove her socks and those nails need to be cut but we will deal with that later. She doesn't look comfortable, the sand is going through her toes but her face is like ‘this is the worst thing that could happen to a living person’. I take her hand and pull her to the water before she could think of putting her socks back. We reach the wet sand and she wishes

she had wings, I have never seen anyone with so much fear on their face for just having their bare feet in the sand. The water comes and washes our feet, she screams jumping from one side to the other. She wants to get away but I won't let her and when she realises that, she clings on my arm – I don't know how to feel about that but I am feeling all nice.

Another wave comes and she is not as dramatic as she was the first time but there is still a glimpse of fear on her face. She will be okay and I will be okay if she can hold me like she is holding onto me right now. "How does it feel?" I look at her and she looks up to me. God save me, what changed from the day I last saw her because this is not the same person and this is not how I felt about her. "It feels better than I expected," she says and I smile, she smiles too. I look at her feet and her toes are digging into the wet sand oh well she has fallen in love with it already and my job here is done. I leave her with Kwando and I run back to Simbonga.

“You still owe me an explanation of how she got here,” I say sitting down.

“You need to tell me why you gave her my parent's address instead of her parent's house.” I shoot my eyes to him, how did he find out about that? I guess there is a lot of talking that we need to do, I also heard that Nomagugu is dead so I want to know how he feels about that.

“We will talk but there is one thing I want to tell you – you better keep your eyes off her,” I point to Abenathi, “I saw her first.” I add and he dies of laughter.

“What?” he is still laughing.

“Yeah you had your chance with one of the Obennebo sisters and now it is my turn,” I tell him, he thinks I am being funny kanti I am not, I am actually

serious – I know I felt something.

“I wish you nothing but the best and don’t worry about me I wasn't looking. I still have a lot to overcome so a relationship is the last thing on my mind. I saw the way you were looking at her and damn you’re whipped,” he says and laughs, and when I say laugh I mean he is laughing really hard and I feel myself getting upset but I find myself laughing as well.

A moment later, my head is on his lap and his hand runs over my head. Right here is my safe place, my peace and sanity – they saw an enemy in him but in him I found a brother.

•●THE END●•