

DRAW

- NOSIPHO KULA

DRAW



NOSIPHO KULA

A message for the reader.

This book is for my black brothers and sisters who have been tenacious when life has been hard on them because of mental illness but are still continuing to move forward to the end of the rainbow. I hope you get as much from reading this as I did from writing it, enjoy.

With love, Nosi xxx.

Prologue.

I can't take this anymore. I don't want to die, I really don't, even if I always envision my death, I just want to stop the pain. The only way I know how to stop the pain is to do what I do best, draw. Whenever I'm drawing it always seems like I'm an addict getting my next high. It's the only thing that's keeping me alive, this is my kind of normal.

I look under my bed for my box. I open it, all of my blades are there. I have blades that I took out from my sharpener, the blades from my shaver, blades I bought. I take the unutilised one because it's razor-sharp and it's gonna ease the pain for a while. I rolled up my shirt on my left arm.

I draw. And the blood oozes.

I draw again.

I draw again and again.

Again, I draw.

The pain doesn't stop! I draw on my right arm.

I draw again and again.

I draw. The blood spills down my arm now and I'm crying my lungs out. I'm so useless, I'm frail. If someone finds this out, they'd call me a lunatic cause the only way I stop my pain is inflicting pain upon myself.

I draw and draw, I can't stop. I don't want to stop. I can't stop. It hurts but it feels so good.

I take off my skirt to draw on my thighs now, but the pain doesn't stop. No matter what I do, the pain doesn't want to stop. My demons are pleased with what I've done. I'm numb, I'm exhausted and I want to sleep, forever.

I pack my box and go to bed. Tomorrow is another day of masquerading.

Chapter 1

N dinani Peterson, vuka.” That must be mom. It’s the fifth time she’s woken me up today, I always want my 2 minutes to collect myself before I wake. She’s my alarm. Every morning she wakes me up.

I’m really not looking forward for school, starting grade 11 on a somber mood wasn’t exactly what I hoped for. I’m so exhausted, I just want to sleep all day. My scars sting a bit, but it’s the normal kind of pain I’m accustomed too. I get off bed and go to the bathroom to wash. I wear my school uniform and go to the kitchen.

“*Molo ma.*” I say.

“*Ewe ke* , I’ve made porridge, eat up. I’m running late for work, don’t forget to lock up the door on your way out. I hope you have a great day at school, I love you.” , she says as she kisses me on the cheek.

“ Okay ma , I’ll cook today.”

“ Thanks baby, bye.”

I finish my porridge, grab my backpack and I lock the door. Dale High School isn’t far from my house. It’s a ten minute walk. I take out my phone and play something

that matches my mood, Billie Eilish *when the party is over*. I hate school. *High School*, to put emphasis, it took my best-friend. I saw the signs of change in her from the beginning. I could've saved her if I wasn't the cowardice self. My heart still aches for her. I want us again, I guess it's too late to save us. She's the only friend I had, I'm not looking forward to making new friends. I'm still mourning the loss of her. There's nothing left now besides the memories, I live through them.

I get to school early, music blasting through my ears. Music has always been a big part of my life. In some way it healed me from things I don't want to remember. Singing is one of the things I like to do, no one has ever heard me sing. There are freshmen, parents are with their children. I see nervousness written all over the pupils faces, some are excited. I remember being jubilant on my first day at high school, how silly of me. I'm about to go to my hiding place when a black BMW enters the school gates. A parent and a boy step out of the car. My jaw drops at the resemblance they have, but the boy is strikingly gorgeous. His so beautiful he makes my eyes teary and my mouth water. I've never seen such a beautiful sight. He probably feels me staring cause he turns to my direction and stares back at me. A beautiful black boy. Perfection. I'm in awe of him.

I flush cause it's rude to stare and walk away. I go to my favorite hiding spot and continue reading a novel by Elle Kennedy, *The risk*. The bell rings indicating its assembly.

All the students are going to the hall and so am I. Students are so happy to see each other, everyone is rejoicing. For an hour our Principal, Mr Zenzile, welcomes us back and wishes us prosperity for the rest of the school year.

We go to our classes. I sit at the back of the class, always. Our teacher , Mrs Swarts, she teaches English, enters with the black beautiful boy. I don't know whether to be shocked or excited, I look at him and my heart melts.

“Good morning everyone, this is Banele Mdlungu , he's new here and I want you to treat him with respect and welcome him.” She turns to him, “ Take a sit at the back.”

He looks around look for a seat and his gaze lands on me again, I flush and look away. I can feel him approaching me and he sits behind me. Mrs Swarts, distributes the English anthology book and asks us to read the first story.

I can't concentrate on reading because his presence is making me feel all sorts of feelings. I can feel his stare at the back of my head. I feel him watching every move I make. The bell rings indicating its the next lesson and I can't wait any second to get out of here . I grab my English book and -

“ Hey, I'm Banele,”

What?

He's talking to me! Omg his voice, it's a crime to have a voice this good

"Hi!" I greet him back.. But I don't, I just stare at him. He smirks. Why is he smirking?

"Can you show me where I'm suppose to go next?"

"Uhm .. I'm Ndi- .. I'm Ndinani. We going to the same class." My voice sounds horrible.

He follows me and I notice how everyone is looking at us, no wait, they are looking at him. The girls have dreamy faces. I don't think he notices. We arrive at our next lesson, and he sits next to me. Kill me now.

The rest of the day, my beautiful black boy follows me around and I show him where his suppose to go, which is quite easy because he does the same subjects as me. When school is out I grab my backpack and approach the gates.

"Hey Nani." I know that voice. It's my beautiful black boy. I could fall asleep hearing that hoarse voice. He's given me a nickname. I've never had one.

"Uhm .. Hi."

"I wanna thank you for showing me around today, can I walk you home? I'm not taking no for an answer. It's the least I could do."

“ You don’t have too.”

“ I want too.” He takes the lead like he knows where he’s suppose to go ! “So, I haven’t seen you with your friends today.”

“ I don’t have friends.”

“ Why is that?”

“ I don’t want friends.”

“ So you’ve never had friends?”

“ I’ve had a friend, but not anymore.”

“ What happened?”

“ Why do you ask so many questions?”

“ You intrigue me.”

I stare at him. I want to ask him why but I don’t. Holding a conversation with him makes my anxiety peak. He must’ve read my expression because he continues.

“ I’ve watched you today.” His tone becomes subtle. “Whenever someone turns in your direction you look away. It frightens you, it’s like when you let them see

your eyes they gonna know things you don't want them to know. Your arms are always around you when you walk around like you protecting yourself from anyone hurting you."

"You're very observant and I'm not a social person."

"I've noticed. Since you don't have, we friends now. Right chom?" He smiles and his smile is contagious, I smile too.

"First smile of the day and it's beautiful " he says.

I blush. Why am I blushing? Boys don't make me blush.

"We are getting close to my house now..."

"You can't get rid of me that easily. What happened to your friend?"

"I don't wanna talk about it."

He changes the conversation, we talk about school, the weather, and everything that's nothing. I appreciated it when he didn't force me into talking about my bestfriend, Some men force you into doing things you don't want to do. I've had my experience of that. We get to my house and I don't invite him inside because I'll never do that. I think my mom would kill me if I would.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, thank you for walking me in.”

“I’m looking forward to spending the day with you. Bye Nani.” He walks away, full of optimism.

I don’t know how long I stood there lost in thoughts of why he’s looking forward to spend the day with *me*.

Chapter 2

It's morning again and for the first time in forever I'm looking forward to go to school. I wake up before mom does. I'm bewildered as to why I'm feeling happy today. It feels weird being happy when all your life you are used to sadness. In my head I do a silly dance all the way to the bathroom. I wanna look beautiful today. I'm humming all sorts of songs in the kitchen whilst cooking breakfast. I'm making bacon and eggs, mom's favorite.

“Why are we happy today?” mom asks as she buttons her shirt. “And why are you chanting? Something must've have happened because you never wake up before me.” She looks at me suspiciously.

“Nothing happened. I'm just feeling happy today. Can't a girl just be happy because she can?” I throw her a smile.

She approaches me with a suspicious face. She comes closer to my face and screens me. She inhales my scent.

“Are you wearing the perfume i bought you on your seventeenth birthday?” She's frowning now.

“It's nothing, i just wanted to smell nice for a change.”

“It's a boy, isn't it ?”

I blush. That's only because I don't usually have this kind of conversation with my mom, nothing else right? "No it's not. I just wanted to feel pretty, there's no harm in that, right?" I'm lying through my teeth, I can't believe how fast my mom was able to figure it out when I wasn't sure why I'm happy today. It's because of my black beautiful boy. My? What has gotten into me.

"As old as I am, I know when I'm being lied too. This is for a boy."

I turn around and continue with my cooking to avoid the conversation. Mom is having her coffee. She doesn't stop talking.

"I hope you know what you are doing. This is the first time ever I've seen you interested in a boy. I was beginning to think you were gay. My colleagues are going to be happy about this. Since I'm a nurse, I have to get into the sex talk cause-

"Mom ! No please not that talk. I know all about that stuff. They teach us this at school. Can we please just enjoy breakfast? "

She hesitates but drops the topic. She never insists on talking about heavy matters. I've come to the conclusion that what happened to me is what caused her to never talk

about things. After we moved from where we were we lived when I was 10 years of age, I never really got my mom back. After what happened to me, she went to a place where I wish I could've saved her from. We have never talked about it. She blames herself. With all of my heart I want my mother back. I want the relationship I wish we could have. It's very difficult to reach out to her.

I quickly finish my food cause I'm in a hurry to get lost in the brown eyes of my beautiful black boy. Mom finishes too.

“Don't forget to lock the door on your way out. I'll be back late today.” She says.

“ If I ask why you're coming back late today, will you give me an answer?”

She snickers. “ No. I don't answer to you. Bye baby, have a great day at school.”

When I get to school with Ami Faku blasting in my ears, I find my beautiful black boy waiting by the gates of the school. My body awakens at the sight of him, he doesn't notice me yet because he's lost in the English short story book we were given yesterday. When he does notice me, his eyes lighten up and his smile broadens. Beautiful.

“ Hey chom, you look beautiful.” My heart somersaults. I can't help but blush at his compliment. He noticed.

“Hey, why are you standing here?”

“ I was waiting for you, obviously. He rolls his eyes. This might sound cliché but I couldn’t wait to see that pretty face of yours.”

What is it with this guy throwing unnecessary compliments? I could die from this, literally.

“ Are you always like this, complimenting people?” I ask .

“*Ewe*, It’s a norm for me to throw compliments at beautiful things I see.” He ponders for a minute. “Are you ever going to tell men what happened to the one friend you had?”

“ Yes but no now. Will that be adequate for now? “

“It’s okay. As long as you promise you’ll tell me.” He looks hopeful and holds out his finger and we make a pinky promise, with this it doesn’t feel like we’re making a promise for one thing but for forever.

He looks unsure of himself all of a sudden. “ I’m going to need your number ... to uhm .. communicate when we are not together.”

I smile. Why? Because the thought of receiving a text or call from him is exhilarating. I give him my number. The bell rings and together we head to our class.

At noon, I'm concentrating on solving my algebra equations and a note is thrown at me. I look around and find Banele staring at me. He's sitting with Buntu Ngwadla and they are working together. He's already made other friends. It's a piece of cake for him to connect with people, to converse with them. I envy him. He points to the note and mouths to me that I should read it.

You look beautiful when you concentrate.

My heart is warm and content at the moment. I have never been giving so many compliments in one day and I don't know how to react to it. We look at each other and I swear it feels like we are lost in our world. Nothing feels amazing as getting lost in the brown eyes of my black beautiful boy. Our maths teacher, Mr Mbuku, bursts our bubble.

“ Whose already got the answer? Ngwadla? Share your calculations with us.”

I immediately zone out from the lesson. My thoughts are bombarded with Banele. What on earth is happening here? I don't like him, do I? No, I don't. He's my friend and friends don't like each other that way. I need to get over my fantasy. His only complimenting me just because I'm his friend, nothing else. Friends tell each they are beautiful all the time, right? I just met the guy.

It's not possible he'd want me as his. I scold myself into thinking this way. We're friends, nothing else but friends.

By the time school ends I'm exhausted. I wanna go home and sleep but I have a pile of homework to do, it's only day two of Grade 11. Hectic. I make my way to the gates and find Banele waiting for me there.

“ You look exhausted, wanna grab ice cream?” He asks.

“ I don't have any money on me.”

“ Don't worry about it, it's my treat.”

“ Okay then but next time I'll pay, it's a noble thing to do.” He smiles.

Every store is closer in this little township. We don't have to take taxis unless we going in another township. It's not much an effort for us to get to Marcells. We get a table.

“ What flavor do you prefer?” He asks.

“Chocolate, I like everything chocolate.” He looks at me, something flashes in his eyes. Want?

“ I'm chocolate, you like me too?” He smirks.

Did I not die? How in the hell am I suppose to answer that? No? Yes? Maybe? Instead I don't answer, I blush

and look away. He goes and buys the ice creams, both chocolate. We divulge in.

“So..” he trails off.

“So?”

“ This is out curiosity, do you have a boyfriend?”

“If I say yes then what happens?” Oh my God why did I just say that. I could’ve just answered the question.

He raises an eyebrow. “Then I’d have to know the lucky dude.”

“Why would he be lucky?”

He looks me straight in the eyes.

“ I just think that anyone is lucky to have you. I’d go crazy if they’d never realize how truly remarkable you are. Your aura, it’s a presence I want to be surrounded with all the time. You project an energy that I want to succumb to. I’ve known you for a minute, but I’m a good judge of character and your intentions are genuine.” His eyes convey honesty.

I blush, I don’t think my face has ever burnt like this from the effect of his words and the way he’s looking at me. My body is alive, and my heart is doing a thousand

somersaults. I'm trying to articulate a coherent response but I can't, my brain has stopped thinking.

"So do you?" He asks.

"Uhm...do I what?"

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No, no I don't ." He smiles. He's giving me the smile he gave me this morning. This is making him happy.

"Do you uhm... have a girlfriend?"

"No, I don't."

My reaction takes me by surprise. I don't understand why I am relieved to hear this. We get into our bubble again and talk for hours. I found out that he is the only child his father has. His mother died a few years back. He wishes she could come back and recite all the achievements he had without her. Like winning the sport matches he played for his previous school. He had to move in with his uncle and his wife for 2 years because at that time, his father wasn't financially stable yet. I sense he didn't enjoy the stay because of the change in his voice when he articulates this. He tells me that he has a strong relationship with his dad. The reason he had to change schools was because his father got a job offer and it pays very well. We talk and he jokes and I laugh at his jokes. We don't notice that the people have left until the

waitress tells us they are closing. He walks me home and we continue with our endless chatter. Before we depart, he hugs me and I feel all warm all over again.

When I get home the house feels cold because mom is not here. I have nothing else to do but tackle my homework. I make a sandwich. I charge my phone and get ready for bed.

My phone rings and it's unknown number.

“ Hello, who's this?”

“Your man.” I know this voice. It's my beautiful black boy. He's being playful, so I'll play along then.

“ My man? I don't have a man, I have men.”

“ Haha, funny. We didn't really get the chance to talk about you today. And I want to know about you.”

“ There's nothing much to know besides that I live with my mom, I'm the only child. I don't know my dad. That's about it.” He's silent on the other line.

“ Are you ready to talk about what happened to your friend?”

I sigh in exasperation. “Sinawo? She was my best-friend. We've been friends since the 8th grade. She had an abusive father, he abused her emotionally and physically. He was a drunkard. When we started high school,

everything changed. Half way through the year she -," I feel pain crawling in my body and spreading everywhere. I'm not sure if I'm able to share my best friend with anyone.

" I'm here, talk to me." He says, that only encourages me to carry on.

"She made new friends, the type of friends your parents don't want you around with. All of them were school dropouts. Her rebellious side started when she arrived late at school, she was up all night partying with her friends. When I tried to reprimand her she pushed me away and told me I'm jealous because I don't have friends that are not within our circle. This one time she didn't come to school for weeks and when I went to check her at home, she had bruises all over her. The beating she got from her father got worse. She was his punching bag. Whenever he got intoxicated with alcohol, he threw fists at her. She had no one to take her to hospital and so I did, my mother helped her. At that time I was hopeful that our friendship could be mended. My mom suggested she stayed with us and she did. Her father went to a rehabilitation center. We both made it to the next grade. She got back with her old friends again and started using drugs, she stopped coming home and school altogether. I was devastated. I tried saving her, with everything in me I tried. I kept going back to her in hopes of bringing her home. I saw her slip away from the world before she actually did. When her father came back, she didn't want anything to do with him. She

blamed him for the way she was. She got worse and worse until she overdosed...”

I’m numb now. Pain is becoming too intense. I’m struggling to focus, my vision is blurred out with tears. I’m sobbing. I grab my box under the bed, full of pain reliefs. I roll up my pyjama sleeves.

I’ve forgotten Banele is on the other line until he says, “ You did all that you could’ve done to save her. Don’t blame yourself. I’m sorry you had to go through that. Losing someone you love wholeheartedly is heart wrenching. It’s going to be okay, I’m here now. I’m here.” There’s something about his reassurance that soothes me. I didn’t know that I need to hear this. The pain subsides. I don’t draw tonight because I know my black beautiful boy is here.

“ She left a letter for me. I’ve never gotten the strength to read it. Every time I get the courage to read it, I chicken out.”

“ There’s no rush Nani, you still have time. Heal first and the rest will follow.”

I don’t know how long we stay on the line together. I hear my mom come in and pretend to be asleep when she checks in on me. We talk for hours and I find myself

drifting off to sleep with the hoarse voice of my beautiful black boy.

Chapter 3

I'm going to need you to be in pairs. You will be doing your Biology project for next term. You are doing it this term because there's going to be an immense load of work the next term. You'll be designing a model of a heart. The two will gather information and decide what to present to me next week Friday. You'll choose for yourselves who you want to work with." Mr James addresses.

It's been three weeks since the call. I have laughed more with him than I had in years. I have never felt so alive. It's not like me to let anyone in. There's something about him that makes me alive. To explore the world, with him. Whenever he's around, the energy he exudes is noticeable. I feel his presence before I even see him. I've become comfortable with him. In a short space of time, he has become my coping mechanism, he soothes whatever I'm feeling with his presence. I've grown so fond of him, he hardly calls me "chom" these past few weeks. I don't know why I'm happy about that, I just am. We've set up a routine to study after school at the library. He is for everyone. He has so many acquaintances but he's only been here for a couple of weeks. Everyone at school knows him. Regardless of that, he's always with

me and making sure I'm okay. He spend intervals with me. I haven't drawn since I met him and that worries me. I don't have any guarantee how long he'll be my coping mechanism. I just hope it's not temporary.

“My house or yours?” He asks.

“What? What for?”

He rolls his eyes and I swear it's the sexiest thing he's ever done. “For the heart design we are going to make, weren't your listening?”

“I was, i just got lost in my thoughts.”

“I hope your thoughts are of me,” I blush. “Your house or mine?”

I hesitate.

“I won't bite unless you want me to.” He wiggles his eyebrows playfully. I laugh.

“Mine. We'll go to my house after school.”

“Okay, sounds good to me.”

“ I’ll let my mom know that I’m bringing someone over today, she didn’t go to work. It’s her day off on Thursdays.”

“I’ll tell dad to come and fetch me at your house.”

I text mom.

I have a friend coming over today, we are going to do our Biology project. Is that okay? I’ve already agreed and I was hoping u don’t make a fuss about it.

She replies within a second.

K. He can come over, I know it’s a boy. I won’t be here when you get home, I’m grocery shopping.

How does she do that? She’s been watching me like a hawk these past few weeks. She went as far as saying Banele is my boyfriend. Even when I argue with her she doesn’t wanna hear it. I’ve suspected that she listens to the late night conversations I have with Banele.

After school, we head to my house. Banele carries my backpack.

“Let’s play a game.” He says.

“Which game?” I ask.

“Simon says.”

“What happens if I don’t do what Simon tells me to do?”
I ask.

“You lose. I don’t like to lose. I always win.”

I snicker, “ Well in that case, you’ve met your match.”

He laughs. “Is that a challenge?”

“ It’s whatever you want it to be.” I say with a smirk.

It’s quiet for a minute, as if he’s contemplating what to say.

“Simon says sing for me.”

I groan, “Why does it have to be singing? Can’t Simon tell me to do something else?”

“I heard you humming to a Billie Eilish song a few days back. If you don’t do it, then you lose.” He smiles, mocking me.

“ Okay fine then,” We stop walking. “Which song?”

“ A song you’d dedicate too me.”

My brain immediately stops functioning. A song for him? There are so many songs I'd dedicate to him. I don't know how long I seek for a song in my mind but I can't seem to decide on it. Well, not until I hear myself singing Usher and Yuna's song, *crush*. At that moment, the world stops for us. No one has ever heard me sing, it's a talent I've hidden for as long as I can remember. Banele has a way of bringing out things I don't do nor talk about. For him, at this moment I know I'd do anything and everything for him. He's looking at me like I'm the only person he has eyes for. I feel like he is reading into every lyric I sing. We are in our bubble, I don't want this to ever end. When I finish singing, I hear the birds chipping again, the cars hooting and my heart beating faster than it normally does.

“ You sing so beautifully, so raw and authentic. If it were up to me I'd listen to you all day every day.” He says and I blush.

He goes quiet and opens and closes his mouth as if he wants to say something more but he doesn't. We walk to my house in comfortable silence. I don't know how to feel about what I've just done. Basically, I've just told the guy I have a crush on him. How stupid of me. I don't know whether to cry or laugh about this.

“Simon says tell me what you’re thinking.” I say.

“Are you sure you want to know?” He asks.

I take a deep breathe and say, “*Ewe.*”

“I’m thinking about how what I feel for you isn’t just a crush- crushes eventually fade away, I don’t think what I feel for you will ever fade anytime soon and how amazing the moment we’ve just had was, I wish we could repeat it.”

He holds my hand and tightens it. It’s a gesture that shows I don’t have to say anything, so I don’t. I just want to hug him and give him all my love. I want to tell him that in the shortest time I’ve met him, I can’t stand not being in his presence. I want to tell him that I love drifting off to sleep hearing his voice, but i don’t.

When we get to my house, I get into my comfortable clothes. I make sure I don’t wear anything that’s going to reveal my arms and thighs. Sweatpants and an oversized shirt will do. I make something to eat for us, we sit in the living room. When we’re done eating, we tackle our school project. We decide that I’m going to focus on how the heart circulates the blood within the body and his main focus is on the external and internal structure, the arteries and their functions. For an hour we discuss how we are going to make our model and whenever I’m not

looking I can feel his stare. I write down every idea we've had. When we take a break, I refill our drinks.

"Where's your mom?"

"She went to the mall, grocery shopping."

"Is it safe to say Simon says kiss me?"

I choke on my drink. I look at him. My eyes widen as he comes closer to me. He waits. I don't know what he's waiting for. I don't know if it's for my invitation or rejection. He doesn't take his eyes off me, but when he does they lower down to my lips. In my head I'm screaming, KISS ME ! I don't remember how to breathe all of sudden. He's so close I'm drunk with the scent of him.

"I thought we were friends." I don't know where I get the strength to say that cause all I want is his lips on mine. And why don't I just shut up?!

" I think we both know we've already passed the friendship barrier." He says, he still hasn't taken his eyes off of me. His lips are slightly parted. His tongue darts out and licks his lower lip.

"Kiss me." I hear myself say.

Before my mind registers what is happening, his lips smashes into mine and I gasp. Instantly my body feels like a furnace. He's making me feel hot.

Banele is kissing me.

I'm kissing him.

We're kissing each other, agonizingly slow.

He tastes of mint because of the drink we drank. I gasp again at the way his lips feel so amazing on mine and he takes advantage of that and slides in his tongue. He changes his pace. Holy mother of God. An alien feeling, desire, surges through me and weird sensations go down below. He pulls me closer to him, and I grab him by the shirt. He licks my lower lip and bites it. I hear a voice and I realize it's me, moaning against his mouth. He goes down on my neck and kisses me there. Everything in me vanishes and I am only filled with the thoughts of him. I don't want him to stop kissing me, ever.

Then I hear my mom's car pull up at the drive way. With a tortured groan, I pull away. All too soon. He blinks, befuddled as to why I've broken the kiss.

"Mom, she's here." I say with a voice I don't recognize.

Realization hits his face. "Oh shit."

We quickly get into our sitting position and pretend to busy ourselves with the school work. What the hell just happened? I've just had my first kiss. And it was...oh my.

“ Molweni, you must be the “friend” that keeps calling my daughter.” She says as she carries the grocery bags into the kitchen. She comes back again.

“Ndinani, can you bring the rest of the bags.”

I stand up and go outside. I indistinctly hear Banele introducing himself to mom. I spot the BMW I saw Banele in the first day at school parked three houses away. I assume it's his dad. My heart breaks a little that he's leaving. I go inside.

“Okay, I'll be right outside.” Banele says while on the phone.

“That was my Dad, he says he's outside and isn't sure which house I'm at.”

He packs his stuff and I walk him out.

“I'll see you tomorrow *sthandwa sam.*”

He kisses me on the forehead and walks away. His kiss is still lingering on my lips.

He called me his love. I have a boyfriend now. Me, Ndinani Peterson. I wish Sinawo was here, she'd be so happy for me.

I help mom cook dinner and she comments on how well mannered Banele is. She likes him, even though she doesn't admit it she does. Banele has that effect on people, they can't hate him. She also says he reminds her of her first lover, he looks like him.

When I get ready for bed I receive a text from him.

No matter what I do, I just can't stop thinking about kissing you again. Until next time. Gudnight.

I fall into a deep slumber with the thoughts of my brown eyed beautiful black boy.

Chapter 4

The first thing I notice when I get to school is that Banele is not by the gates waiting for me. I don't panic at first and I go look for him in our class, he's not there. I go look for him in my- now has become our, favorite spot and I don't find him. I tell myself he's probably late.

I get into panic mode when half way through our first Physics lesson I realize that he's not coming to school. I won't see him today, he won't make me laugh today. I won't get lost in his beautiful brown eyes. He won't interrupt my thoughts with some silly questions. The thought saddens me and I fight the urge to cry. My throat constricts and I'm struggling to breath. It burns. My heart palpitates and I instantaneously feel dizziness. Phelo Gina, she sits next to me at Physics, gives me worried glances. Exhale and Inhale Ndinani, I tell myself. I got this, he was not here for years. Him not being here does not make any difference. I tell myself all of this but then I find myself waiting for his text, something from him.

At lunch time I feel lonely. I'm on the verge of crying. Don't I deserve an explanation? Why didn't he text me? He kisses me and disappears on me? Was I bad? He's coming back right? I'm silently sobbing on our favorite spot missing his presence. I begin trembling and

sweating. I feel my lungs buckle and leave me gasping for air. All of a sudden I feel numb, the dizziness comes back. I try to stand, when I do I fall back down.

“Ndinani !” Someone calls my name.

It’s the last thing I hear before I black out.

When I wake up, I find myself at home in my room. Disoriented, I find my way to the bathroom. I change into my sleep wear clothes. It’s already dark outside.

“*Mama.*” I call out.

“I’m in the living room baby.” I grab my phone and notice it’s close to nine o’clock. I still haven’t received a text from Banele. I’m no longer sad now, I’m angry.

With a worried look on my moms face, I enter the room. “Come sit next to me.” I do and snuggle closer in her arms. “You fainted at school. What’s the problem baby, you haven’t had an anxiety attack since last year.”

I sigh. “Grade 11 has me by the neck. I’m already feeling the pressure *mama.*”

This is partially true, I’ve never been this stressed about a grade.

“You know you have nothing to worry about. You got this, you always had this. Don’t panic, everything will work out. Just study. I was so sick with worry when Mr Zenzile called.” She says as her eyes well with tears.

“I’m okay *mama*, I really am.” I snuggle closer into her in reassurance.

“Your other friend, Phelo, you never told me about was with you in the sick room, she gave me her number and said text her and let her know that you are okay.”

“Oh, I’ll text her.”

She says as she hugs me and I hug her back. It’s quiet for a while, comfortable silence.

I’m enjoying the silence because mom is depicting her love once in a blue moon. I don’t correct her about Phelo not being my friend.

“I have something to tell you.” She pulls away from the hug and looks at me. I wait for her to say something, she looks nervous like she’s afraid of what she’s about to say.

“Before I say anything, I want you to know that I’ll never replace you with anyone and you are my first priority. After your father left us, I didn’t think I’ll be able to let any man be in our lives. But I’ve met someone, and he

makes me feel complete. I have never felt a love like this, in the three months we have been together I've been happier. He's what I have needed, the piece I never knew I didn't have. I want you to meet him, not now but soon."

"WHAT?! How did I not notice this? You have a boyfriend? 3 months and you've never given me a clue that you're dating. I'm so glad you gave love a chance again."

I can't believe this. It all becomes very clear to me all of a sudden. She's always making effort in how she looks, what she wears. When she goes to work she wears makeup, she never did that. All of those calls she takes in her room and laughs like no one's business. I've always been tempted to ask her whose making her laugh, but I know her. She wouldn't have answered me, she'd only tell me not to stick my nose in other people's business.

I think I've surprised her with my reaction. "You are? I thought you'd get mad at me for having a boyfriend."

I laugh. "No, I'm not. I'm happy that you are happy. It all makes sense now. The calls you've been having, the extra effort you've been making in your appearance, it's because you have a man!"

She laughs. It's a beautiful sight to see my mom laugh. "A girl has to look good for her man, and you shouldn't be talking because you have one."

I sigh with sadness. "He didn't come to school today, I haven't heard from him all day."

"Teenage love. I think you should try and call him."

I ponder for a second. "Okay, I will."

"This is nice, I really like this new relationship we have. Us talking about boyfriends and stuff."

"I do too." I say and hug her.

We watch the Queen, our favorite telenovela. When the show ends, she goes to bed. I take my phone from the coffee table and text Phelo.

Hey, thank you for waiting in the sick room with me. I appreciate it so much. I wanted to let you know that I'm okay.

A minute after I sent the text she replies back.

I'm glad u okay. C u tomorrow at school.

I smile at the text. She wants to see me tomorrow. Will that lead to friendship? Do I want to make other friends?

Yes. I don't want to live in fear of losing another friend. Nothing like what happened to Sinawo is going to happen again.

I gather the courage to call Banele. On the second ring he picks it up.

“Ndinani.” He says my name like he needs me, like he wants me to be with him right now.

I don't say anything.

“Sthandwa sam, what's wrong?” Warmth floods through my entire body because of his endearment for me. I try and compose myself and act as livid as I am.

“Why weren't you at school today?” I say and applaud my voice for not giving anything away.

“ I had a mental breakdown this morning.” He says, his voice is devoid of emotion.

My heart breaks. “ What happened?”

“I was triggered by something from my past. I just don't want to talk about it now. I want to hear you talk, your voice is soothing the ache I've been feeling today.”

My world is alright again. My beautiful black boy is here, talking to me. “ What do you want us talk about then?”

“How was school?” He asks.

“ I had a half day at school so I won’t be able to answer your question.”

“Why did you have a half day?”

“I had an anxiety attack.” I tense as I remember the pain disabling me, making numb.

“I’m sorry.” He whispers. “Was there a particular reason for it to happen?”

“As peculiar as this reason may sound yes, there was.”

“What was it? “

I don’t answer him. I don’t want to tell him that he has been my coping mechanism. That’s going to make me seem desperate.

“Simone says tell me.” He says.

What? He doesn’t get to do that to me.

“I wasn’t aware that we are still playing.” I tell him.

“I never said the game was over.” I can feel him smirking at me.

“The last time I checked, it was my turn playing.” I say, smiling.

“Use your turn so I can use mine then.”

“What is it that from your past that triggered you?” I say this cautiously cause I feel like it’s one of the demons he wants to forget.

He sighs and goes silent for a few minutes. “My uncle called my dad, he divorced with his wife and he’s coming to live with us in 2 months, he-” his voice cracks. My heart breaks again.

“I’m here baby, I’m here.” I say.

“He abused me Ndinani.” He cries out. “He raped me.”

I cry for him. I want to tell him I’m sorry but I know that’s not what he wants to hear. I want to tell him he didn’t deserve what happened to him. I want him to cry in my arms while I hold him and he cries. But instead of saying all of this, with tears cascading down my face, I’m a livid with anger.

“Does your father know?” I ask.

“No, he doesn’t.” He sniffs.

“ You have to tell him Banele.”

“ I don’t have the courage to do so. How do I tell him the brother he grew up with and bailed him out of so many situations raped his son? How do I make him believe that the reason I kept quiet for this long is because I never wanted him to lose his brother? How do I let him know that the 2 years I’ve spent staying at his brothers house has scarred me for life?” His voice cracks again.

I feel his pain and it numbs me. I cry because this happened to him. I cry because I want to ease his pain but i don’t know how to. At this moment, I’ve never felt so helpless.

“Baby, I know this hard for you. Having had such a traumatic experience and not being able to tell anyone about it is painful. What if you don’t tell your father and he does it again? What happens then?”

“ He won’t. I’m older now, stronger. I’ll be able to fight him.” He says sternly.

“ I don’t want you to go through that again Banele, we have to tell someone. I’m here with you and I’m not going anywhere. Please.”

“I just need more time to be ready to tell Dad, this is going to break him.” He says sadly. “Sing for me please.”

I oblige. I pour my heart and soul into Billie’s song *Hostage*. Hoping it will make him feel better.

“ I don’t want you to ever stop singing for me.” He says when I finish singing. I blush of course.

“Thank you, I feel a lot better now. I-” He stops. “It’s my turn now. What made you have an anxiety attack?”

I sigh. “You. Since we met, you have been my coping mechanism. I’m sorry. And seeing you not at school today sent me into a panic mode, and when you didn’t call and text to let me know that you were not coming. I panicked. I thought you ghosted me.”

“ If I make you cope better, then I’m at your disposal. You don’t have to be sorry for it. You can use me in whatever way that satisfies you. And I’m sorry for not calling you. I truly am, I promise I’ll let you know if something like this comes up.”

“Okay. It’s getting late Banele. We have a lot to do tomorrow. Our project is not finished.”

“Okay *sthandwa sam*. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” I say

He doesn't drop the call. “Why aren't you drop the call?”
I ask.

“Everything feels so right when you are talking to me.”

“It's the same for me Banele.”

“Drop the call *sthandwa sam.*” He sighs and I drop it.

Immediately when I get into bed I receive a text from
him:

Dream of me. Kiss me when you see me. xxx

At this moment everything feels like it's going to be
alright. I'm content and I'm happy.

Chapter 5

He's here.

I automatically smile when I see him. Warmth spreads through me. I do a frivolous dance in my head. When he sees me, I halt in my steps. He has never looked at me like that before. His gaze is conveying a look of interest and need. My heart aches at the sight of him because he's beautiful. He hasn't taken his eyes off of me when I met him, he engulfs me in a warm hug.

"Missed you." He says in my ear and kisses me on the forehead.

"I missed you too." I say then kiss him as he told me to.

He holds my hand and leads us to our class. As we walk, I notice we are the center of attention. I try pulling my hand away but he doesn't let me.

"This public display thing is drawing attention to us." I say.

“I don’t care, I want to show them that you are mine.” He winks at me.

I giggle.

“Hey ! Ndinani.” I turn to find Phelo approaching us. She sits next to me.

“Hey Phelo.” I smile at her genuinely and introduce her to Banele.

“ How are you today?”

“I’m feeling a lot better actually, anything I missed yesterday ?”

“Not much, I took papers for you that were handed out when you left.” She reaches into her bag and gives them to me.

“Thank you, I hope it wasn’t much trouble for you.”

The rest of the day is amazing & busy cause Phelo is helping Banele catch up on yesterday’s work. I find myself laughing more than I ever had, sometimes I stop

laughing because I'm being aware of this alien feeling-happiness, the kind of laughing that makes your stomach hurt, makes you clap and your stomach hurt. Phelo and Banele spend lunch with me. I really like Phelo, it's very easy warming up to her. She's the total opposite of me. She can make jokes. She's beautiful, inside and out. The only thing we have in common is that we're both smart.. She's really gorgeous, with thick eyebrows and long braids. She's vibrant, everyone likes her.

Banele reminds me that we have to finish up our Biology project. He tells me that we'll go to his house today. I text mom and let her know that I'll be back late. He signed up for soccer and tells me to wait for him after school because he has a meeting with their soccer coach.

When schools is over I stay in class and concentrate on finishing my homework.

"Hey Nani." I look up to see Phelo standing by the door. She's catching her breath like she's been running. "Why are you still here?"

" I'm waiting for Banele, we're working on the Biology project together, why are you here?" I ask.

“I ran here because I forgot my Maths book. Mr Mbuku would kill me if I didn’t do his homework.”

I laugh. “He definitely would, he doesn’t want people who don’t do as they are told.”

“I know right?” She takes her book and puts it into her backpack. “And I heard that Buntu is going to be in the school team too.” Her voice dreamy.

I eye her suspiciously. “Yes, he is.”

“Don’t look at me like that, everybody knows how hot Buntu is, you can’t deny him that.”

I laugh. “I wouldn’t have known because my eyes are for Banele.”

She rolls her eyes. “Banele is defs hot but Buntu, omg. I have the biggest crush on him.”

That doesn't shock me because she's been salivating over Buntu for years. I might be the quiet girl in the corner but I notice things that happens in this school.

"You're lying!" I shriek in excitement, her sharing things with me excites me the most.

"I'm not, I've had hots for him for years. It's hard to resist his oozing sex appeal. I'm just waiting for him to look in my direction." She sighs.

"How about we make him look in your direction? Rumor has it that he's single." I suggest.

"How? I mean the guy hardly glances at me, has he seen how hot I am? Maybe it's because his father is a Pastor. I go to church every Sunday just because i want to see him. I've tried everything." I laugh.

"I don't know how. Do you know who he's doing his project with?" She shakes her head. "Or maybe you could walk with him after his meeting. I'll ask Banele to introduce you."

“What if it’s going to be awkward? I’ve never talked to the guy. What if I won’t be able to hold a conversation with him?” She hides her face with her hands in horror.

“Stop panicking, it’s now or never girl. We should-“

“Nani, are you ready to go?” Banele says in the doorway.

“In a sec.” I say as I pack my books.

“Let’s go.” I say to Phelo.

“Banele, can you do me a favor.” I look over his shoulder and see Buntu exiting the school gates.

“Sure, what’s up?” He eyes me like I’m up to something. Of course I am, I’m match making.

“Can you ask Buntu to walk Phelo home. I don’t want her to walk home alone.” He rolls his eyes, obviously knowing what I’m up too.

He whistles and Buntu stops. I have no idea how he knew Banele was whistling for him, but he did. We go to him and Banele does the introductions.

“Can you walk Sinawo home bro? We don’t want her to walk home alone.”

Buntu smiles at him. Sinawo pinches my arm. “Sure, let’s go.”

I watch them depart together. I can’t wait to hear from Phelo telling me how it went. We walk to Banele’s house. It’s a bit further from school but we enjoy the walk, well with him I enjoy everything.

When we get to his house there are still boxes of unpacked furniture. It’s a huge and a beautiful house. His dad must make a fortune. His house definitely speaks for itself. Banele takes off his uniform and wear shorts and a vest. I wish he hadn’t worn the vest because I can’t take my eyes off his arms, they are distracting. And his legs, they are so masculine, hairy, long and beautiful. Everything about him is beautiful.

“What do you feel like eating?” He asks.

You, the word it on the tip of my tongue but I quickly compose myself.

“I .. uhm.. I’m good with anything.”

He goes into the kitchen. He emerges with plates after a few minutes, he made a sand-which with orange juice. I watch him eat, I watch the way his lips clings to the rim of the glass before he swallows. I’m obsessed with his lips. It’s been too long since his those lips have touched mine.

“Penny for your thoughts?”

I blush.

“What are you thinking about?” His lips twitch.

I hesitate for a second.

“Your lips, I’m thinking about your lips.”

“What about them?”

“I’m wondering about how long is it going to take before you kiss me again.”

There. I said it. We sitting so close together. Our thighs are touching each other. Heat spreads through me as I notice how close he is. I bite my bottom lip and his gaze follows the movement.

“If you keep looking at me like that, it’d probably take a second.”

“Why are you waiting then?” I don’t know where I get this bravery but I like it.

He doesn’t answer me and he does what I want. At first the kiss is slow, I know he’s teasing me. I deepen the kiss and he unleashes a groan. He drives the kiss deeper and fire engulfs us. His mouth is hot and hungry, I’m enjoying the feeling of his lips onto mine. I moan, giving him access to put the perfect amount of tongue in. It feels like heaven. His fingertips brush over my thighs and I shiver.

That unfamiliar feeling surges through me again. Heat overwhelms me and I melt in my black beautiful boy’s arms. For such a long time we are kissing each other, I

don't ever want him to stop. I want more. His phone rings and he cries out in frustration.

“Dad?” He listens. “Yeah, I’m with my Ndinani..” He listens again. “No, we’re just doing our school work.” He looks at me and I blush. “Yeah, okay. See you later then.”

“He says he’ll drive you home when he gets here.”

“Oh, will you be there?”

“I’d be anywhere you want to me to be.”

I blush. “So...Lets work.”

By six o’clock we’ve finished half our project. We work very well together. I love the way he listens to my opinions, the way he adds something to whatever I’m saying. I love how he stimulates my mind. And I love how we see eye to eye on most things.

“I’m worn out, kiss me. I want to have energy again.” He wiggles his eyebrows and smirks.

His father walks in when I'm about kiss him. I flush, embarrassed. He's holding pizza and his work bag. I quickly sit up straight and move away from him. He comes closer and smiles up at his dad.

"Hey Dad, this is my girlfriend Ndinani." He introduces us.

He doesn't say anything and studies me. It's quiet for a while. It's an awful silence. Why is he looking at me like this? I wonder. His look makes me nervous. I'm sweating.

"You look very familiar, and nice to meet you." He genuinely smiles and his smile resembles Banele's.

"It's nice to meet you too sir." I break as I shake his hand.

"You look like someone I've met."

I don't know what to say to that. He walks into the kitchen and Banele laughs at me.

"What are you laughing at?"

“You were so nervous, I like you when you are nervous.”

I rolled my eyes and pack my books.

“You leaving already?” I turn around to find Mr Mdlungu. “I thought we’d eat pizza together.”

“No, thank you sir. I’m going home, my mom is probably waiting for me.”

“Okay then, grab a slice. I’ll take you home.”

I do as he says. We get in the car and drive off, with Banele of course. The drive is short, Banele and his dad talk about sports and school. I notice how comfortable they are with each other. I make a mental note to lessen the worry Banele has about telling his father about his Uncle. My gut is telling me his dad would do anything in his power to protect him. It’s the kind of relationship I wish I had with my father, he went MIA ever since birth. Bastard.

When we get home, the Mdlungu’s walk me in.

“Ma, I’m home!” I call out.

We find her in the living room, reading a novel. She looks up and shock registers on her face. Immediately the room intensifies awkwardly.

“Mom, this is Banele’s father. Mr Mdlungu.”

Silence.

I look at Mr Mdlungu and he looks as appalled as my mom. I look at Banele for help, but he looks clueless as I am.

“Mzwandile.” Mom says, still flabbergasted.

“Thandile.” Banele’s father says.

Chapter 6

What? They know each other? How?

It's clear they know each other. The way they are looking at each other says they've got history together. I'm very curious to know how, but I'll wait for our "girls talk" again. The way they said their names. The way they gazed at each other. There's definitely more to this.

"How have you been?" Mzwandile says. He walks towards my mom but stops himself.

"I think we will leave you guys to talk." I say and pull Banele into my room.

I go into the bathroom and quickly change my uniform. When I emerge into my room I find Banele laying on my bed comfortable, legs crossed, and patiently waiting for me.

"I see you've made yourself at home."

"Wherever you are, is home to me."

I blush. "You're a sweet talker aren't you?"

“Not really,” he smirks “you like me so much that whenever I say something good about you, you blush.”

I roll my eyes. “ That’s only because you aren’t afraid to speak your mind. I’ve never had a friend throwing compliments at me all the damn time.”

“I can’t help it.” He smiles and pulls me to him. “When it comes to you, I can’t help anything. I can’t stop thinking about your soft lips. I can’t stop watching how your black eyes always show how you’re feeling. When I’m with you, I can’t help but want to touch you, hold you and kiss you. I love everything about you, the texture of your hair, the way you look at me, your laughter whenever I say something comic, more than anything I love being in your presence. I love you.”

Did he just-?

He said the L word. He loves me. Me? Ndinani Peterson. Just me, the way I am. An ocean of emotions pours all over me. I can’t comprehend why I’m crying but I am. I sob on his chest and he holds me. I don’t ever want him to let go of me.

Do I say it back? Am I ready to say it?

“I don’t know what love feels like,” I confess “ I want to say it back, but I’m not sure that what I feel for you is love, I don’t know what it is.”

“You’ll figure it *sthandwa sam*, you don’t have to say it back just yet. You’ll know when to say it. I didn’t plan on saying it. I love you.” He kisses my forehead.

I hug him, tightly. I’m about to burst with emotion. Who would have thought dating is this wonderful? I belong here, I belong with him.

For a while we just enjoy each other’s presence, we’re holding on to each other so tightly. I don’t want to burst our bubble but I have too.

“You need to tell your dad Banele.” He visibly tenses at my words and I immediately regret bringing up what scars him the most.

“I don’t think I c-can”. His voice cracks and I hold him tighter. I’m afraid to see his face because i don’t want to see his haunted face.

“You’re just afraid, don’t let the fear get to you. I told you I’ll be here for you. If you want, I’ll be there with you when you tell him. I promise.”

He’s quiet for a heartbeat and he sighs. “Okay, I’ll tell him.”

His body relaxes and I stare at him. I don’t believe he actually listened to me. I kiss him.

The fire that always surrounds us when we kiss ignites. I kiss him passionately. I pour my heart into this kiss. I'm letting him know that I'll be here for him when he needs me. I want to reassure him that it's going to be okay. I don't want him to live his life pretending that he's happy, I want him to be happy. Truly. With me. I want it for him. I want it for us. He trails his fingers on my thighs and I immediately pull away. I don't want him to see my drawings.

"Our parents are in the other room." I say, breathlessly.

He stares at me, probably reading into my words.

"Baby.." he pulls me into him and I feel his erection. I gasp. "Are you a virgin?"

"Well.. I uhm..." I remain speechless.

"You've never dated before, have you?"

"I-"

"Ndinani!" Mom calls out.

"We're coming."

Hand in hand, I walk in with Banele in the living room. The tension that was there is no longer there, there's a little bit of awkwardness. I closely watch my mom on the couch and her facial expression is emotionless. Mzwandile is up on his feet and looks like he's ready to bolt. Regret is written all over his face.

"We have to go." Mzwandile says to Banele with a voice void of emotion.

He kisses my forehead. "Bye sthandwa sam."

Don't go. My inner voice says.

"Bye, text me when you get home."

After a few seconds I hear the door close. They didn't say goodbye to each other. I look at mom. She sighs like she has been holding her breath. All of a sudden she breaks down. She has never cried in-front of me. My mom, the woman who has held strong woman persona, crumbles. My heart bleeds.

On instinct, I go and comfort her. In my arms, she weeps. Every time I hear her cries my heart breaks. Her hiccups are hard to bare. There must have been something really terrible that made my resilient mom breakdown. I listen to her sob and I don't know what to say. I just hold her. After half an hour the sobs subside and she's trying to

control her breath. It's quiet for a while and I don't want to bite the bullet but I have to eventually.

"Mama, what's going? Are you okay?" I mutter.

"After that cry I'm okay. I needed that so badly." She whispers.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I ask. She remains quiet, I don't want to push her. She doesn't like to talk about herself.

"He was my first love."

What?

"Back in the days, when my parents were still alive, I wasn't allowed to date. They wanted me to become a doctor. My father was a disciplinarian, so was my mom but she bent over the rules a little for me. I had a curfew, I wasn't allowed to have "guy" friends . The only people I was allowed to befriend were church people. I met Mzwandile at age 17, I was doing my matric and he was doing his first year. He had to leave for school and come back every 4 months, we hated the long distance and I decided to join him at his varsity after I finished studying. I fell in-love with him. I thought he was my forever. He was perfect. He made me happy, he made me feel alive. He was patient with me, he loved me fiercely

and loudly. Within three months my parents found out about us and I was prohibited from seeing him.”

“That didn’t stop us from seeing each other. He’d write me letters. We had a secret place where we met. I couldn’t allow them to break us apart. Once in a while he’d call me and tell me how much he loved me. It was hard for us to be together but we didn’t give up on each other. My parents have always warned me not to have sex before marriage but I rebelled, I went ahead and did it. I’ll always remember that night. It was so beautiful. I was giving up what I valued for the person I loved. But I wish I didn’t, if I could turn back the time..”

She tears up again. I hold her again. The pain in her voice is unbearable. I notice that she’s not even here, she’s reliving moments from her childhood. This must be hard for her, my mom never opens up. This is the first time she’s ever telling me about who she was as a teenager.

“I fell pregnant. When I told him he freaked out. He blamed it on me and left me, all alone. My parents couldn’t handle the shame and kicked me out. I didn’t know what to do. I went to a shelter. I was under a lot of pressure, I didn’t eat. I lost the baby. I don’t know how it happened, I just woke up and I bled . I was in a dark place. I continued with school but didn’t qualify to become a doctor so I became a nurse. At age 18 I wasn’t allowed at the shelter anymore. I got a job then continued

with my studies. A few years later I met Mzwandile again, he wanted us to fix thing. He asked me about the baby. He never even gave me a chance to explain how I lost the baby. He vanished from the face of the earth until today.”

“Did he listen to you this time?”

“Yes. He apologized. He’s so angry with himself. He knows better now. He knows he should’ve handled the situation way better than he did. I’ve never seen this version of him. He has changed so much over the years.”

“Do you forgive him?”

“After today I realized I was waiting for an apology. The guilt has left. I’ve always blamed myself for losing the baby.”

“I’m glad you know that it wasn’t your fault. Do you.. do you still love him?”

“I’m not sure I’m able to give you answer right now. I have a boyfriend, who loves me so much. But Mzwandile coming back into my life is something else. Thank you for listening to all my ranting.”

“It’s going to work out, I promise. Thank you for sharing this with me.” I kiss her. I go into the kitchen and take chocolate ice cream with me.

“Our favorite.” I say and her mood lightens up.

We watch a Eddie Murphy movie instead of our usual telenovelas. A lot is going on through my head. My mom and Banele’s father have dated. I’m dating Banele now, will that cause a problem in our relationship?

“*Mama.*” I say hesitantly.

“Yes?”

“You do know I’m dating Banele right?”

“Yes...”

“The thing is, what if you decide you want try again. He’s a widow now. He’s available. It would make things very awkward.”

“I don’t think getting back with him is going to happen. I have a boyfriend, and I’m very much in love with him.”

“You don’t even mention your boyfriend’s name mom!” I laugh.

“I will soon. When I’m ready to introduce you to him.”

“Okay then.”

After that I get my mom back. We laugh throughout the movie. She drifts off on the couch and I cover her with a blanket.

In my room I find my phone blipping with text messages from Banele and a missed call. I immediately smile. I find two messages. This one is sent 2 hours ago.

I'm home. Well, ur first kisser is home.

Another one.

Can I call? I mic u already. My tongue misses tangling with yours.

I giggle and call him back. I get inside my comforters. He picks up on the second ring. I wonder what he was doing on the first ring.

"Sthandwa sam."

"Don't get excited, I'm calling the only guy I've ever had to kiss just to say goodnight."

"Me being your first kisser is something I want to gloat about. It makes me happy."

"You crazy." I giggle and yawn.

“Sleepy aren’t we?”

“Yes, can we go to sleep?”

“Simon says stay awake.”

“What? I can’t do that! I’m sleepy.”

“You sleep, you lose.”

“Fine, I’m not losing to you.” And staying up all night listening to his voice isn’t such a bad idea.

“That’s my baby. Did I tell you I like you when you competitive?” I can feel him smirking.

“You like everything about me Banele.”

“Damn right. Did I tell you about the soccer meeting? Well coach said..”

My beautiful black boy spends hours over the phone with me. When my airtime ends he calls me with his. I’m in cloud nine, listening to the voice of a guy that liquifies my insides. I could never be more content than I am now.

Chapter 7

I wake up with my phone blaring its ringtone. It's 7 in the morning. Who in the hell wakes up early on a Saturday morning?

It's Phelo.

Still unconscious I answer my phone.

"Guessssss who has Buntu's numbers? ME ! I do!" She literally screams through the phone. Wow, I never would have guessed she'd be a morning person.

"First of all, why do you wake up so early in the morning? Secondly how did you manage THAT ?"

"I'm coming over to your house ! Send me the address. I'll tell you all the deets ! And when I get there you better be dressed up cause we're going to the mall !" she squeals excitedly.

"What? Why do we have to go to the mall?" That wakes me up. I feel claustrophobic in overcrowded places.

"I have to buy a dress for church tomorrow, I've ran out of dresses."

“You buying a dress for Buntu aren’t you?” I roll my eyes.

“Yes ! A girl’s gotta do what a girl’s gotta do to get her man. So please help me, pretty please.”

“ Arrrgh, okay.” She drops the call with a laugh.

I get out of bed and shower. After that I make the bed and pick out an outfit for the day. I’m not really into fashion, I wear whatever makes me feel comfortable. I wear my favorite black pants and a long sleeve grey shirt. In the mirror I look decent enough and no part of my body is showing.

Ugly. My inner critic says.

Pain quickly tries to get into me. I shut it down and close my eyes. I repeat the word pretty a several times in my head until she doesn’t say anything. I’m going to have fun today, I don’t need the negativity. I applaud myself for patching myself up that quickly.

In the kitchen I make breakfast. I make one of mom’s favorite, pancakes. I’m a very good cook. Self-taught. Mom has always been busy, always. She never makes time for me, for us. I’m happy that we are trying to mend our relationship. I’m happy that she’s happy. There’s a lot we need to discuss but we also need time. I understand

now why she's the way she is. She was never taught to cater for someone else. She became an adult at a young age. She had to deal with a lot of challenges. I've never known my mom beyond the exterior, it's really heartwarming to know her.

By eight, I finish making breakfast. This is the first time I've made breakfast in bed for her. I hope this doesn't make her suspicious. She's always been the one who's up first. I knock on her door and there's no answer. I guess she's still asleep. I open the door and find her peacefully asleep.

"Mama, wake up."

She stirs a little and wakes up.

"Hey, good morning." She says, she's not fully awake yet but when she smells the aroma of pancakes and coffee she becomes wide awake.

"I made these for you. How are you feeling today?"

She smiles. "Thank you honey, I'm feeling a lot better."

"Good, because I need a favor."

"I knew it, what do you want?" She asks as she digs in.

“I’m going to the mall with Phelo. Can I go?”

Shocked she says. “ Really? Wow this is startling. You never go to malls. “

I shrug. “Is that a yes?”

“Okay no problem, take my credit card with you. You need new clothes too.”

“That won’t be necessary-“ wait, I have a boyfriend now. I have to look good. “On second thought, I’m taking the card. I promise I won’t spend much.”

“The last time I checked, you hated shopping. You really going out of your comfort zone. I’m loving the effect your new friends have on you.” She kisses my cheek. “I’m so proud of you.”

She’s proud of me? Omg. This is the first time I’ve heard her say that. And it feels ... so freakin’ amazing. I hug her. I’ve been having a lot of hugs from her lately and they also feel amazing. She’s exuding love and affection. I’ve been dreaming of this, this is what I’ve been praying for.

I take the card and text Phelo.

Waiting 4 u.

She replies within seconds.

I'll be there in 5 min.

Another notification from Banele shows. My mood escalates to a hundred.

Gudmorning sthandwa sam. Plans for 2day?

Who knew a good morning text could make me feel this happy? Do all girls get this excited to hear from their boyfriend's? I doubt it.

Gudmorning, I'm going shopping with Phelo. Don't miss me too much.

He replies.

Have fun. You're the one whose gonna miss me too much.

I smell a challenge here. I'm not backing down.

We'll see about that.

A knock on the door interrupts me. That must be

Phelo. When I open the door I am still in awe of her beauty. She's even more beautiful without her uniform. She's wearing a short jean skirt and a black vest. She's showing off long beautiful legs. I bet anything would look good on her. How on earth did I become friends with someone as beautiful as her?

"Ready to go?" She eyes me from head to toe. "Have you seen the weather outside. The sun is scorching and you're wearing jeans?"

"I'll survive." I shrug. "You look gorgeous by the way."

She blushes. "Thank you. You are changing. Lead me to your room please."

And because I know she won't let this go, I lead her to my room. We pass by my mom's room.

"You haven't left yet?" She asks.

"No, Phelo wants me to change. Apparently it's too hot outside for jeans."

She laughs. "Have fun girls."

The minute we walk into my room, she searches for my wardrobe and she searches through it. I watch her,

fascinated, saying “nope” to my other clothes. How does she know what’s suitable to wear to the mall?

“Why don’t you have color? All of your clothes are dull!” She says exasperated. After a minute she says. “Oh ! This is perfect.”

She’s holding my yellow dress. A dress? I can’t wear a dress. I start panicking. I search my brain for excuses not to wear this dress and I don’t know how to tell Phelo I don’t wear dresses. Not since that *day*. But I’m a big girl, I can do this. I can do this.

“Don’t stand there looking at me! Go and change !” She rolls her eyes.

“Can I at-least wear something on top?” I ask.

“You’ll look gorgeous even if you’re not Nani.” She tries to reassure me.

“I just.. I won’t feel comfortable in public showing that much skin.”

Please don’t ask why. She searches my face, I’m sure she finds panic, and with resignation she sighs. “Okay fine. I’ll look for something.”

I quickly change. The dress is below my knees and I look really pretty in it. It gives me colour and my mood suddenly changes. I wear sandals and Phelo does her magic with my cardigan, I feel confident enough.

“My work here is done, you look beautiful.” She sighs in contentment. And that compliment alone boosts myself esteem.

“Do you mind helping me out shopping today? Since you know a lot about clothes and stuff.”

“It would be my pleasure. Let’s go !”

Three exhausting hours later we eat lunch at McDonalds. I don’t think there’s any shop we didn’t enter. We even entered the expensive shops, just to be shocked by the prices and walk out. Fitting the clothes is the exhilarating part, I don’t know why I dreaded shopping. I guess I only enjoyed it because I was with Phelo, she knows what to buy and what not to buy. Where has she been all my life? I’ve noticed a lot of pupils hang out here on weekends. Phelo has introduced me to a number of girls- and guys. You’d swear she knows the entire school.

“With the dress I bought today, Buntu won’t be able to take his eyes off me.”

I laugh. “Wow, you really like him. “

“Yep and in no time he’ll be mine. He only gave me his number to keep contact with him. I certainly don’t mind though, as long as I’m in his presence.”

“You’ve got it bad!” I tease.

“Who said it was only men who chased after women? I can do anything I bloody want. He is mine, he just doesn’t know it yet.” My stomach hurts from laughing. I’ve spent the whole time with her laughing, she brings nothing else but happiness into my life.

“Your feminist side is on display, you go girl !” I cheer.

“My past relationships have been wack, I’m glad we didn’t see any of the guys I’ve dated here. I just feel like Buntu will erase the memories of them.” She cringes. She must hate her exes.

“Break a leg. He’ll ask you out. Don’t forget to give him hints and flirt !”

“I suck at giving hints, what do you suggest?”

“I don’t know. But show him you want him.”

“I’ll show him alright.” She wiggles her eyebrows and I laugh.

“Thank you for helping me out today, I needed this.” I say, genuinely.

“Anytime chomie. Do you want ice cream? I never leave the mall without eating ice-cream.”

“Yes please.”

We head to the ice cream shop, while she orders I check my phone. And there’s text from Banele.

Can’t believe you haven’t texted or call. Miss you. How’s your day going?

My insides melt. My beautiful black boy. I decide to not text him until I get home, just to torture him a little bit. I’m dying to text back, but I restrain myself.

Five minutes later, with our chocolate ice cream we wait for an uber. The Uber drops me off first.

“Text me when you get home.” I tell Phelo.

“Okay, thank you for today. I had lots of fun.”

“Me too. Thank you and bye.” I hug her.

Once I’m inside the house, I put the shopping bags in my room and the takeaways I bought in the kitchen. When

I'm about to check mom and inform her I'm home, i hear her giggling in her room, but then I hear two voices laughing? I listen closely and I hear a voice of a man? What? No ways.

Mom has a man inside ! Omg. Should I knock and let her know I'm home? But that's going to disturb her. I decide to sneak away from her door and into my room. I don't want to be the child that doesn't give her mom privacy. I'd want to be left alone when I have a man over.

In my room, I call Banele. Torturing him is like torturing myself, God I missed him so much.

“Ndinani.” His voice is hoarse. He called me by name, he's mad.

But I missed his voice.

“Banele.” I say with a sigh. “I missed you so -”

“Really? You ignored me half of the day.” He's mad, oh I like him worked up over little things.

“I'm sorry, it's been a busy day and I was having so much fun. I needed this kind of fun.” I sigh, why did I not text him?

“It's okay *sthandwa sam*, I'm glad you had fun. Just don't ignore me again.” Just like that, his anger dissolves.

“I promise I won’t. How was your day?”

“I was hanging out with dad, had fun but got bored and slept. Can I come over? I miss you so much.”

I don’t think mom would appreciate me having a boy over, but... whose going to let her know?

“You can come but you’ll have to come through the window, *Mama* is home and she has a man over.”

“And you’ll have *your man* over.” He laughs.

Ahhh, I love the sound of “your man”. He is mine and I’m his. I kinda like what we have going on.

“I’ll be waiting for you, don’t be too long.” I say.

I drop the call. In the meantime I text mom, I really don’t want to disturb her quality time with her man.

I’m back. I heard voices in ur room & I didn’t want to disturb you. I bought food you don’t have to cook. Thank you for the money, I had fun. I’ll show you the clothes 2morrow.

After an hour, I hear a knock on my window. Jubilantly I jump to open it. The sight of my beautiful black boy

makes my heart ache. He is so beautiful I don't understand how he became mine. We staring at each other, we're in our bubble and I'm so content in it.

"You're so beautiful in a dress." His eyes gleam when he articulates that.

That compliment liquifies my insides. I blush.

"Are you going to stand there forever?" I say.

He gets through the window without difficulty. He sits on my bed and I join him. I hug him and he brings me closer to him.

"Missed you." He mumbles.

I missed you too baby, I wanna say but I don't because I feel so warm in his arms.

He kisses my forehead. Then my cheeks, my nose, my eyes and light kisses on my lips. Ahhh, I wanna stay like this forever.

"I almost told Dad about his brother today." I tense immediately. "The confession was on the tip of my tongue, but I just couldn't. I need...time."

"It's okay." I hug him tightly. "Take your time. Your dad loves you and he'll do anything to protect. I know a lot

will change after you tell him but it's for the best. I'll be here. I promise." I reassure him.

He doesn't say anything. He kisses me and the fire that his kisses reignite makes warmth flood my entire body. His lips taste so good, sweet and dreamy. They are everything I could've wanted and more. I can't seem to figure out what he's sharing with this kiss. Appreciation, maybe. But damn he's lips feel so good against mine. I kiss him back thoroughly, reacquainting myself with his taste and the warmth of his breath on my face.

He takes over the kiss and finds the trail to my neck giving me access to breathe. He kisses me so gently I hear myself moan. For a moment I worry about my mom hearing us but when he sends kisses down my neck and the thought quickly abandons me. He lays me on my back and bites my lower lip. I am undone. Completely lost in him.

"You are so beautiful." He looks at me conveying nothing but desire. I want this. I want to feel loved and desired.

He caresses my face and I lean into his hand kissing it. My heart wants to burst with bliss. He rests himself on my chest and I hold him.

"Can we stay like this? You holding me and whisper sweet nothings to each other?"

“Yes, whatever you want is what I want at the moment.” I mutter .

We stay like this for forever. I don't know how long time passes but when it's time for him to leave I suddenly feel under the weather. He departs giving me a forehead kiss and I fall into a deep slumber with the images of my black beautiful boy.

Chapter 8

On a Monday morning I find mom glued on her phone and giggle in the kitchen. With a glance on the stove

I notice she hasn't made breakfast meaning we're eating cereal today. My lunch is packed and mom is ready for work. She giggles again, I'm pretty sure it's her "boyfriend-with-an-unmentioned-name". This man makes her so happy which makes me happy for her.

"*Sbwl sana*, is that the mysterious guy again?" I ask curiously.

She gives me the mind your business look.

"All weekend you've been head over heels for him. Am I ever going to meet him?"

"Soon, he wants to meet you. I'm nervous about him being the first guy into our lives. What if you two don't jell with each other?"

"As long as he makes you happy mom we won't have a problem." I pack my lunch box and make cereal hurriedly. "Aren't you suppose to be gone by now?"

She blushes. "He's picking me up from and to work." She frowns, a minute passes. "I have lunch with Banele's father, he wants to "talk"."

“ I’m sure he wants to make clear the air between you two. Don’t forget to let things go and be happy.”

She sighs. “Okay, I’ll bare that in mind. I raised you well baby girl.”

Ari Lennox is blasting through my earphones when I approach the gates of the school. The first thing I notice is that Banele isn’t waiting for me as he usually does. Panic crawls at the back of my throat and a lump forms in it. The happiness I’ve been feeling this morning flees.

I spot Phelo at the doorway of our class. She’s chatting with the other classmates. Wanting to be alone, I rush to the bathroom. I calm myself down. I take out my phone and text Banele.

Baby you aren’t here. What’s going on?

I wait for a few minutes for his response but he doesn’t say anything. I’m so mad, why didn’t he warn me he’s not coming today? To hell with him. Exiting the ladies, i approach Phelo with a smile. My phone vibrates with a text and I know it’s him.

Woke up late. I’ll be there.

There's something off about his text, there's no reassurance, it's like he wasn't the one texting. He's using one word phrases and that isn't like him. The anger vanishes. I'm overreacting, maybe it's because it's that time of the month. My instincts are telling me something is definitely wrong but I brush the thought off. I send heart emojis.

"Heeeeeeey. I got news." Phelo says excitedly and dragging the "hey" meaning it's good news.

"Hey love. Spill the beans !"

"I'm having a date with Buntu later today. After his soccer practice. Yesterday we stayed all night chatting. I'm already seeing our future together." She has a dreamy face, and did I mention how beautiful she is?

My mood matches hers. "You already got a date with him, you got game sis."

"I know right. He's so easy to talk to omg. Our conversation isn't forced. I like him."

"I hope everything works out for you." I say.

“By the way, have you heard about the party Buhle’s throwing? I can’t wait to finish exams and loosen up. You’re coming with me right?”

I hesitate, I hate parties. “I don’t know, I’ll have to check with mom first.”

“I’m sure she’ll agree, your mom gives off a cool vibe.” If you only knew.

Banele arrives ten minutes after the first period. I don’t recognize the expression he wears today. Something about it got me worried. It’s scared? No, that can’t be him. What would he be afraid of? He corks up his feelings. What’s going on? He doesn’t look at me when he takes his seat and I know right there and there that something is going.

I’m counting the minutes until we get our time together. I’ve been throwing worried glances at him. He doesn’t even look at my direction. He isn’t making jokes like he usually does. He isn’t trying to blow kisses or wink at me when the teacher isn’t looking. When the bell rings I quickly pack my books, when I look for Banele there’s no sight of him. What the hell?

It’s been a hectic day. The work that needs to be done is piling and it needs full attention. We doing our Biology presentation tomorrow. While my partner ignores me, i

busy myself preparing our presentation. All day long Banele has been avoiding me. He didn't spend his intervals with me, but Phelo saved me from being alone. I'm sick with worry. I need him to talk to me. Patiently, I wait until school's over to talk to him.

"Banele." I call for him immediately after the bell has rang.

His shoulders tense, he has his back on me and I can't see his face. I wait for my classmates to leave. With a deep breath I try and address the elephant in the room.

"I hate the silent treatment thing. Is everything okay?" I say subtly.

"I don't have time for this, I need to get to practice."

He doesn't wait for my response and walks out.

WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK?

My heart shatters like glass.

What just happened? I'm befuddled.

I'm fuming with anger when I walk out the gates, alone. On the way home, I'm listening to one of my favorite artists Giveon, *heartbreak anniversary* and I swear if I don't get home right away, I'll burst into tears. I'm lost in my thoughts and my heart hurts. Tears hang themselves

on my eyelids for their lives. I hate it when my anger turns into tears.

At home, I wail my eyes out. I'm trembling and everything in me hurts. I'm not okay. I drag myself into my room and let everything out. I don't know how long I cry but I eventually fall asleep.

When I wake, I change my clothes. I'm no longer angry, I'm just downcast. I've been so emotional today, it's always like this when I'm on the rag. The only thing that can cheer me up is cooking, so i do my magic in the kitchen.

Subsequently I hear my phone ringing and it's Phelo. I was hoping it was someone else.

"Hey girl." I say sullenly.

"I hate men." She sounds like she's about to tear up.

"What's wrong?" I ask, my comforting instincts awaken.

"My date with Buntu didn't go as expected, well it did but not the way I wanted it too. After his soccer practice, he texted me the location. Everything went well at first, the conversation wasn't forced, there wasn't any awkwardness. Everything changed after he said "I have something to tell you". I thought he was going to tell me he likes me but noooooo." She says, pissed. "I felt my

heart sink when he said “Nobody knows this, even my parents don’t know. I’m tired of pretending to be something I’m not. You’ve grown on me. So, the thing is I like men”.

“What? He’s gay?” I cough, shock choking me.

“Yes, and don’t you dare say anything to anyone. I don’t see the future I thought we had anymore. I can’t cry over spilt milk anyways.” She says this sadly and I wish I was there with her.

“Don’t worry, I won’t say anything. I’m sorry, cry if it makes you feel better. On the bright side, he was honest with you and didn’t lead you on. I’m happy he told you about his sexuality.”

“Yeah, he’s such an amazing person. He said he knew I like him and didn’t want my feelings for him to grow any further and hopefully we’ll build onto the relationship we have. I’m okay with that, it just sucks because the fantasies I’ve been having of him will be no more.”

“You’ll meet someone else to have fantasies for. You got everything and more, these boys don’t deserve you and your love.” I console.

“I’m so glad I called you, my confidence is creeping back on me. After tomorrow, I’ll look for someone to crush on.”

I high five myself for making someone feel good today. “Already?” I laugh.

She laughs. “I don’t have time crying over this.” She pauses. “Quick question, are you and Banele okay? He wasn’t himself today.”

Pain stings my heart. “The last time I checked we were okay, he’s not okay. I don’t know what’s wrong, I’ve tried talking to him.”

I put the phone on speaker and continue with my almost ready food.

“He’s been avoiding me today. I really don’t like to see him like this.” I say.

“Try and call him, or maybe he needs his space to self-introspect. He’ll communicate with you when he’s ready, he strikes me as the type who articulates themselves well.”

“So I shouldn’t worry about?”

“Yes and no. Worry about it but not too much, it might or might not be something serious. Check on him though, boys weren’t taught to reach out when they aren’t okay. FYI, i suck at giving relationships advice.”

“Okay. I’ll check on him, thank you.”

“I have to go, mom and dad just got home. Thank you back.”

“Goo’bye.” I coo.

I continue with my cooking. I don’t notice when mom arrives because I’m contemplating on how to approach Banele. If he needs me he isn’t showing anything of sort. God, I miss him so much.

“Hey, smells good.” She says at she takes note of what I’m cooking.

“Hey Ma, how was lunch with Banele’s father?” I ask as I begin to dish up.

“It went well. We talked like we’ve never talked before. We reminisced, he’s changed quite a lot.” She pauses. “I didn’t know I needed the closure, maybe it’s one of the reasons me and your father didn’t work. I feel like an

amount of load has been lifted off my shoulders. We've buried a hatch."

"So there wasn't chemistry between the two of you?" I curiously ask.

"No there wasn't. He isn't what I want. My boyfriend, Njabulo, is everything I've ever wanted. I'm not going back there."

"You are so whipped over your man, it's cute." I tease. "Does he know you don't want him back?" We eat whilst watching television.

"Yes, I've been unambiguous about my intentions with him and his reaction to that wasn't pleasant.. He isn't looking and is focusing on raising his son." The mention of Banele makes my heart sting. "His brother is coming this side in two days, they're were..." I lose concentration.

His brother? That's Banele's uncle ! Banele freaking out wherever he is. Abruptly I stop eating and call Banele. I wait for him to answer the call, while my heart is pulsating loudly.

"What's wrong?" Mom asks .

“It’s nothing, I just remembered something important I had to do.” I quickly do a bunk to my room before she questions me any further.

The phone rings until it goes to voicemail. Once more, panic chokes me. He never not answer his phone, never. I try again and I don’t get an answer. I try texting him.

Baby please pick up your phone. I need you to talk to me.

With a heavy heart, I think about the events of today on my bed. Banele is going through a rough time but he’s so wrong by shutting me out. I wanted us to work through his demons together. I’ve never seen him like this, he’s frightened. I suspect he has gone back to the little traumatized boy he was. I’m so scared for him, but also furious at his uncle for damaging him so bad.

In a short period of time, Banele has become so essential in my life. I can’t go on a day without hearing from him. Everything I share with him isn’t forced, I just want him to know the kind of person I am. He makes me so happy, he isn’t ashamed to be seen with me. His love is fierce, when I’m with him I’m always drowning in his love. Whenever I try and show him affection, he doesn’t know how to accept it, like me. When he’s away from me I want nothing else but to be soothed with his voice. He brings me peace I’ve never found anywhere. I’ve never felt anything like this, I don’t want to feel it for anyone

either than him. I am... I am in-love with him. I'm in-love with Banele. This hits me like lightning and I start crying.

He defines love.

Why haven't I told him this? He needs to know. I need to tell him how I feel. I try calling him again, but this time it goes straight to voicemail. I cross my heart that I'll see him tomorrow.

I'm feeling the pain again, I don't like feeling like this. I do the only thing I know that will erase the pain, I draw. I promised myself I won't draw too much but once I start I can't stop.

I draw and draw.

And again I draw, once the pain in my heart subsides I feel numb and the drawings starts to sting. I stop and try to sleep.

Unable to sleep, I do the touch ups of our school project again. I'm making sure I cover everything that's going to score us marks. I make notes for Banele and iron out everything. Once I'm done I check my phone and there's nothing from Banele. I try calling but it's futile. Resignation takes over and I find myself falling asleep. This time I don't see the images of my beautiful black boy but a frightened little boy.

Chapter 9

It rarely rains in Dale but today it's raining stair rods. My mom drops me off at school because of the forecast. I sprint to my class and find no one else but me, it's quite early. Not knowing what to do I listen to Frank Ocean whilst I go through my messages with Banele. This is making me miss him so much. I haven't heard from him since yesterday. After a few minutes my phone dings with a text message from Banele.

Not coming to 2day, I hv a cold.

This time I don't get sad or hurt by his text. It's because I understand why he is acting the way he is.. On the spur of the moment, I decide I'll be absent at school today. Banele needs me and I'm going to be there for him. Rushing out of the school gates, making sure no one sees me, I make a run for it to Banele's house.

Twenty minutes later, I am soaking wet. My hair is a mess, my clothes are dripping with water. I am shivering because of the cold. When I arrive at Banele's house, I chicken out. I stand quietly by the door for minutes, anxious about seeing him.

Crossing my heart, I knock at the door. I wait for a few minutes before he open the door. When he opens the door

the expression he's wearing tugs at my heart, his eyes are bloodshot and swollen. The man who makes me feel every feeling that could possibly be felt is staring at me torn. Oh, how I want to mend him so badly.

"Hi." I say.

"Hey." He whispers.

"What are you doing here?" He gestures for me to come in. Relief floods through, he isn't pushing me away. That's a good sign.

"I thought I should come check up on..." I trail off, my lips trembling, because I don't know what to say.

"You're freezing baby." He gestures for me to come in. "I'll go look for warm clothes and make you coffee."

"O-okay."

I stand there, awkwardly, shivering and feeling the cold in my bones. Why did I run in the rain? After a few minutes he comes back with a tracksuit, a t-shirt and a rug and I'm sure they belong to him.

"You can go change in the bathroom, put the wet clothes in the tumble drier." He shows me the way and leaves me

to have privacy. Why is it so awkward? I don't want this, I want us.

Quickly, I change into warm clothes. They smell of him. He smells so good. I just wish I could lay in his arms, this awkwardness should evaporate because I can't stand this wall that's pulling us apart. When I'm done changing, I hesitate going back and I become nervous. I take a deep breath and enter the living room.

There's coffee on the table waiting for me. He's starting at me, his eyes aren't full of warmth like they always are, they are just empty. He has eye bags. He gives me a wry smile, he looks tired.

Settling myself on the other end of the couch, he offers me the coffee and I welcome the warmth it brings. I watch him watch me, the silence is uncomfortable. I decide to break the ice.

“Do you want to talk?”

Tears form in his eyes, he blinks and looks away. I struggle between the fight of wanting to hold him in my arms and giving him time to deal with this. Wanting to comfort him takes over, I get closer to him and I hold his hand in reassurance.

“He's coming.” He whispers only for me to hear. If I wasn't close, I wouldn't be able to hear.

“You need to tell your dad Banele. He has to know today. It’s the only way we can ensure your safety, it’s the only way we can make sure he never touches you again.”

“I’m scared.” He’s shaking now and on the verge of breaking down. He looks away.

“ I know you are baby, but I’m here okay? And if you’re scared your father isn’t going to believe you, don’t be. He’s going to believe you. He loves you.” My declaration of my love for him is on the tip of my tongue but this isn’t the right time.

“This will shatter him Ndinani. I don’t know how to speak out, I’ve been going through scenarios in my head and none of them have a good outcome. I don’t know if I’ll be able to do this.”

My heart soars.

“You can. Aren’t you tired of living in fear? Remember when you told me that when he’s around you are always looking over your shoulder, doesn’t that wore you out? You are stronger than this. Fight baby, I know you can.”

He doesn’t say anything for a while. He’s on the brink of tears. Fighting whatever it was that made me scared to touch him, I engulf him in my arms.

He lays here, where he belongs, in my arms while I whisper to him that I'm here. In the silence, I wait for him to stop crying. His cries are heart wrenching. I wait for him to remove the heavy ache in his chest. For him, I'd wait for as long as he wants me to. My flawed beautiful black boy, I'd want him no other way than he is now.

His quiet sobs subside. He goes silent. I don't say anything either but I continue to hold him tighter.

"I'm going to tell Dad. I don't want that bastard to have power over me. I've lived my life being afraid. He has done enough damage. For so long I've been daunted by him, but not anymore. I'm going to fight with everything I have. I've spent nights and days trying to heal from the trauma, but seeing him acting like he never touched me every time his wife went to work at night ruined me. I'm tired of being silenced. I don't want to be a victim anymore, I want to be a survivor." He doesn't wait for my response, he picks up his phone and sitting up he makes a call.

"Tata." He pauses. "I'm feeling better than in the morning. When are you going to be able to come home?" A pause. "It's something crucial, I don't know how things are going to be after this but you need to know. I need

you.” Another pause. “Okay, I’ll be waiting.” He drops the call.

He suppress a sigh and he grabs my arm to bring me closer to him, I wince. He looks at me and frowns.

“What’s wrong *sthandwa sam*?”

Suddenly my throat constricts and I am struggling to breathe. I pull away from him. The voice in my head tells me he’s going to stop loving me if he knows. He’ll laughs at me, telling me I’m unworthy of love and I am unloveable. He can’t know. I don’t want him to find out.

“Nani? What’s wrong?” He sits next to me, his voice full of worry.

Closing my eyes, I try to control my breathing but I can’t. My vision blurs because of tears forming. My chest burning, needing oxygen. It hurts so much.

“Breath Nani, breath *sthandwa sam*.”

Counting to ten, I summon my body to exhale. After a while, I relax. Everything clears now,

“That scared me. What are you afraid of?”

I don’t answer him.

“Talk to me baby.”

“I don’t think you’d want me if I tell you.” I hiccup.

“I’d always want you Ndinani, I’d always love you and I’d want you anyway that I can have you.”

“You wouldn’t. I’m too flawed.”

“Show me how flawed you are. I don’t think I would stop loving you just because of your flaws.”

Rolling up my sleeves on both sides, I show him my drawings. I watch him analyzing them. He touches them and I close my eyes. He traces each drawing, the fresh and the old drawings. Each touch feels like he’s healing each and everyone of them. He kisses them, slowly tracing the drawings with his lips. I’ve never felt so naked around him than I am now. How do I let him know there’s more?

He takes off his shirt, and shows me his drawings. They are faint and older. Shocked, I become emotional again. He understands. He’s so beautiful.

“I draw too. I used to draw, I stopped doing it because I promised dad I wouldn’t. It hurt him when he found out. He wanted to know why I did it, but I only gave him half of it. Today he’s about to know everything.” He kisses

me, softly. “I don’t love you any less than I did when you didn’t show me. Because you’re flawed, you are perfect to me.”

My tears fall, my lips quivering.

“I’ve fallen in-love with you.” I whisper, only for him to hear.

His eyes glint with glee.

“I know, you wouldn’t be here if you didn’t. I love you too *sthandwa sam*.”

He cups my chin with one of his hands, with the other he wipes my tears away. The air around us changes and my heart starts pounding loudly. At first, his lips lightly touch mine, I didn’t expect him to be so tender. When he puts pressure on my lips by sealing his lips tightly with mine. Oh God, he has the softest lips. The tip of his tongue outlines my lips, I shiver. The moment I kiss him back, I am gone. A low hum of desire buzzes between my legs, it sneaks its way to my breast hardening my nipples. I let his tongue seep into my mouth. He roams his hand and finds my tits. We groan simultaneously when he caresses my nipples and I lose my senses.

I touch him. My hands wander to his chest, shoulders, feeling his heart hammering as loudly as mine. I caress his muscular arms. I feel him pulling away and I harden the kiss and tighten my grip on his neck. He groans and I

swallow the husky sound. I pull away, trying to catch my breath.

“I love you.” I say it again meaning it with my whole heart. “ I want to live in your skin and live in your mind.”

“The feeling is mutual *sthandwa sam*. I’m sorry for shutting you out. Thank you for being here with me.”

“I want to be here with you.”

When he attempts to kiss me again, my phone dings.

Njabulo is coming over tonight.

Finally! I get to meet the guy who stole my mom’s heart. I text her back and tell her I can’t wait to meet him then I turn to Banele.

“So where were we?” I ask.

“You were about to get naked with me.” He says enthusiastically.

“Tempting, but no.” I laugh.

We spend the rest of the day in each other’s arms. He shows me intimacy by letting me in his mind. He tells me how scared he is about his father’s reaction. He tells me

he misses his mother. He gives me a glimpse of what he wants in future. He touches me in a subtle way. He touches and lingers in every part of my body. He peruses me and my emotions. Eventually, I wasn't ashamed to show him more of my drawings. I never thought I'd meet someone who won't be revolted by my body. He looks at me like I am an epitome of everything he has ever wanted. He makes me feel like I'm the most beautiful sight he has ever seen.

I can't help it, I am falling for my black beautiful boy, hard and fast. I feel the love I have for him multiply and burn in my chest by just being here with him, doing nothing else but enjoying each others presence. I am loving everything about this feeling. No matter what the outcomes are of me falling for him, I won't regret anything. I want to shower him with love. I am endlessly devoted to him and he always reassures me that it's reciprocated. I want to take away his bad memories and leave him with the good. I want him, all of him.

“Can't you sleep over?”

I laugh. “No, my mom doesn't know I'm here. She'd kill me if she knows I'm here.” I say as I wear my dry uniform and his hoody.

“You don't have to leave now Nani.” He sulks. “We'll come up with an excuse.”

“Tempting but not.” I laugh.

“Fine. I’ll uber you home.” His phone dings, he reads the message. “Dad is coming home early.”

“You’ll let me know how it goes okay?” He nods and I kiss the side of his mouth. “Don’t forget we’re doing the Biology presentation tomorrow.”

A few minutes later. The Uber arrives and he hugs me. “I don’t want you to leave.” He says.

“I don’t want to leave but I have too. Mom is introducing me to her boyfriend so I have to be ready.”

With resignation he says, “Fine, text me when you get home.”

When I get home I find mom turning the kitchen into an antic mess. She’s gone all out for this guy. She’s cooking with her special pots and cutleries. My stomach grumbles when I inhale the aroma, the fact that I’ve eaten at Banele’s is futile, she’s that good of a cook.

“Hey *mama*, you’re pretty occupied.”

She looks up. “Thank God you’re here, chop the onions for me. I’m going to change. When Njabulo gets here, I want everything to be perfect.”

“But *mama* ...” she gives me a threatening glare. “Okay, okay, I’ll do it.”

An hour later everything is thoroughly cooked. My mom is looking gorgeous. I’m decent enough, I wore one of the outfit Phelo picked out for me. Mom is pacing up and down, I’ve never seen her so nervous.

“When is he getting here? I’m starving?” I ask.

Right on time, there’s a knock on the door. Mom inhales and exhales. “Behave.” She says to me.

Njabulo enters and I internally applaud my mom for having good taste. He’s a definition of tall, dark and handsome. His appearance is comely.

“Hey honey.” He kisses my mom on the forehead. She blushes crimson.

“Hey, this is my daughter Ndinani.” She turns to me. “This is my boyfriend Njabulo.”

He smiles broadly when he looks at me. “Finally, I’ve been wanting to meet you for days.” I like him already !

“Really? It would sound cliché if I told you I’ve been waiting for this day as much as you.”

He laughs. “I blame your mom for this.”

She rolls her eyes and we laugh. I’m loving this. Tension eases off my mom, Njabulo also notices and winks at mom.

At dinner, everything is running smoothly. Mom’s food is mouthwatering as it looks. Conversation flows. I notice how affectionate Njabulo is towards mom. He likes holding her hand and lightly brushes her knuckles. He listens to her and laughs even mom’s jokes even if they aren’t funny. He is perfect for mom.

“Do you have children?” I ask when mom collects the dishes. Immediately the room is filled with tension. Mom halts in her steps.

“Ndinani!” She reprimands.

“I’m sorry.” I apologize. “I shouldn’t have asked that. It was very obtuse of me.”

“No, it’s okay.” He says. “I had a daughter. She would have been your age by now.”

I cringe at his choice of words, at the past tense he uses to address his daughter. Regret crawls its way into my chest and stings my heart.

“I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay. Her and my her mother got into a car accident years back.” He says limpidly, his voice void of emotion.

“I’m really sorry for bringing this up.”

My phone rings and I escape the tension in the room. I quickly run to my phone to answer Banele’s call.

“Hey.” I sigh. “How did it go?” I ask anxiously.

“He believes me. He doesn’t want anything to do with his brother, he canceled his ticket. He chooses me. It’s going to be okay. It really is.” There’s relief in his voice, happiness too. “We are opening a case against him, Dad wants me to get justice. He is so devastated by this. I’ve never seen him like this.”

“Your dad is amazing first for most. It’s probably hard for him- and for you. You guys need each other more than ever, try and talk to him. I’m just glad you were finally able to tell him.”

“I am too. Thank you, I needed the push you gave me today.”

“I just want happiness to hasten into your direction. I want you okay, all the time.”

“I love you.” He whispers.

“Ndinani.” Mom calls out.

“I’m coming.”

“I love you too. I ruined dinner by asking if Njabulo has children and it turns out they kicked the bucket. Your call saved me from the awkwardness but now I have to go.”

“You’re known for causing disasters sthandwa sam.” He mocks.

Sarcastically speaking I say, “Thanks for making me feel better.”

“I’m sorry.” He stifles a laugh.

“I have to go. Don’t forget we’re doing our presentation tomorrow.”

“I won’t. Goodnight sthandwa sam.”

Dreading to go into the living room, I find them giggling with each other like high school kids. I clear my throat to get their attention.

“Njabulo’s leaving, he wanted to say goodbye.”

“Oh, bye. I hope to see you soon.”

“I hope so too, I mean it. And Ndinani I’m really okay with you asking anything you want to know about me.” I smile.

He’s a great guy. I’m astonished.

Mom walks him out and he’s gone. I throw a thumbs up at mom. She giggles.

“So how did it go for you?” I ask.

“Better than I expected.”

“I’m sorry I made things awkward. He’s a great guy, keep him.”

“You apologized to him that’s all that matters. You want ice cream before bed?” She asks.

Excitedly, I say. “Yes please !”

In bed, I check my messages. One is from Phelo wanting to know if I'm okay. I text her back , reassuring her and I can't wait to see her tomorrow. Whilst doing so, a message from Banele pops into my screen.

My dreams are of you.

Oh God, I am head over heels in-love with my black beautiful boy.

Chapter 10

Dear Ndinani

My situation as I'm writing this is not a pleasant one. My health is in a critical condition. I'm in a hospital bed reminiscing about the jolly memories we've had. My thoughts are of you and I can't believe how I've managed to ruin such a beautiful friendship. I'm so sorry.

So much has happened, everything has changed and I can't adjust to it. I just want the pain to stop. I'm sorry for not being the best-friend you've always wanted. I know we had a lot of plans together but life doesn't always work out the way we want for any of us.

I cannot die without letting you know how much of a good friend you've been. To me, you are my knight and shining armor. You've saved me from myself and a handful of situations, I can't articulate how grateful I am. I've always known in whatever

stumbling block I am in, you'd find your way to save me. I know at times I can be difficult, but thank you for not throwing the towel on me.

I've never felt the kind of love you and your mom exuded for me. I've always felt it, it suffocated me so pleasantly. When I come to the end of my journey on this black-hearted world, always remember I am with you and I live through our memories. You are the only person whose shown me that life can have a rosy side, and for that I am eternally grateful.

I'm sorry I won't be there when you get your first boyfriend and first kiss. When you weep because of a boy whose broken your heart. When tears of joy cascade on your face because you got your dream job. When you shed tears because life hasn't been good on you. I'm sorry I will miss out on the plans we'd plan together. There's soreness in my heart at the thought of not being by your side, not being able to hold you when you have anxiety attacks.

I've made terrible decisions for myself, I regret being disobedient to your mothers reprimands. I have made my bed and now I must lie in it. Thank you for everything you've done for me. Don't forget to make as many friends as you want, people need to know

how amazing you are. My only wish as I lay here, is that you forget every bad thing I've done and remember the good we've had together. Forget that I've stumbled and blundered but do remember I have won some battles. Forget to grieve for me but rejoice that I have lived. Remember only my best.

Your beloved, Sinawo.
I love you, always.

*O*n a Saturday morning I have a feeling of melancholy and nostalgia. It's a day away from finishing exams. It's been a hectic 4 weeks. I've seen less of Banele because he's busy with the court case. His dad drops and picks him up from school. Sometimes he has soccer practices. Sometimes I suspect he's giving me the cold shoulder on purpose. It sucks for me but I know he needs this. Phelo has been sleeping over, we've been together and bonding. She's coming over tonight, cause we're writing Mathematics - the foe- on Monday.

I find myself holding the letter Sinawo left for me and I can't fathom what I'm feeling. I'm sitting on my bedroom floor, missing her so much. I wish i could've read the letter sooner. It would have saved me from a lot of trauma and hurt. I can't remember her laughter nor her voice, all I remember is that beautiful smile she had.

As she said, I start drifting off to the good times we've had. When we both got drunk and got in trouble the next day. I'm remembering all the sleepovers we've had together, they have always been a blast. She was so beautiful, everything she did was beautiful. Even in her dark days her fairness could never fade. We were so close, nothing could separate us. Except, death. Oh how I underestimated you.

A knock on the door interrupts my nostalgic moment. I patch myself together and open the door. Phelo stands on the doorway with earphones in her ears and her backpack. She smiles broadly at me and my somber vanishes. I love this girl, the energy she has is out of this world.

"So I'll light up the cigarette, I'll drink it down till there's nothing left.." She sings *No Peace* by Yebba and Sam Smith off tune but passionately.

I laugh but join her. "*Cause I sure can't get no sleep, and Lords knows there's no relief..*"

She stops all of a sudden, looking appalled.

"What is it?" I ask.

"I had no idea you could sing like that, I'd be underestimating your voice if i said it's beautiful."

“Thank you.” I blush.

“Lets sing again, I wanna hear you sing again.”

I roll my eyes. “And when are we studying?”

“Oh *that*. Can’t wait.” She says sarcastically.

In my room, she notices the letter on the floor. I quickly tuck it away and I know she won’t ask me about it unless I want to talk about. This is one of the things I love about her, she would never make uncomfortable.

Instead she asks. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah I think I am.” I sigh, I want to talk about this. “No, I’m not. I’ve just read a letter from Sinawo, she wrote it before she died. I miss her.”

She holds my hand. “I miss her so much you know, I just wish we could be best-friends again. I want to hear her voice and tell her that everything hasn’t been the same since she left. I don’t even dream about her anymore, she’s really gone.”

“I know what’s like to lose someone who you’re close too. I’ve lost my youngest sisters to suicide, I miss her everyday. But on the brighter side I’m grateful for the

moments I've had with her." She says, sadly. Sadness does not look good on her.

"I think I'm gonna start crying." I half-laugh and half-sob.

"Cry honey but I recommend laughing. Laughter is good for the soul."

And I laugh, it feels so good to laugh the pain away. She joins me. I love Phelo, why is she so amazing?

We spend the rest of the morning trying to tackle Maths in whatever angle we face it with. Phelo makes practicing it bearable because she's good at this. Mom makes food for us and tells us to take a break. She's been happy lately, Njabulo is making her to become a better version of herself. The effect he has on my mom is wonderful.

"Thank you Miss P, your food makes me want to stay here forever."

Mom laughs. "You eat a lot, you'd finish all my groceries."
.

"You like me this way Miss P." She winks and my mom laughs, walking out.

She looks at me with a ‘I want to tell you something face’. When she does that I know I don’t have options, it’s either I agree or nothing.

“Spit it out.”

“Remember that party I told you about? The one Buhle’s having? Well it’s happening on Friday and you are going to be there, I’ll drag you if I have too. And well my new bait, Ntsikelelo, is going to be there. We kissed once, and I’m kissing him again this Friday.” She says, excitement is in her voice.

“I’m pretty sure I don’t have a say in all of this right?”

“Right, now let’s concentrate on murdering that paper on Monday.” She says.

On Monday at school, everyone is in a good mood cause we’re writing our last paper. I glimpse Banele with Buntu, revising like I am with Phelo. I should be doing that with him. He even stopped waiting for me by the gates in the morning, how lovely.

“You are not here sis! Focus!” Phelo shouts get me and I give her my undivided attention. Thirty minutes later I’m ready for the test. It’s fifteen minutes before we write. A note flies and lands on my desk. I look around and find Banele staring at me. He gestures that I should read it.

Can we meet after school? Plz.

I nod at him. I don't let this excite me. I just want to get through this exam first. The thing is with Banele you never know what to expect. We could be happy and the next moment we're not. I just miss him, if this is the way he's apologizing to me then so be it. Phelo told me to focus, I stop myself from filling my mind with the thoughts of him.

After the exam, it's Christmas for everyone. The paper was challenging but what Maths paper isn't? I did my best, that's all that matters. I search for Banele and see him waiting by the gates. Taking a deep breath I approach him. I'm feeling exhausted, this paper wore me out.

"Hi." I say.

"Hey, how have you been?" He looks so drained. It's either the Maths paper did a number on him or it's something else.

"I've been okay, how about you? How's the court case going?"

"That isn't what I wanted to talk about Ndinani." He's calling me by name, this isn't a good sign.

“Okay then what is it?”

“It’s about us.”

“What about us...?”

“I don’t want us anymore. I’ve got a lot on my plate right now and I don’t want you to be any part of this. Let’s take a break.”

“What?” I say in disbelief . “Are you breaking up with me?” I feel my heart cracking in its chamber.

“Yeah, for a while. I just need a break from everything.”

“Okay.” I say backing away from him, the knife he stabbed me with twisting in my heart.

“Ndinani!” I hear him saying, he runs after me and stops me by holding my arm.

“Leave me the *fuck* alone.” I say with venom surprising the both of us. He lets go.

I walk faster to my house. My mind isn’t working with my heart right now. My hear is stabbing me in the back, it’s in denial. It doesn’t want to accept that Banele and I are asunder. I’m furious with it all the way home. Oh

heart, why did I let you lead me astray? Why am I not crying? My heart is so heavy but the tears don't come. Attempting to cry is not going to bring him back. I want to scream. How can he leave me hanging just like that? He left me while I wanted him to stay, don't I deserve someone who wants to stay? I revealed my innermost thoughts and feelings to him now i just have to sit here and bear the brunt. What do I do with the feelings he left behind? Carry the torch, the voice in my head says. I'll get it out of my system.

When I get home I don't know even know which key unlocks the door, I fumble trying to unlock it. When I finally do I enter my room, I want to do what I do best when unfathomable pain attacks me, DRAW. I reach under my bed and take out my box of all things sharp. Very carefully and precisely, I unpack all the blades. I roll up my shirt sleeve. My hands trembling, I trace the almost healed wound and I resurrect it again. It bleeds.

Ouch. That hurt.

Abruptly, I stop and throw it towards the box. I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to self-harm anymore. I'm exhausted on the occurring pain in my life. I want to liberate myself from the demons I'm in battle with. I don't want unpleasant things to keep happening. I don't want to lose myself over the intensity of my feelings anymore. I no longer want to be broken. I don't want to look in the mirror and want to puke when a

reflection of me is reflected. I want to recover my self confidence and esteem I've lost caused by my defeats.

I pack the box. I do the only thing I've never imagined myself doing, i throw it away. I don't need it anymore. I'll be fine without it. My first coping mechanism is gone, now it's the second one. I don't need them right? I feel the tears coming. My throat catches on a lump that appears out of nowhere, and a choked almost-sob squeezes past it.

Quickly, I text mom.

I need you here, please come home.

I've never reached out to my mom, but since our relationship has reached the mother-daughter bonding I'm trying transparency with her. After a minute she responds.

I'm on my way my baby. I'm here.

She dropped work and she's coming to me because I need her? I love that woman so much.

I change into comfortable clothes, i wear something that reveals my arms. I wait, my heart full of hurt and fear.

Thirty minutes later she enters with worry written all over her face. She throws her bag on the couch and sits next to me.

“Are you okay?” She asks.

“I’m not okay, but I’m trying t-to be.” Saliva chokes me.

“What’s wrong *sana lwam?*”

“I don’t want you to freak out *mama*. I just want you to help me conquer my demons. I want you to be there for me like you’ve been doing recently.” I say as I stand up and take off my pants. “Today I’ve decided to stop. I don’t want to do it anymore.” I’m surprised at how calm I am.

“What have you decided to sto..” She trails off as my pants reach the floor, she notices the scars on my thighs. I bring my arms forward and she glances at the cuts. She closes her eyes and tears fall.

“How long has this been happening?” She whispers.

“Since the incident *mama*.”

“I thought we dealt with it.” She looks at me with hurt in her eyes.

“No, we never dealt with anything. We moved and you assumed I’m okay.”

“Why didn’t you ever tell me you needed help?”

“It was hard for the both of us, you changed *mama*. I was living with a zombie. I couldn’t reach out to you, so I found a way to deal with my nightmares and anxiety attacks.”

“I’m sorry honey, I’m so sorry.” She sobs. “ I didn’t know how to deal with it Ndinani. Every time I closed my eyes I saw you laying in a pool of blood. I had to move because I thought things would be better for you. I wanted those 4 boys erase from your memory. And the fact that you never got justice kills me everyday. I did this all for you.”

“I know. I didn’t realize it then but I do now. You love me.”

“You thought I didn’t love you?”

“Yeah, I convinced myself you didn’t love me.”

She hugs me. “I’m sorry Ndinani. I promise we’ll deal with it and whenever you want to talk about it, I’m here.” She wipes her tears away. “What do you want me to do to make things okay?”

“I want you to stop blaming yourself. We will get help together mom, it’s been hell for you too. I don’t want to be a victim anymore.”

“You’re not, you are a survivor. We’re going to get professional help. I’m sorry you had to deal with this alone.”

“You’re trying, that’s all that matters to me.” I say.

“You are so strong, your strength hardens me. You’re amazing baby.” She smiles at me.

“I know, I inherited that from you.”

I’m so comfortable with saying anything with her at the moment, I don’t know how long this feeling will last so I vent some more.

“Banele broke up with me.” My heart starts to hurt again.

“Why?” She doesn’t believe me.

“I don’t know. He said he wants time for himself.”

“You will get back together, mark my words.”

I don’t answer. I don’t want to get my hopes with something I’m not sure I’ll ever let happen again.

“What do you want for dinner?”

“I don’t think I’m gonna eat, I’m tired. I’ll just go to bed.”

“Okay.”

It’s been a hectic day. I keep glancing at my phone, hoping some how this is all a dream, Banele and I are still together. How can one person who brings happiness into your life be the same one who sucks it out of you? That’s never happening again. I’m going to make myself happy. No matter what it takes.

I haven’t felt this kind of peace in my heart in such a long time. The dilemma I’ve been having is no longer visible. I’m slowly picking up the broken pieces of myself. I’m ready to do the things that are out of my comfort zone. I’m ready to take over the world. I want to challenge myself, I want to be my own coping mechanism. I’m never ever going to lean on someone else besides myself. I have so much to offer the world. Sinawo was right, the world needs someone like me.

Chapter 11

I want to do my hair, what do you suggest?”

“Do braids, they’ll look good on you. I’ll do them for you.”

“I didn’t know you can do hair.”

“I’m full of surprises sis, you sound different. Why is that?”

I laugh. “It might be because I’m a bachelorette.”

“Whaaaaaaaaaat? You mean you no longer with Banele?”

“Yep.”

“Omg, why?”

“He doesn’t want us anymore, he said he wanted a break.”

“What the hell, that’s all he gave you?”

“Yep.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me, what the hell is wrong with these boys. Are you okay sis?”

I sigh. “Phelo, I want to lie to you and tell you I’m okay but I can’t. I’m not the person who pretends to be okay anymore. It’s the first morning without him and my heart hurts like hell.”

“Oh honey, do you want me to come over? We could do your hair, it’s going to make you feel pretty. Or we could be sad together doing nothing.”

“Yes come over please. Laughter heals the soul remember? I don’t want to cry.”

“Okay, I’ll be right over. Don’t you dare cry. I first have to get the fibers and let’s do your make-over.” There’s a sound of a door closing on her side.

“Sure. But I won’t stop my tears from falling.”

“You making me want to get there faster. Why don’t I have superpowers?” She sounds exasperated and there’s noise in the background of her family.

I laughing now. “I’m kidding. I won’t cry.”

I drop the call and I'm reminded of the calls Banele used to make. Stepping out of my room, I do my chores. Mom is at work and I have the house to myself. I ignore the want to text Banele and check up on how's he doing.

He's non of my concern anymore. Oh God, I miss him so much. As quickly as I can, I reprimand myself from thinking about him.

In about fifteen minutes, Phelo arrives with bags full of fibers. She's so enthusiastic about doing my hair. She smiles at me, have I mentioned how beautiful she is?

"Are you practicing on me or you've done this before?" I raise an eyebrow.

"Have faith in me. You'll see the goddess you are when I finish with you."

"Okay, do you want to eat first or you want to get into it?"

"Let's get into it, food can wait."

I laugh. "Really? Are you really going to make food wait?"

"Yep, today is about you. I want to make you feel good. Repeat after me, "I.am.a.goddess.""

I love this child.

“I am a goddess.” I repeat.

Four hours later, I’m looking at myself in the mirror and all I can say is *damn*. Where has this beauty been hiding itself? Have I been this oblivious to my own beauty? I curse the moment I counted the things I’m am and excluded beauty. I keep touching my face, my hair and it feels surreal. I feel like I’m someone else, the woman I’ve envied to be.

“I’m so beautiful.” Tears threaten to fall.

“That’s an understatement sis, and don’t you dare cry. I’ll throttle you.” She says behind me.

“I really am a goddess, thank you Phelo.”

She rolls her eyes. “Thank me with food sis, I’m famished.”

Whilst making food, I keep looking for my reflection on glasses, spoons and I’m appalled at how good I look.

“You really didn’t know you were this beautiful, did you?”

“Yeah.” I laugh. “I don’t even recall calling myself beautiful, not even once.”

“That should stop, you are beyond pretty.” I hand over the food. “Feeling any better?”

“I am feeling better but there’s that ache in the pit of my stomach that I cannot erase. He left it there.” I say as I take my sit.

“I don’t think the feeling of your first love is one that will ever fade, regardless of how much you yearn to forget it.” She looks down at her food, I’m sensing we aren’t talking about me anymore.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

She puts her food aside. This isn’t going to be good.

“Andile. My first love.” She rubs her heart like it’s been burnt and it’s sore. “He was so toxic for me. I always wondered if I was beautiful enough for him, or if I was beautiful at all. When he left, I waited for him for so long but then I realized he wasn’t coming back. The realization of that crumbled me. He made love feel so awful. It hurt so bad at the time. I tried to move on with other guys but everything they did I compared it to his doings. I had to teach myself healthy love because I was accustomed to his toxicity. My first taste of love was sour. I lost myself to him. He took and took, he wrapped me in the name of love until I was convinced he had eyes only to see me and a body to be in sync with mine, oh he

left me vacant me. Losing him was me becoming myself again.”

I’ve lost appetite. My heart hurts for Phelo.

“How did you deal with the heartbreak?”

“Self-love. I learnt how to love myself. I told myself I wasn’t capable of loving someone else if I didn’t love myself. The affirmations I needed from him I affirmed them myself. I stopped comparing myself with the girls he wanted to be seen with and started appreciating the beauty and uniqueness that I have. I now love myself to the point where I’m never letting anyone make me doubt myself never again.”

“What would you do if he came back?”

“If he does come back, he isn’t coming back to the naive girl he left. I’ve changed and grown for the better. I was naive at that time of my life but not anymore. He didn’t deserve me nor my love. I deserved more than what he offered.”

“You still love him?”

“I don’t know. I’m able to salivating over other guys again, Buntu and Ntsikelelo for instance. I’m able to romance myself with other lads. I don’t know how I’ll

feel or handle myself when I see him again. But I'm not looking forward to seeing him."

"We are fine without them right?"

"Yes sis. Nothing that they say or do defines us."

Phelo gives me strength. I know now that I'll be fine without him. He came into my world and evoke feelings I never thought I had. I don't know how but eventually they will subside.

For the rest of the day we have fun. The kind of fun I had Sinawo. We prepare- she picks out an outfit for me- what we are going to rock at Buhle's party. We sing along and dance to music. I forget everything and be with the only friend who wants to stay. For the entire day I don't think about Banele until Phelo departs.

This heartbreak is a turmoil for me. I don't want to feel like this. Distracting myself, I cook. Mom is probably on her way. My phones blares a message from Phelo.

It's always fun to be around you. Much love sis.

Smiling, I text her back.

Back atcha. You are so amazing and I'm glad I have you in life. Love you more.

The door opens and reveals mom with her boyfriend, Njabulo. They look so good and happy together.

“Hey.” I greet.

“Hi, you’re getting more beautiful each time I see you.” Njabulo compliments as he hugs me. I don’t flinch and hug him back blushing profusely.

“Who did your hair, you’re looking really good.” Mom says.

“It’s Phelo’s work.” I say proudly.

“Tell her I said she can come and eat whatever she likes anytime.”

I laugh and direct my attention to Njabulo. “Are you joining us for dinner?”

“Yeah, can I help with anything?” Wow, he even cooks. Mom really did a great job with this one.

“You can chop the onions for me.”

We enter the kitchen.

“I’ll have a shower before dinner.” Mom says.

It's silence in the kitchen after mom leaves. I scramble for questions to ask and find nothing. I don't want to ask things that are close to home again.

"How did the exams go?" He asks. That's easy enough to answer.

"They went pretty well." I smile at him.

"That means you got A's right?"

I laugh. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves hey."
I observe that he chops really well, with experience.

"There's something I wanted to talk to you about." He gets serious.

"Okay.."

"I want your blessings for your mothers hand in marriage."

Silence. This is astounding. Excitement slowly spreading itself on me. What do I say?

"She doesn't know I'm going to propose yet. Don't say anything to her. I wanted to make sure if you're okay with it. She loves you and I wouldn't want to get between the two of you."

“I’m A-OKAY with it. I want this for her and you’re not so bad yourself. You have my blessings, only if you talk her into letting me go to a party this Friday.”

“Consider it done. I want her happy, all the time.”

“You and I are going to get along just fine.”

After dinner, Mom walks him to the door and he kisses her. On the lips. I give mom looks when he leaves and she avoids them. She’s so happy, it’s written on her face. I’m having hard time keeping the good news. A knock on the door interrupts us whilst watching our telenovela.

Mom opens the door and gasps. “Mzwandile, hi.”

My heart beat accelerates at the mention of Banele’s father. What is he doing here?

“Can I come in?”

“Sure.”

He acknowledges me when he walks in.

“How can I be of help Mzwandile?”

“I wanted to talk to you... in private.”

I fleet to my room after he says that, giving them privacy. I try to act like I don't want to eavesdrop but curiosity gets the better of me. I open my door and tip toe near my moms room so I can hear them. I hear Banele's father intermediate through the conversation.

".. I haven't been okay lately, it's been hell Thandi." He says.

"Do you want to talk over a cup of coffee?" Mom asks.

"No, thank you. Not even coffee can make me feel better."

"What's going on?" She asks.

"I just found out my brother has been molesting my son repeatedly for 2 years, his ex-wife divorced him because he has been doing the same thing to her. She's helping with the case."

My heart, it hurts.

"Oh Lord, is he okay?" There's shock in her voice.

"He hasn't been okay for a long time. I didn't notice the changes him. When he self-harmed I didn't dig deeper for the cause. What kind of a father am I?"

“You’re an amazing father Mzi. You know that.”

“It doesn’t feel that way. I don’t know how to make this better for him. I don’t want his depression to worsen. What do I do?”

“I wouldn’t know how to answer that question. All that I can say is that try and communicate with him. Be there for him. Ask him what he wants you to do. I’m the last person to give advice about what to do.”

“What do you mean?”

“My daughter went through the same thing.” There’s sadness in her voice, oh mom.

“I’m sorry.” He says.

“It’s okay, we’re dealing with it now. Getting professional help is something we both need.”

It’s quiet for a minute.

“I don’t want to lose my son, he’s all I’ve got.” Omg, he’s crying.

“It’s going to be okay Mzi. I’m here if you want to talk.”

“After all I’ve done to you, you still want to help me. Thank you.”

It’s quiet again. I’m sensing there’s a change in the atmosphere. I turn my head to glimpse at them, Banele’s father has his back on me and mom is facing him. He gets closer to her, wanting to kiss. Mom puts her hand on his chest, shoving him.

“I don’t think this is a good idea. I’m with someone.”

“I’m sorry, my emotions got the better of me.”

Having heard enough, I leave them and enter my room. I’m trying to fight the urge to reach out to Banele. He must be going through a lot. He needs me doesn’t he? I’m so worried about him. I text Phelo, she’ll know what to do.

What do I do when the urge to text him is stronger than the hurt he caused?

Within a minute, I’ve received a text back.

You fight it. If he wanted you to know how he’s doing he would’ve texted. Delete his NUMBER.

I'm the one who wants to know how he's doing, not the other way around. I don't care if he doesn't want to hear from me.

But I really really want to know how his doing.

I miss him, but I don't add that.

I'll ask Buntu to check up on him. Don't you dare text him.

I'm relentless, why is she taking so long. I know it's only been a minute but it feels like forever. I'm not deleting his number until I know for real he is okay. If I'm worried, then I got nothing on his dad. Mom is still talking to him. My phone vibrates in my hand.

Apparently they are having a boys night with the soccer team, so I assume he's okay.

That's a relief.

I'm deleting his number. It don't matter even if I know it by heart.

I go over his contact number to delete it. But I'm firmly holding on to him. Why is it hard to delete it? My mind is bombarded with the thoughts of him. The way his eyes

light up when he looks at me, the way he isn't afraid to express his love for me publicly, the way I'd always blush whenever he compliments me, when I fall asleep hearing his hoarse voice, reminiscing about how my body reacts when he touches subtly every part of me, now my tongue hurts because of hunger for him, the way I'd always get excited whenever his lips are on mine.

Trying to stop the tears in my eyes from falling, I delete his number.

Chapter 12

It's Friday.

Four excruciating days without a word from Banele.

Today, I'm challenging the phobia I have of being around people. I'm in the party mood and I'm feeling really elated. It's a foreign feeling and I'm loving it. The universe is on my side today, mom decided to give me a few bucks on her way to work this morning. I've been glimpsing myself on mirrors, and I remain beautiful. The beauty I have isn't fading, it's here and it's mine.

I request an Uber to Phelo's house. I'm dressing over at her house, this is her request. I take my bag and leave. On the way I promise myself that I will not have anxiety because of many people. I promise myself that I will have the most fun. Nothing is going to ruin today. Not ever.

On my arrival, Phelo's is excited as me. She's not done with her makeup but she's running towards. I'm loving the energy.

"It's Friiiiiiiiiidaaaaaay." She twerks.

“Let’s twerk when we get to the party, you’ll wore yourself out.”

“The night is still young sis, I’m on party mode.”

I laugh. “I’m planning on having fun tonight.”

“Let’s get ready.”

Three hours later, we’ve dolled ourselves up. I had no idea it took such long time to look this good. I look like I’m edible, a dream. I don’t even want to mention how perfect Phelo is, she’s paradise. I wouldn’t think twice about marrying her.

“I think you should open a cosmetics business.” I suggest.

“Really?” She packs her makeup utensils.

“You’re really good at what you do. You could earn some bucks with it.”

“We’ll get into this conversation again and you’ll help me brainstorm. But for now LET’S GO.” She imitates DaBaby and I laugh.

“Did I mention we picking up Buntu?” I halt in my steps.

“Banele isn’t going to be there right?”

“Relax, he won’t be. I asked Buntu.”

I breathe. I’m not ready to see him just yet.

The Uber driver parks blocks away from Buntu’s house. Phelo texts him. I don’t see him exiting the front door, he escapes through the window. He gets into the car and the driver drives off.

“Hey girlsss, the attention is going to be on you two tonight.” He says as he gives a once over.

I cringe, I can already imagine the judgmental eyes.

“Why did you use the window to get out?” Phelo asks.

“As a PK, my rents would never allow met to party. But I can’t miss out on parties. I’m lucky my sister always covers for me.” He winks.

I re-apply my lip gloss. Buntu looks at me, fascinated.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I’d really like to try one of those and I’m gay.”

“Who said lip gloss is only for women? Try it.” I hand it to him.

And he does. He smiles at me. He’s so hot, no wonder Phelo was salivating over him. “Let’s take pictures, I wanna remember this moment. But I’m removing it when we get to the party, I’m not out yet.”

When we arrived at the party, it’s packed. People are already into the groove. The whole school is here, it’s familiar faces all over. I’ve hardly seen anyone out of their school uniform and damn do they look scorching hot. Every single one of them. Buntu hit the nail on the head when he said the attention would be on us. I’m praying I don’t trip and fall with the thousand eyes looking at me. Swear prickles on my back, I’m about to hyperventilate. Phelo holds my hand until we get inside the house. A gesture I really appreciate. Inside, people are dancing, there’s no pace to maneuver, Buntu is dragging Phelo who is dragging me into the kitchen. And it’s packed with booze.

“A drink?” Buntu asks.

“Yes please.” We say in unison.

I chunk the drink and I regret it. It burns the base of my throat, straight up torches my blood. Whoa, I forgot I’m

lightheaded. But I need another one, I'm not here to play games. Buntu doesn't be in two minds and offers me another one. The worry I had a few minutes ago vanishes. Alcohol, oh how I've missed you. And the music, makes want to dance my worries away.

"Do you guys want to dance?" I shout over the music.

Buntu and Phelo looked shocked. Alcohol does this so me. I have this audacity that always want to show itself when I'm sober and gets all the glory when I'm not control of my mouth. I literally drag them to dance with me. I know I can't dance but I don't give a dime right now. I'm too happy to care about what people saying. I'm so lighthearted today. I don't freak out when bodies collide with mine throughout the dancing. Buntu and Phelo hype me with my dancing, I'm pretty sure I'm going to regret this in the morning.

Two hours later, the party is far from ending. I'm wasted. I lost Phelo with Ntsikelelo, who is really fun to be around, free spirited and a flirt. At the back, there some juveniles playing spin the bottle. Since I've been doing a lot of dragging I drag Buntu into the crowd.

"Let's play."

"I don't think that's a good idea. You are drunk."

“I saw you stealing glances at Thando, he’s also playing. He’s bi. This might be your one and only chance.”

“Let’s do this. YOLO.” He winks at me.

We join the crowd and everyone is very welcoming. Apparently you don’t play if you are dating. Since Buntu and I recently joined them we are both given a chance to spin the bottle. Buntu spins first, the bottle lands on some girl I hardly know and another girl. Without hesitation they kiss. Whoa, nobody told me this kissing involves tongues and it’s more than five minutes. Kill me know.

Suddenly the atmosphere changes and I feel butterflies in my stomach. My heart somersaults. Goosebumps form all over me. It must be the weather, no it’s the alcohol.

I direct my attention to the bottle. It’s my turn, but before I spin someone joins us. No, no it’s not someone.

It’s him.

Banele. He’s here and taking a sit across me.

“I don’t think I want to play anymore.” I hear myself say, we’re staring at each other.

“You don’t leave the game until you kiss someone.” Someone says.

Since it's my turn, I spin the bottle and it lands on Buntu and Thando. If Banele wasn't here I swear I'd be jumping up and down just like others. But I'm just stoic here, needing another drink. People are chanting "KISS ! KISS !"

Buntu approaches him like he doesn't want to do this but I know inside he is dying to. Thando on the other hand looks excited. They kiss. The kind of kiss that says I've wanted this for so long. By the time it's time to pull apart, they don't pull away from each other. When Buntu realizes that he pulls away hastily, wiping he's lips like he's revolted. People laugh at Thando. He looks wounded. Trying to pretend like Banele is invisible and isn't staring at me, I gape at Buntu, I realize it's a front when he looks at me with remorseful eyes. One of the guys hands Banele the bottle and he spins.

It lands on him and a girl with familiar features. Buhle. Willing she offers herself to him. I hold my breath. I feel Buntu's stare and worry. I can't look, if he kisses her I'm gonna die and nothing is going to revive me. My heart will rapture.

Excluding myself, I leave the group. I look for another drink, in kitchen. I don't care how drunk I am, I just want to forget everything. To stop feeling the injury to my hurt. The drink is stronger, I don't ever know what it is, and I lose my vision for a second. Through the crowd I

search for Phelo and my eyes lock with a pair of beautiful brown eyes. My black beautiful boy. He's coming towards me, to *me*. One of his soccer mates blocks he's way to greet him and I disappear. I lock myself in the bathroom. I can't comprehend what I'm feeling right now. I can't handle the way my heart reacts when he's around. I'm trying to compose myself in the bathroom.

Fifteen minutes later, I open the bathroom door and bump into him on my way back. Shit. Turning away from him, I open the bathroom door.

"Don't. Don't do that, don't run away from me." He says.

"Why would I be running to you?" There's a little bit of sass in my voice.

"Why are you like this?"

"Like not what you wanted?" I slur.

He gets closer. "You know I want you in every way there is."

"Oh really?" I chuckle. "You have a funny way of showing it."

"I'm sorry." He grimaces.

“For what? For leaving me hanging with no explanation or for breaking my heart to the core?”

He doesn't answer. It's not like it's a conundrum.

“You know what? Have a nice life.” I say petulantly and walk away.

He grabs me and brings me closer to his body.

“Don't touch me!” I say crudely.

He lets go immediately like he has been burnt.

“Don't walk away from me. I just want us to talk.”

“Last time I checked there was no “us”.” I'm burning with anger. “Did you kiss her?”

“No, I couldn't. Did you kiss anyone before I got there?”

“Yes, I'm a single woman after all.” I lie.

He wants to say something but he controls himself. “I want to rectify things.”

“I don't want too Banele. The break you wanted is better than being with someone who'll wake up and decide to not want me.”

“I really want to kiss you right now but you’re making it hard for me too.”

What?

“We broke up. You don’t get to do that anymore.”

“I’d do it if it means you won’t remember the lips of the guy you kissed.”

He bites his lower lip, a movement so simple yet so erotic.

“Simon says love me again.”

What?

What?

“No, no. You don’t get to decide when I get to love you and don’t. You don’t get to make demands. You can’t just walk in and out of my life.” My eyes fill with tears.

“You talk to much when you’re drunk, I love it.” He whispers and comes closer to me until my back hits the wall. “But i can think of better ways to use that mouth.”

“Are you drunk?” I retort.

“No.” His finger traces my lower lip, my breath hitches. “I’m drunk with wanting to taste you. My tongue is dying with the hunger for you. The hunger you’d only be able to soothe.”

Oh God.

“I don’t think I can do this Banele.”

I can’t escape, I’m cornered. Do I want to run from him?

“You’re breathtakingly beautiful.”

Don’t blush. Don’t blush. Don’t blush.

Darn it. I blush.

“You can’t say things like that to me anymore.”

“Why?”

“Because we’re not together anymore.”

“Not for long.”

What? I’m so disoriented I can’t keep up. The intoxication of alcohol makes it worse.

“Banele, you can’t get access to me in your convenience.”

“You don’t want me?”

“Are you serious? You shifting this on me?”

“I’m sorry *sthandwa sam*.”

Don’t blush. Don’t blush. Don’t blush.

I conceal the blush this time. But my inner insides melt.

“I want us back.”

“How do I know you won’t need another break?”

He doesn’t answer. “You really aren’t giving me anything to work with and I’m okay with that. From now on I’m going to need you to be away from me. I don’t need you to love me “sometimes” I deserve more than that.”

He grabs my arm again and pulls me towards a room. He locks the door behind him. I’m still shocked by the sudden change in his demeanor. He stares at me. The air thickens. He comes closer to me and I smell his breath. He didn’t drink. He traces the bottom of my lips with his tongue. Teasing me.

“Who did you kiss?” He asks.

“I didn’t kiss anyone, I lied.” This voluntarily let’s itself out.

“Kiss me.”

“I don’t want too.”

“Your body and eyes are telling me something different.” He smirks.

“Kiss me.” I hear myself say.

“I thought you’d never ask.”

He kisses me, oh so pleasurable. Immediately when his mouth connects itself with mine, my knees buckle. It’s been so long. He’s kissing me passionately, and I reacquaintance myself with the taste of him. My body responds to him, only him. My nipples harden. They become painfully erect, needing his touch. He grinds himself onto me, each contact elevates the wetness I’m feeling down there. I don’t want him to ever stop kissing me. He moans when I bite his lips. His hands are roaming all over me and it feels so good. He pulls away all too soon.

“You are going to shut up and let me explain, I ain’t letting you go again.”

Chapter 13

I am breathing heavily from the alluring kiss. I need his mouth on me.

“Kiss me again please.”

“I don’t think I’ll be able to keep my hands off of you if I kiss you again.”

“I don’t want you to keep them off of me.”

He runs his hands through his face in frustration.

“We need to talk Ndinani.”

“We will.” I shrug. “Right after you’ve kissed me.”

“You’re difficult when you drunk.”

I brush my lips against his. Teasing him passionately. His lips smash into mine, he nearly knocks the wind out of my lungs, and I lose control. I can no longer think straight, my thoughts have been seduced. I feel myself yearning for pleasure. My need to touch him never abating. I want him to touch the parts of me that long for him, only him. I run my fingers down his chest, pulling him closer until there is no space left between us and i could feel the beating of his heart against my chest. I feel

like i am walking on air. It is magic, the way his lips connected with mine. His mouth is so warm, the caress of his lips softer than I could have imagined. Everything about him invaded my senses. I missed this so much.

“Touch me.” I whisper, so low that he wouldn’t be able to hear me if we weren’t so close. He begins to nuzzle my neck with delicate kisses.

“You’re drunk baby, I don’t want to take advantage of you.” He mummurs.

Oh God, but I really need you to touch me.

“Okay.” I push him away from me, wanting air and to bend over.

My mouth fills with saliva and I become dizzy. “I think I’m about to puke.”

My vision blurs. I feel Banele’s hands trying to direct me towards a bucket, he’s holding it. How did he gets ahold of a bucket? My stomach churns. I hear an indistinct muttering. Without warning, I throw up. This is really painful. A few minutes later, my body is numb. I feel myself being picked up, I doze off in warm and safe arms.



I wake up with a throbbing headache. My throat is dehydrated and I need water. I'm not at home, I don't panic because Banele has his arms around me, watching me. The events of the day before come crashing on me. I remember everything, the way I begged in desperation for him to touch me, wanting him to stay away from me but wanting him with me. I remember puking in front of him after kissing him. He looks freshly showered. What time is it anyway?

"We need to talk." He interrupts my thoughts.

"I don't feel well, I have bad breath, I want to go home."

"I'll talk, you'll do the listening." He kisses my forehead.

"Stop kissing me." I grunt out.

"You didn't hear me complaining yesterday when you kissed me non-stop." He smirks.

"Are you going to talk or irritate me?" I retort.

He rolls his eyes, a habit I find sexy. "Firstly, I want to apologize. I handled the situation I was in an unjust way, and for that I'm deeply sorry. I was going through so much at that time and I didn't want you to feel neglected. I thought us taking a break would be optimal."

“I told you several times that I’m always going to be there for you.” I say. My voice serene.

“I know. This has just taken a toll on me, it has been for a long time. My dad hasn’t been doing well even though he conceals that from me. I am broken Ndinani. I went into a heavy depression and I just needed to be alone. I believe that your love can mend me. I didn’t want to tarnish you. And I realize things are better when you’re by my side.”

“I’m as broken as you are Banele, nothing you can tell me can scare me away.” I say.

He takes my hands into his. “I’m sorry, I want to fix things with you.”

“I don’t think we can fix us Banele.”

Taken aback he says, “What do you mean?”

“You have this toxic trait of keeping quiet when things are tough, you don’t reach out to anyone, you push me away. I have to suck what’s bothering you out of you and it’s tiring Banele. With everything in me, I want to help you. I want you to become a better version of yourself. But you aren’t making things easy for me. When you push me away, it hurts. I know you don’t do it

intentionally, it's what you've been doing for years. But if being with you is going to add pain and agony into my life then I don't want this." A tear slips away from me. I'm tired of everything I'm not sure if I'll be able to continue. The thirst is elevating.

He attempts to speak but I stop him. "I was gang raped Banele. I remember that day crystal clear. I was going home from school, I didn't see them following me maybe if I wasn't blasting music in my ears I would've heard them. When I got home I didn't lock the door hence why mama reminds me of locking the door every chance she gets. She wasn't at home that day. It wasn't even five minutes into to the house, they barged in and lock the door themselves. The other two undressed me, another two held me. I screamed and kicked but it was futile. My cries got them exhilarated, I begged them to stop. I remember one of them saying I wore a short skirt because I wanted to tease them and that I brought this to myself. They made my body their bed. They took turns violating me. I bled, that didn't even stop them but it boosted their ego. I blacked out while they were busy but they weren't done when I woke up. When mom got home, I was swimming in the pool of my blood. She lost it. She had them arrested but they got out in two months, we had to move, more like run away. That night, my soul left me. They didn't kill me, but inside they murdered me. I've buried the rape deep down in memories I don't visit but now I want to deal with it. All of this time I've been masquerading to be a survivor and not a victim. This is

the first time I've talked about it and I'm going to get help." I don't realize I'm crying until he wipes my tears. I'm revisiting the ominous moment.

"My point is, we haven't dealt with any of the things we don't talk about. We've got to fight our demons and love our flaws. We can't expect each other to love our flaws when we haven't embraced them, that's unfair to the both of us. You came back to me because you can't withstand your demons, you're afraid of them. I'm going to need you to face them alone and I'll do the same. Don't get me wrong, I don't want you to suffer. I don't want you to fill the empty parts of me, I'll do that myself. I want to feel complete and fall in love with everything I've despised about myself, without you. I want you to deal with the parts of you that make you uncomfortable. I know you love me, and I love you with everything that's in me but we aren't going to work if we're toxic for each other. When we get back together, when we are content and complete with ourselves, the two of us combined, we could set the world on fire." I say.

I search for my clothes and walk towards them, taking off his t-shirt, I wear my clothes but I'm still covered in his scent. In the process of clothing, my tears have blinded me. I can feel his eyes watching every move I make. Avoiding his eyes, I make a move to exit his bedroom. My heart painstakingly in agony. Every part of me is begging to stay and be with him.

“I don’t want to let you leave again.” He begs.

“We’ll come back to each other if we want us as much as we claim to.”

“What do you want me to do? I’ll do any t-thing as long as you stay.” He chokes.

“I can’t. I’ve used you as my coping mechanism. I am not okay when you’re not around. I draw whenever you’ve hurt me. You can’t articulate yourself when hurting. You build walls around you and I’m unwilling to break them because there are many layers you’ve surrounded yourself with, and some are made of thorns. I want you to want to tell me things. This relationship has sucked out most of my energy, the good outweighs the bad but the bad is so poisonous it could cause fatal harm to one of us. I’m doing this for us. We need this. Until then Banele, goodbye.”

“We are going to keep in touch right?”

“No. I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

I walk out.

On the way home, I am numb. I am unaware of my surroundings. I’m silently reciting that I’ve made a good

decision. I don't know how long it took for me to get home, but when I did I broke down. I curl myself and heaved. I cry for the cries I've suppressed the previous days. I cry for liberating myself from the one place I've always wanted to be in. I am on the floor, pain is piercing me. I succumb to the pain and cry till exhaustion, until I'm tearless.

It takes a while for me to notice mom isn't home. I lay there, trying to gather myself together. I'm having the worst throbbing headache I need sleep. I get up from the floor and get a glass of water to hydrate my thirst. I charge my phone, I got several messages from Phelo, but I don't view them and read the one my mom sent.

I won't come home tonight & tomorrow. Lock the door and ask Phelo to come over.

This is a first. I have a feeling she'll come back as an engaged women. I'm so glad I've had the chance to witness her fall in-love again. She deserves all the happiness in this world.

In my room, I get in bed and sleep.

I wake up with a door banging. I'm still disoriented and the fear I had when I was assaulted triggers. I relax when I hear Buntu and Phelo's voice. That really frightened me. I quickly walk to the door and find worried faces

staring back at me. They would look good together if Buntu wasn't guy. By the look of things, they've been trying to reach me all day, the sun is about to set.

“Why the hell do you have a phone if we can't reach you? I'm been trying to get ahold of you all day.” Phelo says.

“I'm sorry, but this isn't a good time.” I say.

She halts on her way in. She stares at me and I know I look horrible, I haven't showered. Buntu on the other hand is holding Phelo's bag and busy texting.

“What's wrong? What did Banele do?” She asks.

“He didn't do anything this time around. I broke things off with him permanently.”

That has Buntu's attention.

“What?” He says. “He's been preparing himself for saying the right things to get back together with you. He wasn't coming at the party and I told him this is he's chance to rectify things.”

“What?” Phelo says. “He wasn't suppose to be at the party. Things would've went well if you hadn't tell him to come.” She elbows Buntu in the stomach.

“It's okay. We needed to talk.” I say.

“I don't get it, the two of you love each other.” She says.

That alone makes my eyes water. What did I do? We could've fixed things. He didn't deserve this.

“There's a lot of things we need to fix, not together. But I told him when we both heal from our past, then we'll try again.”

I break down. My heart is overflowing with agony. I can't hold the cries on anymore. I can't let this vacuum the happiness out of me.

“I-I love him Phelo. I want to be with him. We both deserve happiness but sometimes we suck the energy out of each other and it's daunting.”

“It's going to be okay.” She hushes me in her arms, I feel Buntu's presence next to us. I'm going to be okay. It's okay to cry over him. It's okay to feel the hurt. My love won't be enough for us to heal. I've done the right thing because if I hadn't we would've ruined each other.

“Is it a bad time to tell you there's a video of me kissing Thando circulating?” He says.

“What? Did your parents see it?”

“No, not yet. But I don't care if they see it or not. I'm tired of hiding my sexuality.”

“You like Thando don't you?” I ask.

“Saying I like him is an understatement. Thank you for convincing me to play the game yesterday.”

“I saw how you enjoyed kissing him. No wonder the video is trending.”

“But that doesn’t give them the right to take away my right to come out.”

“I’m sorry it had to be this way.” Phelo says.

“I just need the courage to tell my folks that they won’t have a *makoti*.”

“But on the bright side they’ll have a son-in-law to help with the cows.” I wink.

He laughs. “Thank you guys for not making this a big deal and not treating me differently.”

“Anytime.” Phelo says, we group hug.

Two hours later I’m laughing like nobody’s business. I love how these two are my safe haven. There’s nothing I have to hold back when I’m with them. I’ve showered and I don’t feel sad anymore. We’ve been watching a comedy movie and eating.

Buntu’s phone rings.

“Hello *tata*.” He listens and his mood changes.

He drops the calls and says, “My father wants me home. I have to go.”

“Text us when you get home, or rather update us on whether he scolded you or not.” I say.

He chuckles and walks out.

“So ... I have something to tell you.” She says with her tongue out, this is exciting.

“Spit it out sis!” I match her excitement.

“Ntsikelelo and I kissed yesterday and we going out on a date next weekend.”

“Gerra out’a here !”

“Yep, I’ve been curving him for a while but I’m ready get into a relationship again.”

“I’m so happy for you. No wonder you’ve been glowing today, you’ve been glowing.”

“He’s head over heels for me. I deserve this kind of love.”

“You definitely do. You want ice-cream?” I ask.

“Pleaseee.”

Before indulging ourselves, she looks inquisitive and I give her the “spit it out” expression.

“Is it really over, isn’t it?”

I sigh. “It is.”

“You’ll be fine, you have me and I’m not going anywhere.” She consoles.

“Let’s talk about how much of a flirt Ntsikelelo.”

She blushes. Love looks good on her, she’s so buoyant.

“Well, he -”

My phone rings, it’s mom.

“One of us is about to become a Mrs.”

“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?” I put her on loudspeaker.

“Phelo listen to this.”

“He proposed, your mom is getting married.” Mom says.

“Your man finally put a ring on it Miss P.”

“Who’s Miss P, I don’t even know who that is.” She laughs.

“Get home real soon I want to hear all the details!” I say.

“I’ll will. Don’t forget to lock the door. Bye.” She drops the call.

I am in cloud nine. My mom is getting married. My closest friend has found the someone who reciprocates her love. I’m learning how to orchestrate a path for

myself. The relationship I was in taught me happiness, and I'm not letting that feeling go. From today onwards, I will not let anything deter me. I've work so hard to become the girl I've always wanted to be, the beautiful one, courageous, the one who embraces her flaws and cuts off all negativity toxicity. I never again dim my own light, I will never settle for anything less than what I deserve. I am a goddess.

Chapter 14

BANELE

I remember two months ago when the sight of her brought a piercing ache into my heart, that was because she didn't want anything to do with me to any further extent. I remember wanting to compliment her like I always do, but I restrain myself because she barely looks into my direction. She laughs with her friends, I get mad because I'm not the one making her cry with laughter. I don't wait for her at the gates anymore, she arrives with Phelo. I'm envious of Buntu because he can talk to her, laugh with her. Every chance I get I ask him about her. Everything without her is bizarre. I've tried trying new things and I do have fun but when the day descends, I fight the urge to call her and tell her about my day. She's become more beautiful, she unintentionally draws attention to herself. I've heard whispers about guys wanting to ask her out because we've broken up and I threaten each and everyone of them. I can't let them mess with my girl.

I miss her so fucking much. If it's possible to die from missing someone, I'd would have deceased a long time ago. Its a handful of times I've stopped myself from texting and calling her. There's so much I want to tell her.

I want to tell her that my uncle got arrested. My dad and I have been getting professional help, it's been really good for us. I'm more open with my father, we talk to each other about anything and everything. I want her to know that she was right, telling my dad was worth it. I want to tell her that my dad has met someone. I haven't met her yet but she's a phenomenal woman, that's what my dad said.

It's Saturday. Buntu is coming over with the bro's. I woke up and decided I'm going to read the poetry's I've written about Ndinani. When I first met her I knew she's what I want. I didn't care wether she'd make me her friend or something more, I just wanted to be known as hers. Everything about you is my favorite. When we first kissed, I felt everything in me being fixed. I don't know what I was thinking breaking things off with her. I swear I'm working on getting her back. It's been a tough process moving at a snails pace.

I reach for my box below my bed, it has my poems in it. I remember writing this poem when I'd woken up having a bad dream and the thoughts of her calmed me down. On that day we've also had our first kiss. The kiss revoked desires and needs.

**Let
me**

kiss

the parts you think are undesirable.

Let

me

make love to the shunned parts of you.

Let

me

woo you into seeing yourself as I do, perfection.

Her love feels so good. She's all I want in a girl. Her flaws, the things she doesn't like about herself, are what I love. I knew I loved her when I woke up and look forward to being with her. I knew she's for me when she wasn't shaken by the parts of me that are ugly. I knew how broken we both were when she showed me her drawings. She stayed all the fucking times, my presence was enough for her. I'm an arse for being this toxic. She taught me a different side of intimacy, when all my life I've know how to be intimate with a girl.

She is my favorite because she plays with razors.

She twists it across

her wrists.

Drawing after drawing, she pleases her demons.

I want to be the one who eases her anguish.

She's my favorite because she does what I do.

Fuck, I could write a book explaining why I can't stop loving her. I am more me when I'm with her. When I wrote this, I had a wet dream about her.

I want to caress your body.
Our souls embedded
Our beings intertwined and
You cry out in ecstasy.

This is when I had a boner by just staring at her.

Your front entices me and makes my knees cave in.

It's your sublimity.

It's effortless.

It's delicate.

Your front makes me want to see you, only you.

When I went home after telling her I have fallen in love with her.

It's only your kisses that make my body purr.

Your touches that thaw my insides.

Your smile that makes me trip over air.

Your entire existence makes want to be, it's only you.

I bled in ink in this one when she told me her trauma. She deserves all the glorious things this world can offer.

I kiss you, you moan in pleasure.

I groan because your pleasure is my pleasure.

You grind yourself onto me and I know you want my touch.

You want me to feel the wetness that oozes out of your cooze.

I want to honeymoon your honeypot.

I want my lips to be coat with your wetness.

I want to nibble your nipples.

I want to quench your ache.

I'm certain this is what you also want when you deepen the kiss and call out my name when it's intense.

My mouth waters at the thought.

But I know you're not ready for this kind of pleasure.

Baby, you tense whenever men are around you.

You cringe when I touch you at first but relax when you realize it's me.

And it's okay.

And when you are ready, I'll give you the bliss no one else has experienced.

Before I get carried away, I tuck the poems safely in their residing box. In the kitchen warm up the meat dad bought for my mates. He left in a rush saying its work related but I know it's because of a work. I haven't been surrounding myself with my friends and I want to rectify that. I'm always rushing home after practice or a game. Ndinani is always there watching me play, a part of me wants to believe she's there for me and not for Buntu. Damn, I'm whipped over this girl.

Half an hour later, my mates barge in, laughing their face off about an unintellectual topic.

“This habit of y'all barging in has to stop. What if I was busy with a girl?” I ask.

“What girl?” Xola, our wing man asks.
They burst out laughing.

“Says the one who nuts in seconds.” I retort.

Again, they burst out laughing.

“Whatcha laughing at Lwazi? The only thing you know is missionary, that's why your girls come to me.” Lwando says.

“You're so ugly Lwando if I was you I'd sue my parents.” He says.

It's hysterical. It's a never ending cycle of roasting end other. We're a bunch of assholes.

For the rest of the day it's laughter, games and food. Dad arrives and he offers to drop them at their homes. Buntu stays behind because he wants to talk to me and the fact that his house is closer to mine is at his benefit.

“Wassup?” I say.

“There's a possibility Ndinani might reside somewhere else.”

“What?” My mood sinks.

“I just thought I'd give you a heads up.”

“When is this happening?”

“I don't know the full details but it's towards the end of the year and her mother is still contemplating the moving thing.”

She can't *leave*.

“Do you know if ..you know.. if she wants to hear from me?”

He smirks. “She'd be happy if you reach out.”

Relief floods through me. “Thank you bro. I'll up my game and get her back before she leaves.”

“It's not going to be easy.” He laughs.

Dammit, I know. Talking about Ndinani when we aren't in good terms, irks me out so I change the conversation.

“How about we make a bet?” I challenge.

“Bet about what?” He challenges back.

“When I get Ndinani back, you coarse Thando into dating you.”

He chokes on his saliva and looks appalled.

“What? I know you're gay. It's about time you do something about the fact you're into him.”

“Is it that obvious?” He flushes.

“No. I saw the way you two kissed that day. And there's nothing wrong with being gay, it's you are. I say go get your man.”

He laughs. “It's my turn to say thank you.”

“Let me walk you out and make a plan on how to get my girl back.” I say.

A little while later, I collect all the pieces of poetry I've written about Ndinani and put them in my box. I'd be damn if I let her out of my grasp again. I can only hope she's going to take me back. I quickly text dad because he's my only hope knowing the full details.

Can you plz ask my girl's mom when they are moving? I'll explain everything later.

I wait for about 30 minutes, and he replies.

Her response was "not anytime soon." Be smart champ, get your girl, I taught you better than that.

Damn right you did.

That girl is my destiny. She makes everything bearable. When I finally learn how to abandon my toxic traits, my goal would be to make her happy all the time. Until then I will continue to express my love for with inks, I will continue to busk in our lovely memories. Until then, she will always define love. My heart screams at me wanting to nothing else to articulates itself to her. I sleep with the only though ringing in my mind...

I love you without end.

Chapter 15

6 months later.

Music is blasting through my ears and I'm dancing like it's nobody's business. I'm cleaning the kitchen floor, my mom promised to service me with money. She's out on a date with her knight and shining amor, my soon to be step-dad. I'm from a therapy session with my therapist, which has been immensely helpful.

My phone vibrates in my pocket. A tentative smile tugs at my lips when I notice it's Phelo. She sent me snaps of her and Ntsikelelo, they're still at it and they look good together, more like complementing each other. It's beautiful to witness.

I've grown so much these previous months. My mindset is not what it was. I've instilled beautiful and affectionate words in my vocabulary. I am no longer venomous towards myself, I treat myself with ease and kindness. Each day, I fall in love with the person I've always envied to be, the person I'm becoming. I have engraved positive thoughts in my heart. I will no longer erode myself. I will no longer deny myself self love. For a long period I've wanted people to fill me, but now I fill my cup and it runneth over. For every little milestone, I applaud myself.

There's a knock on my door. A kid from across the street gives me a box and a red rose. He doesn't say anything and runs away. I open the box and instantly recognize the hand writing on the note, it belongs to my black brown eyed beautiful boy.

I hope this can lure you and keep you yearning for more, text me when you want more than MORE. B

I don't know whether to be shocked or pleased nevertheless I eagerly open the box that's wrapped in blue, Banele's favorite colour. The box is filled with written notes, paying close attention I realize it's scribbles of *poems*. I wasn't aware Banele writes. I stop whatever it was that I was doing and focus on the task at hand. I am taken back to the time where he first wrote me a note.

Your mind enhances my libido.

The way you articulate yourself

Is gentle, smooth, like how I want to stroke you,

Lick every wet path of you.

You, only you.

Oh. My. Goodness.

Being aware of the fact that every piece of poem in the box is about me makes want to run back to him. I happily

read them and my heart whispers *I've missed you so much.*

Your voice.

It makes me believe I am adequate.

It mends my soul.

You sing, I fall more than I thought I would.

After an hour of reading how everything that I am makes Banele fall in love with me, I search for words to express how I feel but I can't. The feeling of being loved wholly is inexplicable. It's been hell without his affectionate ways. For him to let me in, in what he thinks of me means more than I bargained.

Not knowing what to do, I text Phelo.

Banele sent me a box full of poems about me. He also said I should text him when I want more. Send help sis.

She replies back instantly.

It's about damn time! All I can say is go get your man sis.

Without further ado, I text Banele and knowing his number by heart is a perk. It's been so long without talking to him, I want to weep.

I want more than MORE.

I bite my nails and wait for his reply. After all this time, I'm appalled to know he still wants me. I want more than anything to be surrounded by the rarity of his love. My phone rings.

"Hey." I register shock in his voice.

"Hi."

"You texted."

"Yes, I did."

Silence...

"Are you busy?"

"I was but not anymore."

"Can we meet and just *talk*?"

"Okay." I say.

"Meet me at the mall and I'll finance everything."

He drops the call and I finish up my chores. In my room, I wear one of the skirts Phelo said I look good in and shows my curves and a blouse that outlines the shape of my bust. I look really luscious. I'm flaunting my beauty. I can't believe there was a point in my life I thought I was ugly. I kept telling myself that my beauty is subtle, that it

can be missed if you don't give it a second glance. I deserve to go to hell to think so badly of myself.

He sends me the location and it's at the ice cream shop we first went to. Oh my.

I arrive there and he's sitting exactly at the same spot we last sat at. I've been seeing him everyday at school, but today it feels like I'm seeing him for the first time. He is an epitome of beauty. He isn't aware that I'm admiring his beauty, he's fiddling his hands nervously. He looks around, his gaze lands on me and there's no else in the shop besides us. We're in our bubble, where I've always wanted to be. He approaches me and halts when notices my full figure, I blush when his eyes smolder with desire. I approach him.

"You're utterly beautiful." He says.

Aah. "You so not bad yourself."

"Hey." He kisses my forehead. Aah. "Let's start over. I'm Banele and I'm into you, so much."

"Hi, I'm Ndinani and the feeling is mutual." His smile broadens.

Let me go and order, you nothing but chocolate right?" He winks.

I laugh, smitten. "Yes, please."

He returns and smiles at me. "I miss you so much."

“It took you eight months for you to say that to me.” I roll my eyes.

“You wanted us apart then and now I’m sick and tired of that.”

“I never wanted us apart Banele, I wanted us to deal with our demons apart. I wanted you to realize that we’ll continue being toxic to each other if we don’t deal with ourselves separately.”

“I know. I have dealt with most of the things that are standing in the way of us being together. I want us to be together, I can’t stand the breakup anymore. It’s been so long Ndinani. I need you, I’ll do anything.”

I don’t say anything and he continues.

“I’ll promise I’ll love you the way you love me if not more. Knowing your demons isn’t adequate anymore. I want know what makes them uncomfortable and what makes their skin crawl. I know when I’m by your side nothing is difficult to face. I’ll wait for you if you still need time, I’m yours.”

I sigh. “Only on one condition.”

“Anything, I’ll do it.”

“Only if you promise me you’ll kiss me away the parts of me that I think are undesirable.” I look at him behind my eyelids.

He smiles, and his smile reaches his eyes and I know I've said what he wanted me to say all along. "I'll do it now if you don't stop looking at me like that."

"Promises, promises." I roll my eyes.

He smiles and gets out of his sit and air struggles to get into my nostrils. Goosebumps form, I can't stop staring at him. He is so close I can smell his breath. He's going to kiss me! Oh yes please. I close my eyes and reopen them only to find him staring at me.

"You're so beautiful baby." He says.

He smashes his lips onto mine and I lose concentration. He kisses me, infecting me with his poison and love. I open up to him and when he inserts his tongue I lose all thoughts and worries. More than anything I want his touch on me. The way he's kissing me shows how much he has missed me, he shows me the hunger he writes about, he promises me love through the kiss and I fall for his love language. I want to cry because he tastes so good and I have waited for so long to be attached to him like this. We tangle our tongues and kiss each other in us. He stops kissing me to catch our breath.

"I'm so glad I'm kissing you again, the thought I'd never kiss you again killed me."

"I want you to touch me." I say trying to catch my breath.

"I've been dying to."

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

THE END.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For as long as I can remember I've always been a romance reader. For so long I dreamt of writing my own romance books, but because of insecurities and self doubt I couldn't bring myself to write. When I finally wrote, I couldn't stop. Writing became a coping mechanism, it became easy as breathing. I am a firm believer in love, in soulmates and everything romantic. I read so much you'd think it's the only thing that's keeping me alive. I stay until sunrise reading, I lose and find myself in words. I found a way to express myself beautifully and that is with words.

I'd like to think of myself as a young black feminist. I stand for everything that's for black women. I also believe that I am deserving of love and spreading love wherever I go is vital. Depression isn't something I'd wish upon anyone and I believe that LOVE can cure it. I hope some day you find someone who won't get tired of your needs, someone who won't find you exhausting. And I hope you find the kind of love Banele & Ndinani have for each other. There's still love out there, we just don't know where to find it.

Thank you for reading my book until the end. I understand that your time is valuable & I appreciate you squeezing this novel into your time. I'd really like to know how you felt when you got to the last chapter. If

you have any inquiries or comments on the book contact me here :

tamianosipho0@gmail.com

With lots of love, Nosi.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to any person, living or dead, or any events or occurrences, is purely coincidental. The characters and story lines are created by the author's imagination and are used fictitiously. Thank you for downloading this free ebook.

Cover image designed by Siyabonga Mbusi.

Edited by Noluthi Kula.

Published 2020.