

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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PROLOGUE

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"You may now kiss your bride" says a pastor after Lethukuthula Gumede and Nobuhle Khoza now Gumede said their vows putting on their rings, promising each other forever, I am seated at the back watching them share their kiss. It is indeed a joyous day for everyone but for me, not so much, he is the father of my daughter that I haven't seen for three years, Lethu's grandma Ziyanda raised her ever since she was born they took her from the hospital after I gave birth to her. I gave them a go ahead I was only sixteen years old, Lethu and I were both teenagers I didn't want no baby we were just foolish to rush into sex. Ever since that day he didn't want anything to do with me as I said I don't want anything to do with the baby, he is a year younger than me but so matured for his age even his body structure.

I rush out of the hall before everyone and get in my car watching the couple walk out holding hands, a crowd singing behind them, everyone looks happy. I see Lethu picking up a beautiful baby girl who is wearing a white dress, that is our daughter Phumelele, he named her I am sure he doesn't know me at all, well of course she doesn't, I only gave birth to her nothing else I bet the wife will be her mother from now on but I need to see her even if it's just to say hi then I will never bother them again but I don't know if Lethu would allow me, he hates me and he makes sure our paths don't cross I don't even go on family lunches and gatherings because he told me he will kill me. His hate for me is more than the love he had ever since we were just kids where he would ask his parents Nadia and Pamella if him and his three identical brothers can visit our house just so we can play together, we got so close from the age of 8 till I was 15 and we started to fool around trying adult stuff, he was the naughty one and initiated the sex and

I agreed because I loved him, I still do but everything changed when I found out I was pregnant, I was so scared, Mom and dad were disappointed but they were there for me I just couldn't see myself raising a baby, being a teenage mom, so that's where Lethu told me that whatever we had going on was over and his family will take the baby and they did.

I am startled by someone opening my door I quickly look up it's the groom Lethu looking so angry and handsome at the same time.

Lethu: "You are fucking with me right!?"

He is staring at me with cold eyes, I feel stuck on my seat.

Lethu: "What the fuck are you doing here!?"

His hands are moving so quick as he communicate with me using sign language.

Me: " I'm leaving, sorry."

Lethu: I will kill you Tinyiko try some shit with me I will kill you! You want to ruin my life huh did I invite you to my wedding!?

I know he is shouting he is even sweating on his nose.

He quickly look behind him and there is his brother Lethokuhle looks like he is calling him.

Lethu: Get the fuck out of here now!

I nod as he close my door and walk away, I breathe for some time and drive away going home.

Ntombi: What were you thinking Tinyiko why did you go to his wedding?

I wipe my tears sitting up in bed.

Me: " I want to see Phumelele."

She widen her eyes.

Ntombi: "But why now Tee? It will look like you want to mess things up for him and his wife, why now?"

I shake my head.

Me: "I just need to see her, just once sis."

She sighs.

Ntombi: "We will talk to dad but Tinyiko you are putting us in a very difficult position, you didn't want Phumelele and the Gumedes accepted that now what!? I am married to that family please don't make me choose sides.

Me: "I'm sorry, it's okay I don't have to see her forget I even mentioned it sis sorry."

I get under covers and close my eyes. This was my decision so I have to suck it up and not mess people's life just because I have changed my mind about wanting to see my baby girl.

I am Tinyiko Zulu walk this journey with me.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 1

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I have been in bed for three consecutive days I don't know what's worse, seeing Lethu getting married or not being able to see my daughter but then all of it is my fault things were okay between Lethu and I before I chose to abandon Phumelele the day she was born.

Lethu was so excited the day I was in labour and when I delivered the baby he was so happy holding her so carefully like he was scared she might fall while I just closed my eyes because finally she was out of my tummy which was so depressing for me, I cried for the whole nine months because I didn't want no baby so I don't blame Lethu for wanting nothing to do with me after rejecting our daughter.

My door swings open and dad is staring at me with sad eyes.

Mageba: What do you want me to do?

I sit up and shrug my shoulders.

Me: "Maybe I should finish my studies in Cape Town and..."

He shakes his head.

Mageba: No, you are not going there, you need me, us your family.

Me: " Did you talk to them?

He look down and nod a little then look back at me.

Mageba: They don't want to confuse her Niko.

I nod.

Me: "I understand, thank you for trying to talk to them."

He went to meet the Gumedes to beg them to let me see Phume.

He sit next to me and hold my hand.

Mageba: Maybe one day Lethu will come around.

I nod.

Mageba: I love you and I will keep trying to talk to him and his family.

Me: "Thank you dad."

I am grateful to God for giving me such wonderful family after my own mother failed me, the love and support they give me is out of this world.

Mageba: Ntombi and Nomonde are worried because you are not replying to their messages so they said they are coming to see you and you know they are going to shout at you for locking yourself up so I say wake up and look pretty to avoid their loud voices.

I smile nodding, he get up and walk out. I bath then clean my room before my big sisters show up because they really can shout.

They walk in and look around the room I look down until Monde lift my chin up and look into my eyes I just let my tears do the talking they both sit on my either side and hug me until I feel better.

Ntombi: " We hate seeing you like this."

Me: "I'm okay."

Monde: "We talked to Q and Sage they will talk to Lethu."

I nod but I know Lethu once his mind is made up no one can change it.

Ntombi: I heard that Phume is coming back to live here since Lethu has a wife now.

I look down that feels like a stab in my heart.

We stay for the whole day it's always nice having them around because they can be crazy.

I eat dinner then go to bed, I start taking my phone and search for Lethu on Facebook I notice that his profile picture he is with his wife on their wedding day, he really loves her, when we were still teenagers in love he used to post pictures of us but when we broke up he deleted every last one of them and never posted any girl until he met his wife, I go through his timeline and I keep breathing because the chest pains I feel are too much he

really loves her judging from their pictures there he looks very happy.

I have been doing the same thing everyday which is looking at Lethu's account he is so active these days, I stop scrolling when I come across a picture of Phumelele in a very beautiful dress and a caption " First day at day care and this big girl didn't cry, love you Phume kaTata" I sit up and zoom the picture, she is going to Nkanyezi's day care which is like five minutes away from here the picture Lethu took was right at the gate of the day care. I quickly get out of bed and go take a shower and get dressed in a hurry then run out I drive to the centre and park, I breathe for a while then slowly step out of my car walking in, I can hear a lot of noise the kids are making I walk in and greet the mothers that look after the kids.

Nandi: Niko hey so good to see you long time!

She says coming to hug me, she used to help at Sage's school I guess she changed schools now. I greet her back and ask if I could help

around and they allow me since they know me and that we are close with the Gumedes.

I go to the kids and walk in they are all playing with toys making noise I look around and spot my baby girl, it breaks my heart that I only notice her because of the pictures I see not because I know her personally. I step closer to her as she drops the teddy bear I squat in front of her and pick it up giving it to her she takes it with both hands.

Phume: Bonga..(thanks)

I smile at least she can talk she didn't inherit being deaf like me. She is beautiful looking a lot like Lethu and his entire family those people have strong genes.

She sit down and cross her legs rocking a teddy back and forth I sit in front of her she stares at me like she is waiting for me to say something I just wave smiling.

I stay with her she ends up giving me a teddy and take another one I keep smiling as she

tries to get me to talk I can see she is confused I get it she is young and she is only going to start now to learn sign language.

I see her quickly getting up and running to the door I turn and see Lethu and his wife behind him, he is hugging Phume but his eyes are on me and he looks so angry I must have lost track of time because I told myself that once the school is out I will be long gone.

I slowly get up and walk towards them he pick Phumelele up and walk out his wife takes the bag which I assume is Phume's. I get in my car and drive home and no one is there Mom and dad went to the palace and the boys are probably at their house at the back. I open the fridge and take bottled water when I close it I notice Lethu standing right in front of me I get startled and jump up letting go of the bottle, he step closer I feel his hand on my neck then he squeeze me I try to move his hand away but his grip get even tighter.

Lethu: You are testing me Tinyiko, stay away from my daughter.

I am struggling to breathe the tears are making their way out of my eyes, I want to beg him to let go but how when I don't have a voice.

Lethu: "Stay away."

I am hoping to see the Lethu that once was in love with me but I only see an animal out for blood, my blood.

He finally let go I go on my knees coughing my neck hurts I almost passed out, I slowly look up at him he is staring at me then he turns and walk out. I sit on the floor crying for some time then finally go to my room and go to bed fully dressed I am too tired to do anything at this point.

The whole week ends with me fighting the urge to go see Phume again but afraid of what Lethu might do I stay away as he said I should.

We are eating dinner with my brothers and parents I see their eyes moving to the door I look at the same direction and Lethu is here with a gun in his hand and he is visibly shaking as he points the gun at me dad get up and try to go to him but he raise his hand up to stop him.

Lethu: Where is my daughter?

I look at him confused.

Lethu: Tinyiko where did you take my daughter!

Me: "I don't understand."

He cocks his gun but Shaka quickly get up and rush to him taking the gun from his hand.

Shaka: Get out Lethukuthula now.

I see his eyes getting teary staring at me I see vulnerability in there so someone took our daughter. He put his hand in his pocket and answer his phone.

Lethu: You found her? Where? Okay I'm coming now.

He rush out without saying a word I sit down and cover my face, how can someone you love so much hate you this bad, I am the first person he suspects when our daughter goes missing.

Later dad tells me that someone took Phume from daycare and brought her back with a new teddy but they don't know who it was they are still looking.

Later I see Nadia walking in with Lethu behind him I am sitting next to dad on the couch.

Nadia: Mageba..

She bows then stare at Lethu, his face has red marks like he was slapped.

Nadia: Talk dammit!

Lethu: Mageba I came to apologize for pulling out a gun in your house I'm sorry.

Nadia: Go on..

Lethu: I'm sorry Niko for accusing you of taking my daughter.

He says looking at me his eyes are cold, he is not sorry at all.

Nadia: Mageba I'm sorry for what my son did please forgive us I don't want any bad blood between our families we've known each other for years you are like the father to us so I hope we won't let kids get between us.

Mageba: I am not happy about the way he disrespected me and my house but I know maybe he was too emotional and wanted someone to blame so I forgive him and hope he won't ever do it again.

Nadia: Oh he knows what will happen to him if he do it again.

Dad walk them out I follow them and ask to talk to Lethu, we move away from the parents.

Me: " Is she okay?"

Lethu: " You care?"

I look down.

Me: "I'm sorry please forgive me."

He doesn't say anything.

Me: "Please."

I feel tears burning my eyes, I remember when we were still kids I would feel sad and he would steal Pamella's phone to call Mom so we can talk he was always there for me in my darkest days and right now I crave for his hug so bad it used to make me feel better, I step closer and hug him but he push me back hard and get in Nadia's car, I lean on the wall and look down, dad take my hand and we walk in.

Mageba: He is married Niko move on..

I nod wiping my tears.

Mageba: "You gonna be fine just try to let go of the past and look forward to the future, I want to see you happy."

Me: " And I will be, one day."

I get in bed and sleep with that tiny voice in me telling me that there is no other man for me other than Lethu but I know I am hurting myself with this, he is married to the love of his life a better woman than I could ever be with no emotional scars, no history of mental illness and never stepped foot on a psychiatric hospital before.

Days go by with me trying to find courage to wake up and face the world and today I wake up and take a long shower then wear my clothes then walk out.

Nombuso: Baby wow, Mageba look who came out of her room.

I smile as they look at me with warm smiles on their faces, they hug me.

Nombuso: I missed you.

Me: "I'm okay now Mom."

I eat breakfast with them which is something I stopped doing a while back they seem so happy.

I walk out and look at my car it's clean maybe Luyanda washed it for me, I get in and drive to the mall doing some shopping then go eat alone, I see Lethu with his wife and Phume walking in I continue to eat and pretend I am not seeing them at all even though my heart hurts right now. Our eyes lock he whispers to his wife then they walk out I look at my food and I am not hungry anymore I sigh and pay walking out and bump into him and Phume coming from the bathroom and I want to curse this day for bumping into them like this.

Me; "Sorry."

Phume stares at me like she is trying to figure out if she knows me, Lethu pulls her close to him.

Me: "Hi."

She smiles, I stretch my hand to shake her hand I smile as I touch her small hand then look at Lethu he is looking at me.

Me: "Bye."

I turn and walk away, I won't be bringing problems into his life so I am keeping my distance hopefully I will get over him but I don't know how with Phume, she is my daughter but I have to try and carry on living.

I feel a tap on my back I turn it's Phume handing me a teddy bear she must have remembered me from day care that day, I look at Lethu he is standing a distance away from us, I look at the teddy smiling then hand it back to her she takes it and runs off back to her dad then I watch them walking away at least Lethu didn't cause a scene trying to stop her from coming to me.

I continue walking around and a guy stands next to me I look at him.

"Hi." I nod.

"Are you alone." I just move to another isle, I have never been interested in dating anyone after Lethu so I don't even know how to react when a guy approaches me.

I finally go to my car and notice Lethu's car is next to mine I quickly go to my car and the guy I saw inside rush to me and ask for my number I shake my head and get in my car as Lethu and his little family walk out of the mall I drive out fast driving home from now on I will try to make sure our paths don't cross ever though my heart is with that little girl but I have to stick to my decision I took three years ago and stay out of her life she has a mother now she doesn't need me at all, she never did she has everything she needs and more.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 2

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"How do you feel?" I look up blinking the tears away I don't know how to answer that question.

"How do you feel?" He ask again tapping his pen on his writing board. That is my psychologist that I stopped seeing about six months ago but now I can see I need this or I will be admitted to the hospital again which will hurt my family. The past few weeks I have been buying razors and stocking them in my bathroom, I have a history of cutting myself, one day it even left me unconscious but luckily Ntombi found me in time and took me to the hospital so whenever I get those suicidal thoughts I see my psychologist because I don't want to hurt the people that cares for me anymore.

Me: "I wish I can talk so Lethu can hear it in words how sorry I am for what I did three years ago."

Him: You think a voice would make a difference?

I shrug my shoulders.

Me: "I heard words can be powerful so I don't know."

He nods and place everything down rubbing his hands together.

Him: Have you thought of writing him a letter?

Me: "No, you think it could work?"

Him: Well I don't know Lethu personally so I wouldn't know but a letter might help."

I nod a little.

I stay for another fifteen minutes listening to him talk, the man can talk and have very funny stories to tell.

I go home and get in bed after taking my diary and a pen and start writing.

"I know the pain I put you through when I rejected our daughter while you were so happy about her, no amount of apologies can make what I did okay I was just in a bad space but I should have tried harder to be okay for

her sake and raise her but I failed I'm sorry
Lethu I live with a regret every single day I
hope one day you will forgive me.

Niko."

I sigh and put it in the envelope.

The next day I wake up early and drive to his school, he is a qualified teacher with all his brothers because they wanted to carry on their legacy themselves, so the schools Nkanyezi built they are teachers there. I drop off the letter in his office, the security allowed me to enter the premises then I drive to campus which I have been neglecting for a while now.

My day go on smoothly then later I go back home and rush to my room as my phone vibrates in my pocket I take it out and my heart beats faster as I read the text from Lethu I didn't even have his number and it reads "Meet me at the park 5 minutes from now." I sit down I am scared on what he might do to me, maybe that letter pissed him off. I get up

and drive to the park I see his car is already parked my phone vibrates again it's him "Come to my car." I breathe out and slowly step out of my car going to his. I get in the passenger seat and look at him nervously as his left hand is on the steering wheel you can't miss the wedding ring there it's beautiful.

Lethu: Hi.

I nod.

Lethu: I got your letter.

I don't know what to say because I didn't think he would reply let alone ask to see me.

Lethu: Don't ever do that again.

I look at him.

Lethu: Don't send me letters, texts or whatever, we are not friends.

Me: " I understand, I'm sorry I didn't mean to upset you."

He nods.

Lethu: "I heard you started seeing your psychologist again, have you started getting crazy again?"

I find that very offensive so I just open the door and step out of his car going to mine then drive away. I drive for almost 20 minutes not stopping I keep wiping my tears , I park on the side and cry, so he thinks I am crazy now but it was okay back when he was still with me.

I feel myself being dragged out of the car I look around and notice that I am in the middle of nowhere there is sugarcane all around this area and a black car behind mine and three guys are now standing in front of me.

"Princess kaMageba" one of them says with a smirk on his face.

Me: "Please don't hurt me."

"This will be easy, she can't call for help." He says again my head starts spinning as those are the same words my mother said when she

allowed that man to have his way with me while I was just 8 years old.

I stumble back as I feel like I am having trouble breathing my vision becomes blur I feel quick movements in front of me I blink a few times I can see Lethu is here, I just collapse on the ground.

I open my eyes I am still on the ground I quickly sit up and look around Lethu is sitting next to me unbothered just staring at me, I get up and go to my car but a hand pull me.

Lethu: You are not going to say thanks?

I stare at him blankly.

Lethu: For saving your ass! Those guys were gonna hurt you what were you thinking stopping at this kind of place.

Me: "I wasn't thinking, i'm crazy remember?"

Lethu: Get over yourself, you want everyone to feel sorry for you well not me baby I'm done with that shit.

Me: "Ok."

I open my car and turn to look at him.

Me: "I see it now."

Lethu: "See what?"

Me: "You never loved or cared about me Lethu, you just wanted to sleep with me that is why you rushed us to do it and when I said I am not ready to have a baby you were so quick to give up on me because you got what you wanted, Sex! That's it right? I was your experiment!"

I don't wait for him to answer I just get in my car and make a U-turn driving back home, I am done begging him he can go to hell right now I will start living for myself.

I wake up in the morning and tell myself that I am going to see Phume at daycare I don't care what Lethu might do anymore.

I walk in and ask to help with the kids again and they gladly allow me I stay with the kids from morning till late but I spent most of my

time with Phume who doesn't interact much with others she just play with her teddy she remind me of myself when I was still a kid.

She get up and walk to the door and her parents are here I just get up and pass them by the door I don't even look Lethu's way, I get in my car and drive home and it feels good not to care anymore, I take a bath then go to my room but stop on my tracks covering my boobs as I see Lethu sitting comfortable on my bed, I turn going back to the bathroom and wrap a towel around my body I was just in a panty. I go back to him and stare at him.

Me: "Why are you here?"

Lethu: Didn't I tell you to stay away from my daughter?

Me: "You did but you called me crazy and I will show you crazy."

He raise his eyebrow?

Lethu: You will?

I nod, he get up and step closer to me I stand still acting brave but I am scared. He stands in front of me I am still staring at him.

Lethu: You know I can send you back to that loony bin right?

I blink, when did he become so insensitive.

Lethu: You miss your home so bad huh?

He grab the back of my neck and his face is an inch away from mine I am shaking.

I am stunned when I feel his lips on mine and he push me to bed and stand in front of me.

Lethu: You want me Tinyiko you can't even help it.

Next thing we are both naked he is on top of me all sweaty he is moving so fast I don't know when was the last time I felt like this and I don't want the feeling to end, he lock our hands above my head looking down at me, for a moment I see Lethu that I fell in love with in there.

He finally cums then get off me without saying a word and wear his clothes, I sit up and look at him.

Me: "Lethu what does all this mean?"

Lethu: What's this? What are you talking about?

Me: "I mean what we just did."

Lethu: It's all in your head, me and you will never be sweetheart I am married.

He says showing me his ring.

Me: "Lethu what were you doing with me?"

Lethu: I gave you what you wanted now stay away from me and my daughter.

Me: "What I wanted?"

Lethu: Yeah my attention, you got it but I have a wife and kid at home so bye.

He takes his keys and walk out I feel anger rising from the pit of my stomach straight to my head, I get up and start trashing the entire room then go to the bathroom I open the

drawer and take all the razors in there, how can I allow Lethu to use me like that!?

I take the pills and razors and sit in my bed I drink all the pills and start cutting my left wrist, deep cuts I am so angry that I don't feel any pain I am just numb I cut my right wrist and slowly let go of the razor as I feel dizzy then slowly lay in bed, I feel drowsy.

I wake up and see dad next to me I am in a white room my stomach hurts.

I move alerting dad who is staring into space that I am awake, he quickly get up and look at me.

Mageba: "Hey should I call the doctor for you?"

I shake my head.

Mageba: Why would you do this again Niko, why?

I feel tired I don't think I can even raise my hands up.

Mageba: Luyanda found you naked with wrist cuts and you were having a seizure, why did you overdose?

Me: "I'm tired of living."

He wipes his face.

Mageba: I am failing, God knows I tried Tinyiko.

I look at him.

Mageba: They will keep you here and when you get out you can go to that Cape Town you always wanted to run off to.

I hold the sheets tight.

Mageba: Bye, I love you but I can't watch you kill yourself in my house so after this you will decide if you really want to live or die but you are not allowed in my house ever again.

I feel a lump in my throat..I slowly raise my hands up.

Me: "You don't mean that dad."

He get up and walk out, everyone is tired of me I guess.

This is exactly what Lethu wanted and I gave in to him, he did tell me he will send me back here and now here I am in a "loony bin" again.

Two months later no one in my family has visited me in here I just go for my therapy classes then go to bed. Today a doctor told me I can go home so I am sitting in my bed I don't even know who to call. A door opens Ntombi walk in I am happy to see her so I jump to hug her but she doesn't hug me back I sit in bed looking at her.

Ntombi: I can with your stuff.

Me: "Thank you."

Ntombi: "Your flight leaves tonight and accomodation is paid up."

I nod.

Me: "Thank you guys for everything you did for me."

She nods and give me all my documents in an envelope I get up and follow her I can see my luggage at the reception it's like they took all my stuff I guess they really don't want me here anymore. I walk out and find Ntombi crying on Sage's arms then go to their car while Sage comes to me, he smiles and open his arms for me I hug him.

Sage: "You gonna be okay?"

Me: "I don't know."

Sage: "I know you will, you have been through a lot and fought to be where you are today?"

Me: "you mean in here?"

I say smiling he shakes his head returning the smile.

Sage: "come on."

He laughs and we hug again.

Me: "Tell her I love her."

Sage: "I will."

He go to his car and drive off, I go back inside and send a text to Lethu.

Me: " Thank you for what you did it finally made me let go of all the feelings I had for you now all I feel is hate, have a nice life.

Later I get a cab and it takes me to the airport, no one came to say goodbye I guess this is it, I am on my own now.

When I get to Cape Town I get a car to take me to the written address on the papers Ntombi gave me. I walk in at the apartment and it's fully furnished very beautiful I am grateful for this I send a text to dad.

Me: "Mageba I am sorry for disappointing you, thank you for not giving up on me for all these years you have been a great father to me thank you so much I am in Cape Town now and I like my new place."

I go to my bedroom and sleep without taking off my clothes, maybe this is a new start that I need, away from Lethu and everything that

keeps pulling me back making me end up in a mental institution but where do I start now?

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 3

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LETHU

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I have been having weird dreams of my daughter crying and I can't seem to find where she is all I hear is her screams now I just woke up to the same dream, I sit up and look at the time it's just after one o'clock in the morning, I look at my wife she is deep in sleep, she is so pretty I kiss her cheek and get off bed going to

the kitchen I find dad Ntsika there standing in the centre of the room like he is thinking.

Me: Dad.

He slowly look at me.

Me: Is everything okay?

Ntsika: You tell me.

I look at him confused.

Me: What do you mean?

Ntsika: I have been having dreams of a baby girl crying.

Me: I have been having the same dreams as well any idea what they might mean?

He chuckles.

Ntsika: Did you finally find out who took Phume from school that day she went missing?

Me: No I am still working on that.

Ntsika: Work harder you might have pissed off someone out there.

Me: I still think Tinyiko did that so..

Ntsika: You are a fool.

Me: Dad..

Ntsika: I don't like fools Lethukuthula, find out who took Phume from school or they will strike again while you blame the poor girl who left home because of you!

Me: Me, what did I do?

Ntsika: I'm old boy and if you keep acting clueless on me I will punch your face.

He says and push me out of his way going to his bedroom, I sigh and drink some water going back to my room.

The next day my wife take Phume to day care while I go to school where I teach. My day go on as normal but before lunch my phone keeps beeping I take it and notice that my wife has been calling me, I call her back.

Me: my love.

Buhle: I just received a call from daycare I am driving there now.

Me: What's going on?

Buhle: Someone gave the security some lunchbox saying it's for Phume but when he opened it, it had rotten food.

Me: What!?

I say taking my keys rushing out to my car.

She drops the call as I drive like a crazy man to the centre and rush inside. I get there and find Phume with Buhle already.

Me: I need to talk to the security now.

Buhle: They are coming.

I wait for a while and the security and two teachers come to us.

Me: Hey man did you see the person who did this?

He shakes his head.

Security: I was walking around the school and when I went back there was a note and a lunchbox.

He gives it to me a note is written "for the precious Phumelele from me" that's it nothing else, I open the lunch box and quickly close it because of the bad smell.

Me: I think my daughter should take time off a bit until I find out who is doing this.

They nod I take my daughter and go home.

Nobuhle and I are in our room I am still stressed about what they sent to my little girl earlier today.

Buhle: Lethu..

Me: Yeah.

Buhle: You think that crazy girl would go this far?

I don't reply, of course Tinyiko is still on the top of my list of suspects. I get up and kiss her cheek.

Me: I will be back soon.

I say walking out and go to Mageba's house, I find them sitting in the lounge watching TV.

Me: King and Queen.

I bow they just nod, I sit down.

Nombuso: Why are you here Lethu?

She is so cold.

Me: Where is Tinyiko?

They both chuckle.

Mageba: Far away from you, that's what you wanted right?

Me: if she keeps harassing my daughter we gonna have a problem.

Mageba swiftly get up and pin me on the couch, his grip is too tight around my neck.

Mageba: My daughter left home because of you and you come here and accuse her of shit!?! We had to let her go so she can maybe have a normal life away from you! She is all alone and you come here and talk shit.

He let go of my neck I gasp for air but he punch my jaw hard I taste blood.

Mageba: Let this be the last time you step foot in my house you hear me!?! Or I will not be responsible for what will happen to you next!

He wipe his face with his arm and walk away cussing, I have never seen him so angry in my life and I have known him my whole life.

Nombuso: Get out Lethu and never step foot in my house again.

She walk away as well, I don't know why they can't see that Tinyiko is crazy and she is capable of doing anything, a person who rejects her daughter at birth is capable of killing a soul that's what I believe.

I slowly make my way back home, my jaw is broken, I get some ice pack and rub it on my jaw.

Nadia walk in as I am resting my head on the couch she roughly pull me up and punch me on the same jaw Mageba punched earlier I groan in pain.

Nadia: I am calling dad so he will sort you out, you have been disrespecting Mageba and his family for too long it's enough now.

She says walking away, I sit down and prepare myself for the beating of my life, I might be married but grandpa still beat the crap out of me even my father's and Nadia too.

Later we eat dinner and the door opens everyone seems happy to see grandpa but not me, he smile and shoulder hug his kids, he looks good with his black beard that has grey hair here and there, he is getting old. My siblings greet him as well I get up and go to him, he stares at me then point outside with his head I walk out first. Once we are out he punch my stomach hard I groan going on my knees.

Me: Shit..

Luyolo: Get up!

I slowly get up only to get another punch and go back to my knees again.

Luyolo: I said get up!

I get up and step back from him, he grab a chair from the veranda and sit down.

Luyolo: Have you ever heard an old man crying because of the kids he practically raised?

I shake my head.

Luyolo: That was Mageba today when he called me telling me that my family should stay away from his family.

Me: Grandpa..

Luyolo: Don't fucken call me Lethu! His daughter is far away from him because he was afraid if she stays here close to YOU she will end up dead! And you keep reminding him by going there talking shit about his daughter!

He is shouting, he is really angry.

Luyolo: Mageba is like a brother to me and I won't lose that because of a piece of shit like you!

Me: I'm sorry.

Luyolo: Tinyiko is gone Lethu she is all alone, let her be, why do you want to keep hurting her?

Me: I hate her!

I shout, he get up I quickly step back.

Me: I'm sorry but I hate her so much.

Luyolo: Why so much Lethu? She gave you Phumelele it's not like she killed her.

Me: I wanted us to do it together, to raise our daughter together but she was so selfish thinking about only her crazy self. i hate what she did.

He sighs and sit down again.

Luyolo: Leave her alone Lethu it's enough now.

Me: If she is far away from here then I am happy.

Luyolo: But that means you have been barking at a wrong tree, Phume's life is still in danger and it's not Tinyiko.

Me: I will find out who it is.

Luyolo: I hope you do soon and stop disrespecting Mageba he is going through a lot, they made Tinyiko believe they have given up on her so if you keep doing this Mageba will kill you and I won't stop him.

Me: I'm sorry grandpa I will apologize to the king.

Luyolo: No let it go or dare try to step foot in his yard and bare the consequences and trust me they won't be nice.

I nod and we walk in, I go to my brothers at the back and sit with them, we talk about life in general but Sbonga is too quiet.

Me: Sbonga are you okay?

He look my way and I feel like smiling, you know when someone looks like you as if you made them it makes me so proud, I know I sound crazy but it's just how I feel when I look at my brothers.

Me: What's wrong brother?

Sbonga: I am just sad that Tinyiko chose you.

We all stare at him.

Me: Chose me? Was there any competition?

He chuckles and get up but I stand in front of him stopping him, he is the quiet one from all three of us and gets angry very quickly.

Me: You were eyeing Tinyiko too?

Sbonga: So what if I was?

I look at Lethokuhle but he just look away and so is Sbani.

Me: You wanted Tinyiko Sbonga! While she was with me?

Sbonga: I would have treated her way better than you did bastard.

I chuckle in disbelief.

Me: Sbonga!

Sbonga: Get out of my way Lethu or I will make you.

He says and push me back walking away, I am still in disbelief, I shake my head and follow him but Lethokuhle pull my hand.

Letho: Don't..

Me:No I want him to repeat what he said to me.

I walk up to him and find him listening to music I roughly pull out his headsets he get up and we stare at each other right now I am too angry to be amused by how much we look alike.

Me: You want the mother of my child Boh?

He laughs a little.

Sbonga: Mother of your child my black ass!

I knock him with a punch but he laughs once again.

Sbonga: I am sure she ask herself how she ended up with you.

Me: Keep talking shit Sbonga, I will slice off your throat in your sleep.

Sbonga: How did we even share a womb with a bastard like you.

A fight break out, we are throwing punches at each other now and our brothers are trying to push us apart I feel a hand grabbing me and it's dad Nkanyezi, Nadia is holding Sbonga.

Ntsika: What the fuck are you doing!?

Me: He started it!

He is still laughing if I didn't know better I would say he is on drugs, Sbonga is not like this.

Nadia: Sbonga what is going on?

Sbonga: I was just telling the bastard the truth but guess it hit the nerve.

Nadia: Can someone tell me what the hell is going on? What truth?

Me: He wants Tinyiko and looks like he wanted her even when she was still with me.

Nadia: You are fighting your brother because of Niko?

Me: She is the mother of my child! How would you feel if Langa tells you that Pamella should have chosen him?

She look at Sbonga who is still very much amused I want to punch his face.

Nadia: Sbonga don't do that man.

Sbonga: Do what!?! I was just saying because, I mean Tinyiko is hot and we were all smitten by her even these two were but they are too afraid to say it, well I'm not I just wish I acted sooner than this crap.

I try to get closer to him but a grip on my arm stop me.

Nadia: Boh are you on drugs?

Sbonga: Of course not.

Ntsika: Then what is wrong with you?

Sbonga: I was just telling it like it is King! He played with that girl's heart.

Me: He rejected my daughter! You were all there! You saw it!

My voice is shaky as I shout I can't believe my brother is saying this to me!

Me: Fuck you Sbonga go to that Tinyiko of yours you are crazy like her!

Sbonga: See what I mean? You knew she had a problem when we were still kids but now you turned it into a joke, we knew she was vulnerable but after you slept with her and she started having problems, you acted like you didn't know, you say she neglected Phumelele but you neglected her first.

I look at him, the amused face is now gone, he is angry.

I just walk away going to Phume's room watching her sleeping calms me down.

Around ten o'clock I go to Sbonga's room and find him busy on his phone.

Sbonga: Came to fight me again?

He says not looking at me, we do sense each other's presence, he can tell if it's me or Letho

who just entered the room, say we feel each other's auras.

Me: Why would you say things like that Sbonga?

Sbonga: I just told you the truth brother.

Me: You want Niko?

He doesn't reply.

Me: But we can't be with the same girl, she is Phume's mother for goodness sake, you can't..

Sbonga: I won't act on it I was just putting it out there.

Me: Why? How do you think I feel knowing that you were lusting over my woman all along.

Sbonga: it wasn't lust..

I sigh and sit on his bed.

Me: Tell me you are joking Sbonga, you are joking right?

Sbonga: Why is Nobuhle here Lethu?

I look at him confused.

Me: She is my wife.

He chuckles and sleep in bed facing up.

Sbonga: Get out of my room Lethukuthula.

I slowly get up and go to my room, I have never been so disappointed and sad in my life, Sbonga is hurting me, my blood brother.

Buhle: Are you okay?

Me: Yeah.

Buhle: You were fighting with your brother, why?

Me: It's nothing.

I get in bed and cover my head, I can't sleep I keep thinking that maybe Sbonga slept with Niko and maybe Phume is not mine but my brother's baby, I create a lot of scenarios in my head that I end up taking my phone and walk out. I try to call Tinyiko but her number is not going through, I feel like I am losing my mind, I sit on the veranda as I feel tears burning my

eyes I don't know why this got me so worked up but who wouldn't learning that your brother has been into your girl.

I finally go back inside and sleep next to my wife who snuggle closer to me, I hold her but my mind is not here anymore, I don't know where it is because it keeps making up stories of its own.

I wake up early in the morning and go check on my daughter and I can't believe that my mind suspected that she's not mine, I mean I know Tinyiko only loves me and she only slept with me and I feel bad for thinking she would sleep with my brother.

I go back to my room and find my wife holding a pregnancy test staring at it.

Me: Hi.

She nods, I sit down and look at her.

Buhle: It's negative again!

She says frustrated.

Me: Uhm are we trying for a baby?

She stares at me like I killed her pet.

Buhle: How can you ask me that!?! I am your wife I am supposed to give you babies not "try" for them!

She shouts.

Me: I'm sorry I guess that came out wrong.

Buhle: Aaaah!

She screams going to the bathroom, I go for breakfast and find Sbonga there I sit and look down.

Sbonga: Hi.

I ignore him, he chuckles pissing me off but I won't say anything not today, everyone comes to eat breakfast.

Ntsika: Sanibonani mafighters.(Greetings fighters)

He says laughing I look away.

Ntsika: It's a good day cheer up.

He is laughing so hard and I can't laugh I am still too sad to laugh.

We finish eating breakfast and I go sit alone at the back just thinking, I look up when I see Sbonga holding two cans of cold drink then he hand me one I take it, he sit next to me.

Sbonga: I'm sorry.

Me: It's fine, you were putting it out there right?

I say with a chuckle.

Sbonga: I didn't mean to say all that it's just that..

He sighs.

Sbonga: She left home Lethu and it's all because of you.

Me: I..

Sbonga: I know you did something to send her to the hospital and that made me a bit angry at you, she doesn't deserve all this Lethu, you seemed to understand her way better than all

of us but everything changed so suddenly making believe that you used her for sex.

Me: No...I love..I loved her Sbonga, you know that.

Sbonga: I thought you did but the way you quickly gave up on her after Phume was born makes me doubt all of that.

I look down.

Sbonga: But she loved you, she still does I know.

He says sounding so sad I guess he really has feelings for her.

Sbonga: I just hope she finds love wherever she is and be genuinely happy.

He says and get up walking away, I have never seen my brother like this he really cares about Tinyiko and it looks deeper than I thought.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 4

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It has been the hardest three months of my life without my family, I'm all alone. I have tried calling dad but he didn't pick up or returned any of my calls so I decided to just stop so I haven't been talking to any of them but I still receive money every month for my needs here.

So today I am going for my first check up after finding out I am pregnant two weeks ago when I fainted at a grocery store and one lady was kind enough to take me to a doctor because I even had a lump in my head, it was a bad fall I just fell dizzy and next thing I was out, that's when a doctor told me I am two months and a few weeks pregnant, I was shocked that he had to do some breathing

exercises with me to calm me down. I don't want to lie the first thing that came into mind when a doctor said the word "pregnant" was abortion but when I went back to my place I thought long and hard about it, I don't want to fail yet another baby, I already failed Phumelele in a way that she doesn't even know me so I am keeping this baby for myself and Lethu can go to hell, I will do it by myself since he hates me so much already I am sure he would even deny this baby because it would reveal that he cheated on his wife so my baby and I will stay away from them, all of them.

I lock my flat and take a cab to a doctor, he does some scans to check on the baby and hearing what he says is a heartbeat brings tears in my heart, I want to be okay for this baby and myself so bad and I am gonna fight for the both of us. Later I take myself out for dinner, I sit at the restaurant and order, while I wait I log in my Facebook account and I find

two messages I open it and they are from Sbonga Lethu's brother and it reads "Hey Niko, how are you holding up" and the second one reads "Please give me your new number I just want to check if you're okay" I delete the messages and block him, I want nothing that connects me to Lethu he is the reason I am without a family far away from home, the people I love and call family, the people who took me in when I had no one, he took all of that away from me.

I am brought back by a waitress placing my food in front of me, I thank her, she seems to understand me because when I ordered I pointed everything I want and she didn't seem to judge me or raise an eyebrow on why I am not talking which most people who meet me for the first do. I eat my food then pay making my way out after requesting for a cab to take me back home. I get there and shower then go to bed, my phone keeps beeping with Facebook notification I check it and it's

Sbonga again with another account, I frown what does he want, "Why did you block me Niko? I promise I mean no harm I just want to check on you." I sigh and tell him to give me his details so we can Skype, he didn't do anything to me so it's unfair to treat him like an enemy, him and his other brothers have been my friends since we were young. I Skype him and as soon as he show up he blinks and wipe his face, I smile a little as he stares at me.

Me: "Hi Boh."

He doesn't reply he looks so sad.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He wipe his face again then nod.

Sbonga: " Are you okay there?"

I smile.

Me: "I'm fine."

Sbonga: "Don't lie to me."

I just maintain the smile but I am trying to hard to blink the tears away which is an epic fail

because they just roll down my cheeks, I keep wiping them as he look straight in my eyes, he does have a stare, they all do.

Me: "give me a minute."

I say after calming down then get up going to the bathroom to wash my face then go back to the room and place the laptop on my lap sitting in bed.

Sbonga: "I'm sorry."

Me: "Why? You didn't do anything wrong."

Sbonga: "I just hate seeing you cry."

Me: "I'm a big girl, I am gonna be fine."

He nods.

Sbonga: So you're in Cape Town?

Me: "Yes."

He nods again.

Me: "How is Phume?"

Sbonga: "She's okay."

Me: "Ok."

He doesn't say anything for a while just looking at me.

Me: "I have to go."

Sbonga: Niko..

I look at him.

Sbonga: "Take care of yourself."

Me: "I will."

Sbonga: "Be happy."

I nod looking down then back at him.

Me: "Tell Sbani and Letho I said hi."

Sbonga: What about Lethu?

I stare at him.

Sbonga: Sorry, Uhm I will tell them, bye Niko.

Me: "Bye."

I close my laptop and sleep facing up brushing my tummy, at least someone cares from back home, I miss Ntombi and Monde so much, Shaka, Luyanda and Richard too but what can I do, they never call.

I wake up hungry in the middle of the night and eat, that's what I love about living alone, you eat whenever you feel hungry, I finish then go back to bed.

In the morning my laptop flashes I rush to it and it's Sbonga, I don't think I mind him contacting me because he gives me a feeling of home which I miss so much, I sit down and answer his call he shows up on the screen, these boys look good, he smile revealing his U-shaped silver on his teeth he got when we were fifteen because he fought and had to fill it up.

Sbonga: "Morning."

Me: 'Hey, you really miss me.'

He laughs.

Sbonga: I do, a lot I just wish you didn't have to go.

Me: "It's better I stay away, I have hurt a lot of people."

Sbonga: "You have been through a lot Niko the least all of us would have done is be there for you not judge you."

Me: "Well I'm okay thank you for caring."

Sbonga: "I will always care."

I smile, he is sweet.

Sbonga: "So what's happening in your life right now, met any friends? Boyfriend anything new?"

I look down as I remember that someone is growing inside my tummy but I can't share that with him, he will tell his brother and I don't want that.

Sbonga: Sniko you know you can tell me anything right?

Sniko that's the name dad calls me with, he named me, that's where Niko comes from.

Me: "I have to go, bye."

Sbonga: "You are hiding something."

Me: "Leave me alone Sbonga, I appreciate that you care but I think you should stop calling me you are Lethu's brother and I can't trust you."

He raise his eyebrow.

Sbonga: Oh okay cool, bye.

The screen goes blank, he is like that when he is disappointed he won't beg but just give you exactly what you want. I get up and decide to look for available job posts because I will only go back to school next year so I want to do something for now. I send my CV to some restaurants.

Later I feel bad for what I said to Sbonga so I send him a text that he should call me and he does.

Sbonga: Niko.

Me: "I'm sorry for what I said earlier".

He nods.

Sbonga: "It's fine".

He look behind him and he look at me.

Sbonga: "You want to say hi to Phume?"

I quickly nod as he put her on his lap, I can't help but smile as she waves at me.

Me: "Hi, how are you?"

Sbonga tells her what I said and she smile.

Phume: Ngiyaphila.(I'm fine.)

I quickly wipe my tears as she moves away from Sbonga.

Me: "Thank you for allowing me to say hi."

He nods.

Sbonga: "It's okay".

He becomes serious.

Sbonga: "Can I come see you?"

Me: "What? Where?"

Sbonga: "Never mind, forget I said anything."

I slowly nod, why would he want to come to Cape town to see me, and I don't want him to know I'm pregnant, I know he is a good friend but he is also Lethu's brother at the end of the

day he is loyal to him so he might tell him about it and they will take my baby away because to Lethu I am "crazy".

The week ends with Sbonga not contacting me at all and I chose to ignore that because I mean even my family don't contact me so why would I expect him to also I will have work to keep me busy these days so I don't have to sit all day thinking about people back home I am fine on my own.

I have started working at a restaurant as a waitress and I believe I am doing great and I am getting good tips.

I just knocked off and I am waiting for a cab to take me home and my phone vibrates I take it out and I see a message from dad I am shocked, 4 months and he is only contacting me now, his message reads "I am coming to see you." This makes me nervous because he will see I am pregnant again and he will be disappointed again but then again this is a man

who just gave up on me I don't know why he is coming here.

I go to bed after checking what I will wear that will hide the little baby bump I have when dad gets here probably in the morning I don't know.

The next day around 10 in the morning I see my door opening I look at the door it's dad and I am just in my pyjamas, I fight the urge to jump on him hugging him, I don't know why he is here maybe he just want to stop giving me money and paying for the flat. I get up and look at him as he opens his arms I slowly walk up to him and hug him tight crying oh how I missed him, he brush my back until I'm calm then we sit down.

Mageba: "I'm sorry for sending you away".

Me: "It's okay, I was bringing trouble in your life anyway".

He shakes his head.

Mageba: "I was scared that one day you will succeed in killing yourself I had to send you away from Lethu because I believe he has everything to do with your last attempted suicide."

Me: "So you care about me?"

Mageba: "You are my daughter of course I care I just wanted you to settle here and get used to this place without thinking of going back home that's why I told everyone not to contact you".

I nod, he stares at me and I move uncomfortable, he saw it I know.

Mageba: "You found a boyfriend here?"

I shake my head.

Mageba: " So it's Lethu again?"

I nod, I can see him sigh.

Me: " I'm sorry dad, I will raise this baby here by myself please don't tell them".

Mageba: " Are you coping this time or I should find a therapist this side".

Me: " I am still fine thank you".

He nods .

Mageba: " The baby will want to go home, you know this".

I know Gumede kids always want home but I just hope this one understands the situation.

Me: "Please don't tell them yet".

Mageba: "Ok."

Me: "Thank you for coming to see me".

He ask a lot of questions, if I'm okay with staying here and he promise to visit with my family from time to time and I am happy to know that they still care I thought I was on my own. I fix his room that he will use then he take me out to eat and shop for a lot of clothes.

The next day I accompany him to the airport and cry when he has to go but he promise that

they will contact me more now and also come here, I go back to my place and I feel so sad and alone now I have been crying since dad left, I skype Sbonga he shows up.

Sbonga: "What's wrong? you've been crying".

Me: "Dad was here to see me and I am sad he had to go."

Sbonga: "oh I'm sorry."

We talk about for a while then I see Lethu next to him then he looks at me next thing I see quick movements it's like they are fighting but I can't see clearly then I can't see anything I guess the call dropped or something.

I stay the whole day wondering if they are okay, I am anxious I don't want them to fight all just because Sbonga contacted me.

I see my phone lights up I check it's a message from Sbonga "Lethu smashed my laptop on the wall so I can't call you for a while I will just send texts."

Me: "Are you guys okay, were you fighting?"

I send a text back.

Sbonga: "Yeah just a few punches I'm fine I don't know about him though".

Me: "If it's about you being in contact with me then you should stop I don't want you guys fighting because of me" .

Sbonga: "I will be sending you texts and once he buys my laptop I will Skype you."

I sigh and sleep in my bed brushing my tummy, I just wish I had a soft life like most rich kids do, I mean I get any money I want from dad I should be worried about shopping and vacations but no, I am out here pregnant and a father of the baby hates my guts and I can't go home because my family is worried I might kill myself because of the same guy I am crazy in love with but wants nothing to do with me, my life is a mess.

Today I found out that I am having a baby girl and I just turned five months I never thought I would be this happy about carrying someone

in my womb I just can't wait to hold her and Sbonga has been begging me to allow him to come this side and I don't want that especially after he fought with his brother and they are not on good terms because of me. I just got off a cab I stop on my tracks as I see someone standing on my doorstep, my eyes are all out and so are his as he stares at my tummy I want to hide but it's too late. We stand there not moving or saying anything for almost two minutes he slowly comes closer to where I am standing and hold my shoulders.

Sbonga: Breathe.

I let out a deep breath I have been holding it in for a while.

Sbonga: Niko..

I shake my head and push him away from me and go unlock my door walking in and drink some water I can feel him behind me I turn to face him, he is looking down then slowly look at me, he seems like he wants to cry..

Me: "Why are you here?"

Sbonga: You are pregnant? You moved on?

I nod.

Me: "And the father of my baby will be here soon so you have to leave."

He nods

Me: "How did you find this place Sbonga?"

Sbonga: Hacked your father's phone.

I want to smile, he was always good with computers and phones he used to visit uncle Carl most of his time just to learn more about hacking and a lot of computer things.

Me: "You have to go".

Sbonga: "Ok, I'm glad you're okay"

He turns and walk out the door, I sit down and breathe so he came here just to see me? I rush out and hold him arm as he is on the phone.

Me: "You can come in"

Sbonga: "What about the father of your baby?"

Me: "I will tell him not to come".

We walk in I offer him juice while we sit, he looks uncomfortable.

Sbonga: You are lying.

He says so suddenly.

Me: "About what?"

Sbonga: "Lethu is the father".

I panic immediately

Me: "Please don't tell him, I want to raise this baby, he will take her away."

He shakes his head.

Me: "Please".

Sbonga: A baby will need to go home once she is born Tinyiko.

Me: " Because you guys want to control everything that's how all of you are".

I am angry now.

Sbonga: I won't tell Lethu but I am telling you, you will need to take her home once she is born.

He get up.

Sbonga: Coming here was a mistake, bye Niko, I will take a flight back home tomorrow.

He says and walk out I just sit there not moving, I will lose a chance to raise this baby again, I know the last time it was my choice but how I want to do it but I know it won't happen.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 5

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LETHU

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I can't believe my brother has been contacting Tinyiko behind my back, I feel betrayed I think something is going on between them and that doesn't sit well with me. Yesterday I caught them talking on Skype and I lost it, we fought and I smashed his laptop, so I haven't seen him since then. It's the weekend and Buhle and Phume went out so I am in my room sleeping in bed facing up, my door swings open and I feel water on my whole body I gasp sitting up wiping my face, the water is cold.

Sbonga: You fucken broke my laptop and now my phone?

Yes this morning I saw his phone in the kitchen and smashed it too on the floor, I hate that he is in contact with Tinyiko, now that I know he has feelings for her I hate that he talks to her, what are they talking about anyway!?

I look at him he has a 2 litre bucket in his hand looking so angry his face is pink.

Me: Wenzani Sbonga..(What are you doing Sbonga?)

Sbonga: Hey I want my laptop and phone by the end of today if you know what's good for you.

Me: You think I am afraid of you?

I say getting up and I am so wet even my pants.

Sbonga: You should be.

Me: All because of Tinyiko!?! You want us to be enemies because of a crazy girl?

He let go of the bucket and punch me so hard I stumble back holding my cheek.

Me: What's wrong with you? Can't you find any woman out there, fighting me for a girl that loves only me? She will never love again, not you or anyone else, only me Sbongakonke give up you are just hurting yourself.

He clicks his tongue and walk out I change my clothes and the bedding and walk out to find him in his room I want to hurt him he doesn't know me at all I find him putting clothes in a small bag.

Me: You are running away?

He chuckles.

Sbonga: I'm not afraid of you Lethu.

Me: Then where are you going?

He takes his bag and look at me.

Sbonga: You are not my Mom or dad so quit asking me questions.

Me: Don't do that Sbonga, we can't be fighting over a woman.

Sbonga: You are fighting me I am just simply defending myself.

He push me out of the way I sigh and follow him.

Me: Did you tell Landi and Ella you are leaving?

Sbonga: I did now leave me alone.

Me: What's wrong with you? Tinyiko is using some Voodoo from miles away on you huh.

He shakes his head and get in his car driving out.

Later we eat dinner then after I go look for Nadia I find her busy on her phone typing away I sit opposite her.

Me: Landi..

She nods still looking at her phone.

Me: Did Sbonga tell you he is leaving?

She nods.

Me: Where is he going?

She look at me.

Nadia: He didn't tell you?

I shake my head.

Nadia: You guys are still fighting?

Me: He is disrespecting me Landi and I don't like that.

Nadia: You have to sort out your issues I can't have my sons fighting.

Me: He should leave Niko alone.

Nadia: You guys have been friends from a young age you can't expect him to lose that all because you are not with her anymore.

Me: It's not about that Nadia, he is in love with her and that can't be right, you know that.

She nods.

Nadia: I know that Lethu but let it go please I will talk to Sbonga stop fighting okay.

Me: Okay.

Nadia: Ntsika is still having bad dreams about a baby crying.

I sigh.

Me: Me too but nothing has been happening with Phume so maybe whoever it was gave up.

Nadia: Don't let your guard down Lethu you don't know maybe they will strike again when you least expect it.

I nod.

Me: I will be vigilant.

I go to my room and take off my clothes my mind is not here at all, all that is in my mind is that Sbonga and Niko are together probably fucking and that is paralyzing my mind right now.

Buhle: Lethu!

I look at her she has a frown on her face.

Buhle: I have been calling you

Me: Sorry I'm just thinking about work.

Buhle: Oh, Uhm baby I am ovulating we should try for a baby.

Sex is the last thing on my mind right now, she comes to me and kiss my neck I push her lightly.

Me: Not today baby I am tired I think I am coming down with flu.

Buhle: Oh.

She sit in bed and play with her hands looking down.

Me: Look we will have a baby don't rush it, it will happen naturally.

She nods and we get in bed, I keep tossing and turning then decide to just call my brother.

Sbonga: Some of us are sleeping at this time.

Me: Where are you Sbongakonke?

Sbonga: Is your wife boring you Lethu because you've been all over my business lately.

Me: We are brothers.

Sbonga: I am just getting some air.

Me: Ok.

I drop the call, I know he is alone and it's crazy of me to think he is with Niko, I am sure he is around Durban not in Cape Town.

In the morning I see Buhle packing a bag I look at her confused.

Me: What is going on?

She look at me with tears in her eyes.

Me: Babe what's wrong?

Buhle: You were calling Tinyiko's name in your sleep! You are calling that stupid girl's name while I am right next to you!

She is shouting tears flowing, she knows Tinyiko because once there was a story about her being a "Crazy princess" when she was admitted to a psychiatric hospital the first time.

Me: Buhle you said it yourself I was sleeping I have no control over dreams come on.

Buhle: I am going home Lethu.

Me: But you are my wife.

She chuckles.

Buhle: How when I can't even go to the palace, Ntsika said we should wait and not do a traditional wedding why is that!?

Me: You can't call the King by his name Buhle!
Not here and I thought this was about a dream
not a wedding.

We only had a white wedding because King
Ntsika said the ancestors won't allow me to
have a traditional wedding yet so we are
waiting for him to tell us the right time.

Me: Let's talk Buhle just stop packing man.
She sit down and wipe her tears.

Me: I'm sorry I just think I dreamt about
Tinyiko because of this issue about Phumelele.

Buhle: But they haven't sent anything to her
for three months now.

Me: Yeah I know but I still think if it's Niko she
will come back and do it again.

Buhle: Oh so you don't love her?

Me: Of course not, you are here Buhle I love
you not her, you are my wife.

She nods I hug her, I don't know what is going
on with me, when I married Buhle I was so

damn sure I love her but now I don't feel anything for her but maybe it's just this jealousy I have of Niko and Sbonga having feelings for her that is blinding me, I love my wife..I know I love her I just have to stop stressing about Sbonga I know my brother wouldn't do that to me.

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TINYIKO

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I have been sending text messages to Sbonga since morning begging him not to tell Lethu about my pregnancy and he hasn't been replying maybe he is on a flight back to Durban he did say he made a mistake by coming here. I look at the door I see a handle moving I jump to open the door I knew he was going to come and say goodbye well at least I hoped, that's how he used to do back home he would move the door handle to alert me that he is here, so that is like his signature knock. I hug him as soon as he walk in then look at him as he

quickly step back from me, maybe he doesn't like that I hugged him.

Me: "Sorry".

He sit on the couch, I sit opposite him.

Sbonga: I will leave tomorrow morning.

I nod.

Sbonga: And like I said I won't tell Lethu but that baby will force you to tell him.

Me: "Thank you for coming to see me."

Sbonga: Yeah though I wasn't expecting to see you pregnant with my brother's child again, you must really love him to sleep with him while he has a wife.

I look at him.

Me: "I am not proud of that so please don't rub it in".

Sbonga: I didn't mean to make you feel bad, I mean everyone knows you love Lethu.

Me: Loved him.

He smiles a little.

Sbonga: Don't lie.

Me: " I'm not lying".

Sbonga: Ok, so it's another girl huh?

I nod.

Sbonga: Guess that's why you are glowing, you look beautiful.

I smile.

Me: "Thank you".

We stay in silence for a while.

Me: "So Nina knows you are here?"

Sbonga: Ngizokuphoxa.

I smirk looking at him, Nina is a girl that literally asked him out and he bluntly refused but she kept coming back.

Me: "I still don't understand how you would turn down such a hot girl"

Sbonga: It's not always about beauty, it fades at some point, I don't want to go from one girl

to another because there is always a hotter girl so I will just stick to love.

Me: "Love? Who do you love Sbonga? You are afraid of girls Wena."

He laughs.

Sbonga: Fuck off.

I smile.

Me: Please take me out, people don't know us so there is no worry about people taking pictures of us.

He nods and I take him to a restaurant where I work and we order and for the first time I feel a kick on my tummy I smile brushing it I catch Sbonga staring at me.

Sbonga: Is everything okay?

I nod.

Me: First time I feel a kick.

Sbonga: Can I feel it too.

Me: "I don't know if she will move again."

He place his hand on my tummy and the baby starts moving like crazy I smile looking at him, he is also smiling then suddenly I feel his lips on mine I am stunned I push him back and stare at him he look away in shame, I don't know what to say or do at this point.

Sbonga: "I'm sorry please forget about what I just did I didn't mean to, I'm sorry".

He use his shaking hands so fast.

Me: "It's okay I guess you were just caught up in a moment".

He nods and look away again, we eat and now everything is awkward because of him, I won't take that kiss serious I really believe it was a mistake he just got too excited when he felt the baby kick, yes I will go with that.

Later we go back to my place and he can't even look at me, I sit next to him on the couch.

Me: "Stop, I promise it's okay I understand it just happened".

He nods.

Me: "You want to sleep here, you will fetch your stuff at a hotel in the morning".

He nods, I go fix a room for him.

Me: "Done you can go and sleep now."

Sbonga: "Thank you".

He walk away, I go to my room and get in bed feeling my baby's movements means everything to me right now.

In the middle of the night I feel hungry I go to the kitchen and make a sandwich when I turn I freeze letting go of the plate in many hands he catch me before I fall on the floor, I totally forgot I am not alone in the flat so when I saw him standing there I froze in fright. He picks me up and take me to my room I still haven't recovered from shock, he punch me hard at the back of my hand I blink looking at him.

Sbonga: "I didn't mean to scare you, i'm sorry".

I continue to stare at him. He keeps pinching me that's what they used to do when I zoned out.

Sbonga: "Come back".

I nod and breathe in and out for a while then nod again looking at him.

Sbonga: "You're okay now?"

I shake my head.

Me: "I am still hungry".

He smile and stretch out his hand to hold mine.

Sbonga: Let's go I will make another sandwich for you.

We go to the kitchen I watch him as he get busy making sandwich, I always got a sense of comfort whenever I am around them, they are like brothers to me, well except for Lethu of course.

Once he is done I eat then go to bed, he tucks me in laughing.

Me: "I am older than you though".

Sbonga: You don't say!

He says amused I smile, he is crazy.

Sbonga: Sleep Princess.

I smile closing my eyes, I feel his hand on my hair which makes me drowsy I fall asleep.

In the morning I wake up early and make breakfast for us then go wake him up, he sit up and pull me to bed then he brush my tummy, the kicks.

Sbonga: Morning mama.

I nod with a smile.

Sbonga: You look better this time.

Me: "I am just looking forward to raising her but I know that chances are slim close to none".

He sighs.

Sbonga: You can't keep a Gumedede child a secret Niko but I will keep your secret till you are ready to tell Lethu.

Me: "I will never be ready, I hate him".

We go to the kitchen and eat then he take a shower so he won't be late.

Sbonga: So I guess this is goodbye I won't be able to come back I'm already late.

Me: "It's okay, thank you so much for coming, it means a lot to me".

Sbonga: "I will always be there for you".

I hug him but he quickly push me away again.

Sbonga: Uhm I have to go, bye, be good and call me anytime you need a friend ok.

Me: "Ok".

He walk to the door and turn looking at me then slowly come back and hug me this time and for a long time then he walk out, I sit down it's back to being alone again.

Months pass and now I am due any day from now and I am getting scared, I know how much pain one go through when in labour I have been there and I am alone, dad and my whole family asked me to come back so they

can be there for me but I refused I still want to raise this baby I am not ready for Lethu to take her, no.

It's 1 o'clock in the morning and I have been peeing a lot and I have some cramps, they come and go. I get in bed and I feel like the baby is turning and pressing down on my womb I slowly sit up and take my phone sending a text to Sbonga, he has been asking about a baby and he kept his promise on not telling Lethu so I feel like I can trust him.

Me: "I think I am in labour".

I send a text and go to the bathroom, I pee and check the tissue I notice brown discharge I go back to the bedroom and change to a dress my phone vibrates I take it.

Sbonga: "I called an ambulance for you it should be there soon I will take an early flight in the morning, be strong okay I love you".

I breathe as pain hits me on my abdomen I sit down tapping my foot on the floor that was a hard one.

An ambulance comes after 15 minutes, they just opened the door I guess Sbonga explained that I am deaf or how else would they just barge in my flat. I walk to the ambulance, my heart is beating fast I am scared of this whole giving birth process but I have to get through it so I can meet my baby girl.

I change and get in bed, a nurse checks me down there and walk out, I sit alone feeling really sad and depressed, I take my phone and find another text from Sbonga.

Sbonga: "I wish I listened to my instincts when they told me to come that side last week I would be there with you now, I don't think I will sleep I am worried".

Me: "I'm okay".

The pain has gone from bad to worse now and it's not far apart like the last time, now the

pain is there one way and I feel like I can't breathe.

The doctor walk in with nurses and they talk amongst themselves and look at me, I guess they are telling him about my problem because now he speaks while looking straight at me.

Doctor: I will count to three and you will push okay, take a deep breath first..

I breathe and I feel the urge to push he starts counting to three, I start pushing and he tells me to stop, I stop and push once again, and again then I push one last time and I feel a sense of relief, the doctor is holding a baby, he place her on my chest and she is crying I can see, I smile with tears in my eyes, she is finally here. They take her away while I go to the bathroom to clean myself up then go to the ward, they bring my baby and they show me how to breastfeed, never mind the pain this moment right here means so much to me.

In the morning I wake up to bath then feed the baby who seems to like sucking on my breast so much.

I see a door opening and Sbonga walk in, I am happy to see him then I remember his the only one I told I didn't even tell my family. He stops by the door looking at me for a while I smile looking at the baby that is still sucking my boob.

He kiss my cheek then look at the baby.

Sbonga: "How does it feel?"

I smile .

Me: "It feels good, very good"

He takes the baby and sit down next to my bed.

Sbonga: Do you have a name?

I shake my head.

Me: "Mind naming her?"

Sbonga: Me?

I nod.

Sbonga: Awethu Gumede.

I smile nodding.

Me: I like it thank you.

And that's the only name she has, Awethu.

I am at my flat with Sbonga and the baby, we came out of the hospital yesterday and the baby has been crying none stop h has been walking around with her but nothing is working she doesn't even want to feed.

Sbonga looks at me I shake my head.

Sbonga: We have to take her home Niko.

Tears make way out of my eyes.

Me: "There has to be another way, I don't want anything to seperate me from my baby, please".

He sighs and sit down with her, he starts saying his clan names for a long time and he is brushing her head, she finally falls asleep, he put her down I wipe my tears.

Sbonga: We have to book flights for tomorrow.

Me: "I can't go back".

Sbonga: " I will make a plan Niko, I am booking flights for us."

He takes his phone and walk out, I sit in bed chewing my nails, I guess this is it, they will take her from me.

The next day we are now in Durban we took a 7 am flight and Sbonga's car is here. He starts the car I hold my baby to my chest.

I see him taking another route and it's not going to the Gumede house, I want to ask where we are going but I am seated at the backseat and also he seems to be so focused on driving.

He parks the car at the Bnb that is not far from their palace then we walk in and go to the room he booked.

Me: "What's happening? Why are we here?"

He doesn't reply but just walk out, I get in next to my daughter and close my eyes.

I feel a hand shaking me I wake up and it's dark outside, he is holding a crying Awethu.

Sbonga: We have to go.

I nod and follow him out, we get in the car and he drives to the palace, he parks outside and tell me to follow him. He goes straight to the rondavel and open it. We walk in and he tells me to sit on the floor, he kneels infront of me with an incense and burn it. He takes the baby from me and start saying the clan names.

Sbonga: I acknowledge that she is a Gumede and we will make things right when the time comes but for now she needs to be with her mother, please Gumede allow that just for a while I will fix everything soon

He is talking while holding the baby in his arms, he keeps begging then fire starts from the incense but quickly stop, he look at me.

Sbonga: She can stay with you but I don't know how much time they are giving us.

I look at him, I didn't think he would do this for me but I am so grateful for it, he is a good guy.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 6

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After Sbonga introduced my daughter to their ancestors he took us back to a BnB then left without saying anything, I feel bad for making him hide things from his family, his brother but what can I do, I don't want to fail this baby like I did with Phume.

I wake up and check the time on my phone it's just after midnight I look next to me Awethu is sleeping peacefully then I notice Sbonga sitting on the couch staring into space, he looks far in thought, I look at him until he look my way.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He nods and look down again, I get up and sit in front of him.

Me: "I'm sorry for putting you in this position, I know it must be hard hiding this from your family I'm sorry I just want to know how it feels, I want to be a mom to her"

Sbonga: I understand that, I do but there are consequences for what I did Niko, once Lethu finds out there is no telling what he will do, that is his baby".

I look down, he pull my chin up and stare into my eyes.

Sbonga: I will do anything for you and bare the consequences later, I don't want to see you hurting again.

Me: "Thank you".

He continues to stare at me I feel uncomfortable and get up going back to bed.

Me: "Are you going to book another room?"

Sbonga: "I will sleep here it's fine."

Me: "But there is only one bed cover here you gonna be cold".

Sbonga: I will be fine Niko.

I nod and sleep in bed.

In the morning he shakes me I sit up rubbing my eyes he smiles.

Me: "What?"

He shakes his head.

Sbonga: "Years later you still wake up and rub your eyes like a baby".

I smile shaking my head.

Sbonga: "I want us to talk".

He says his face changing to serious, I look at him nervously maybe he changed his mind about keeping Awethu a secret.

Sbonga: "I want you to come back to Durban".

Me: "No".

Sbonga: Niko, her being this calm is only temporary, what if she gets sick and I am far away from you.

I look down but he hold the sides of my face.

Sbonga: I will make sure no one finds out, I will find a place for you in a secured apartment far from home but not outside Durban Please.

Me: "So I will be like a prisoner because I can't go out and risk people taking pictures of me.

Sbonga: This is a small sacrifice you have to make to be with your daughter, I will make sure you get everything you need.

I nod, I mean he has done a lot for me I should listen to him, he is right I need him.

Sbonga: I love you.

I feel like he means every word, we have been friends for a long time so I love him as well as a brother and a friend.

Me: "I love you too".

He lick his lips shaking his head.

Sbonga: "You don't understand".

His hands are still on my cheeks.

Me: "Understand what".

He shakes his head and move away from me.

Sbonga: " I will give you this week to pack your stuff then I will fetch you next weekend, our flight back to Cape Town leaves around 12 pm".

I nod.

A week ends and my stuff is packed we are ready to go, Sbonga got a granny flat for us and I am sure it cost him a lot, I told him we could split the amount he pays and he didn't want that, he is a trustfund baby after all and

also a teacher so I guess money is not a problem.

We just got to the flat I am looking around it looks so clean and beautiful I love it.

Sbonga: "Is it okay?"

Me: "Yes thank you".

He nods.

Me: "Why are you doing all this for me? Even going behind your family's back for me".

Sbonga: Matters of the heart.

I look at him confused, he walks away.

A month end with Awethu not giving me problems and she is growing big Sbonga loves her, he sees us almost everyday and also makes sure we lack nothing, we don't go out just stay at home the whole day and it's fine like that as long as my daughter is with me.

He barge in startling me and he rush to the window opening the curtains looking outside,

he stands there for a while then turn to look at me.

Me: "Are you okay?"

Sbonga: "I feel like someone is following me since yesterday".

Me: "But why?"

He shrug his shoulders.

Sbonga: "Maybe I'm just paranoid it happens when you are keeping damaging secrets".

I look down, he hold my hand.

A door swings open and Lethu is standing there looking so angry like he wants to kill someone, I am shaking in fear.

He smiles shaking his head.

Lethu: Sbonga..

I look at Sbonga he doesn't look worried while I feel sick.

Lethu: So this is where you spend all your time huh? With her?

They are staring at each other then their eyes moves to the direction of my bedroom, I know Awethu is crying I feel it.

Lethu: Is that a baby?

He tries to walk to the bedroom but Sbonga pull him back, Lethu roughly removes his hands from him then punch him hard I close my eyes tightly as I feel quick movements in the room, I open my eyes and they are both bruised on their faces.

Lethu: You will know me today Sbonga.

He says walking out I rush to the room to take my baby and walk out but Lethu is back pointing a gun at Sbonga, I am trembling.

Sbonga: Shoot me bastard! I don't even know why you act like a crazy bitch you have a wife at home.

He moves his gun and points at me.

Lethu: I should just kill the bitch and that bastard she is holding, you have my brothers

baby now? What!?! You thought our dicks are the same?

Sbonga: Leave her alone Lethukuthula I am warning you.

Lethu: What you gonna do huh?

He cocks the gun still pointing at me, next thing Sbonga is shaking on the floor blood coming out of his mouth, I feel weak as I see him laying in a pool of blood I go on my knees and use them to get to where Sbonga is, I still have a baby in my arms. I shake him with one hand but looks like he wants to talk, I put the baby down next to him.

Me: "Please don't die, please".

I put my hands where blood is coming out, I am trying to stop the bleeding bullet wound.

Sbonga: Niko..

I look at Lethu he is just standing there staring at his brother in horror.

Me: "Please take him to the hospital Lethu."

He looks like a person who has lost his mind.

Me: "Please Lethu".

He put his hands on top of his head walking around the room. I look at Sbonga he looks like he is slowly losing his breath. Lethu finally get his senses back he kneels next to me.

Lethu: I'm so sorry brother.

I slap him so hard.

Me: "Call for help this is no time for your stupid sorries!"

He quickly get up and call the number.

Sbonga: If-I don't-make-it, know that I love you, I loved you from when we were young, I love you.

I just cry shaking my head putting my head on his chest, he is breathing so slow, I am praying as I close my eyes on his chest, God can't do that to me, he won't allow Sbonga to die because of me. Maybe Lethu was right about me I am crazy and selfish I didn't think about

what will happen when all of this comes out, how their relationship will be after all this, I only thought about myself.

I am still on Sbonga's chest feeling his heart still beating gives me hope, I feel hands on my shoulders the paramedics are here, and one off them pulls me up, I move like lightning going to take my baby from Lethu, he is staring at her in shock. I hold her to my chest as he stares at me his eyes are red and puffy.

They take Sbonga away I want to ask if they think he will make it, but I prayed I know God wouldn't hurt me like that if he dies then his blood is on my hands.

I take the baby to my room I have blood on my hands and face. I take a shower and bath Awethu putting her to sleep then go back to clean blood in the living room. I kneel down and start cleaning with tears in my eyes, if he doesn't make it who will be there for me through thick and thin like he has been the

past hard months of my life even my family didn't support me like he did.

I open the news channel I am sure someone leaked the story of Sbonga being shot, it's often the paramedics or the nurse that receives the patient coming with the "big scoop" for the journalists to have a feast.

I watch as they show their pictures, all four of them together then a picture of Sbonga alone smiling showing his silver filler that makes him different from his brothers.

Reporter: Prince Sbonga Gumede is said to be fighting for his life at the hospital after a shootout at what is believed to be Princess Tinyiko Mageba's apartment, we still don't know the full details on what went down but we hope Prince Lethukuthula who was also at the scene will issue a statement soon."

At least he is not dead though fighting for his life sounds bad but I am grateful he is still breathing.

My phone beeps with dad demanding that I go home as soon as possible, I pack my baby's bag and mine and request a cab to take me home, they didn't know that I am back, dad was still paying for that flat in Cape Town because he believed I am still there. I get home and find my whole family here, I stand by the door looking at them, Mom rush to take the baby from my arms as dad pull me to his arms. We sit down once I have stopped crying.

Mageba: "What happened Sniko?"

Me: "Lethu wanted to shoot me but Sbonga got in a way".

Mageba: When did you come back?

Me: "A month ago and Sbonga was helping me".

He shakes his head clearly disappointed.

Mageba: You got between the brothers Sniko!?

He is shouting.

Nomonde: Dad not now please Mageba you can see she is still traumatized.

Me: "He wanted to shoot me while I was holding my baby, what if he shot her".

I cover my face crying my eyeballs out, Lethu is heartless.

Mageba: These are consequences of lying and secrets Tinyiko, Gumede ancestors don't like to be manipulated.

Me: "I just wanted to be a mom, something I failed to be with Phumelele, I didn't mean for anyone to get hurt".

He sighs and pull me to his chest again, I let it all out.

A week ends and Sbonga is in a coma and I heard that Lethu is missing, no one knows where he is even his wife who just drove inside my yard now, I look at her as she takes quick steps towards me in her long heels, she grabs me and start slapping me twice then push me back I fall on my butt on the ground.

Buhle: If Lethu doesn't come back home in the next two days, you will be next to Sbonga in that hospital I am telling you.

I get up and look at her, she step closer and slap me once again.

Buhle: This is all your fault by being a bitch, opening your legs for brothers, sies you're disgusting.

She says and spit on the floor walking back to her car and drive out.

The Gumedes are in our living rooms we are all seated quietly, Nadia looks really bad but Pamella is worse.

Ntsika: We heard that you have something that belongs to the Gumedes, Sbongakonke's baby can we see her.

Me: "She is Lethu's baby".

Ntsika: "But when Lethu got home that day of the shooting he told us you have Sbonga's baby and he saw her".

Me: "I hid that I am pregnant, when I moved to Cape Town I was already pregnant with Lethu's baby, he didn't know".

Ntsika: "How did you stay with her this whole time? She didn't give you problems?"

I look down then back at him.

Me: "Sbonga introduced her to your ancestors".

They all stare at me.

Me: "He took her to the palace".

Nadia shakes his head.

Nadia: I didn't think it will come to this, when he said he was in love with you I didn't think it was this deep that he would betray his brother and keep secrets from us.

In love with me? Sbonga is not in love with me, he loves me as a friend.

Nadia takes out her phone and put it on her ear then she swiftly get up.

Nadia: Is my son okay? Answer me dammit!

She shouts rushing out and they all get up and follow her, I shiver scared, what if he is dead?

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 7

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LETHU

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I want to end my life after what I did to my brother I let jealousy and anger get the better of me, but I didn't mean to shoot him, he just got in a way I wanted to shoot Tinyiko so bad, how dare she get in between me and my brother, how can she have his baby! I saw myself in that baby, my brother, so a picture I have of them in my head fucking is making me

lose my mind, I hate Tinyiko so much for making me do this to my own brother.

I started following Sbonga two weeks ago and I saw him going to this apartment I thought maybe he found a woman but I didn't stop I wanted to see who it is and the night before I shot him I followed him again and saw him standing at the door moving a door handle which was how he would alert Niko we are at the door because she couldn't hear a knock, I knew right there that it's been Tinyiko this whole time, he is sleeping with the mother of my child and to make it worse I found out they have a baby, so all those trips he took months ago he was going to Cape Town.

I gulp down my Vodka straight from the bottle as it is, it burns my throat but at this point I don't care, I want the pain I feel in my heart to end, I want to turn back the hands of time, I want to get the picture of my brother laying in the pool of blood out of my head. I left home after telling Nadia and the whole family what I

did to Sbonga, and Pamela's scream still haunts me, she literally broke down when she saw it on the news and that's when I decided to leave I couldn't bare seeing my mother like that, seeing Nadia shaking in fear of possible losing a son because of me, so I left I am at some pub that has rooms to rent, most of these people here in this Pub are African brothers from outside South Africa so I am not worried about being spotted, I just drink and book a room upstairs to sleep, and I have been doing that for a week now, I am even scared of watching the news, I am scared they will say my brother didn't make it. Seeing Tinyiko cry on his chest like that broke me even more, I guess I am not the only man she will ever love, she loves my brother now I felt it.

Someone taps my shoulder I look next to me, it's a bartender.

Him: Hey is that you?

He says pointing at the TV screen, it's the news someone leaked a picture of my brother in

hospital and it breaks my heart seeing him like that, his stomach is bandaged and he has pipes all over him.

Me: Give me another bottle.

Him: I think you have had enough sir.

Me: Am I spending your mama's money?

He shakes his head and walk away, then he comes back with bouncers and they tell me to leave, I just pay and go up to my room that I have been using. I take my phone tempted to switch it on and ask about my daughter, I am sure she is wondering where I am though sometimes she thinks Letho or Sbani is daddy.

I switch it on and messages floods my phone I ignore them and call my wife.

Buhle: Lethu where are you? I am worried about you.

Me: I'm fine how is Phume?

Buhle: She is not okay, she senses that you are not here even Letho and Sbani can't help she has been crying, please come home.

I sigh.

Me: "I can't, not now.

Buhle: All this Lethu, all this because of Tinyiko, you said you don't love her but you shot your brother for her!?

She shouts.

Me: Hey! Just because I said I don't love her doesn't mean she should be with my brother, we can't eat on the same dish.

Buhle: Were you still eating on that dish you are talking about?

I stop talking as I remember that I cheated on her months ago with Tinyiko.

Buhle: Lethukuthula!

Me: I have to go.

Buhle: Maybe I should leave then I married you so if you are not here I might as well go back home.

Me: I will come back I just need space.

Buhle: Lethu I am your wife.

Me: Bye Buhle.

I drop the call and get in bed with my clothes on.

In the morning I decide to stop hiding and face the music. I take a shower get dressed and walk out to my car, I drive to the hospital first and ask for his ward and I am happy he is out of the coma now, I slowly make my way to his ward and find him asleep his skin looks pale and mouth is dry, I stand next to him.

Me: I'm sorry brother I didn't mean for you to get hurt, I hope you will forgive me.

A door opens and Landi stands there staring at me, her eyes have red circles around them like she has been crying and not getting enough sleep for days.

Nadia: You are here to finish him off?

Me: No, I'm sorry.

She chuckles and stand next to Sbonga staring down at him.

Me: Landi..

Nadia: Don't talk to me right now Lethu I am so angry but trying so hard to keep calm ok.

I look down.

Nadia: You want to kill my wife! You should see her Lethukuthula she has become a shadow of herself, that woman carried you for nine months all four of you and you hurt her like this! Almost killing your brother!

She shouts and her voice sounds like Langa's right now, she almost became a man.

Me: I didn't mean to shoot him Landi.

Nadia: But you did, you fucken did and ..

She stops talking as Sbonga moves in bed then slowly opens his eyes, he look at Nadia and smile a little.

Nadia: Hey boy, should I call a doctor?

He slowly shakes his head, I know he feels that I am here but he hasn't looked my way.

Sbonga: I want him out of here.

Nadia looks at me.

Me: Sbonga I'm..

She shakes her head and show me the door with her head, I walk out, I feel my intestines turning as Tinyiko stand there looking my way, she looks like she wants to run but Shaka walk in behind her and hold her hand looking at me like he wants to see my reaction, Tinyiko look at him.

Niko: "We should go back home"..

Shaka: But you came here to see Sbonga.

She shakes her head and quickly rush out.

I sit down at the waiting area, I get up as Pamella walk in with Miyah, she looks sick, she looks my way blinking rapidly then they walk in Sbonga's ward without saying a word I sigh

wiping my face and sit down again, I want to apologize to all of them so I get up and go to the ward, they stop talking as soon as I walk in.

Me: Mama..

She doesn't even look my way.

Me: I'm sorry Ella.

She just burst into a loud cry, Nadia look down as Miyah comforts her.

Sbonga: Get the fuck out..

He says so slow speaking through his teeth I nod and walk out I bump into my brothers they just stand there looking at me.

Sbani: You are one crazy bastard you know that?

I can't even look at them so I just walk away and drive home, Phume jumps up as soon as I walk in, I pick her up and walk to her room putting her to bed.

Me: How are you princess?

Phume: Fine..

I nod as she starts talking about what she has been doing half of the things she says don't make sense I guess there is a little Lethu in her one that was always talking things that didn't even happen, I lied a lot when I was a young boy, I chuckle as I think about the day I asked Ntombi to take us to Mageba's house because I saw a pretty girl and wanted to play with her, that's where it all started me and Tinyiko, we were always together and when we grew older I started to realise that I love her, when I told her she ran away from me for the whole week but finally she told me she loves me too, I don't know if we knew the depth of those words then but I did know that I wanted to be with her all the time well until she got pregnant, a first girl I had sex with, I was young but that was a special day for me, but when she told me she didn't want my baby and when she allowed grandma to take her just like that I started developing anger towards her, I wanted her to love me and my daughter but when she failed to love her even

after I sent her the first picture when she started sitting on her own I hated her more then I stopped trying to make her see the precious gift we made together and prayed to live the day she regrets her decision and want to be in her life then I vowed to make her suffer watching me loving another woman and raise Phume with her which is why I was so fast in marrying Buhle.

I wipe my tears and look at Phume who is now falling asleep.

Me: I love you.

I cover her with a blanket and kiss her forehead walking out, I find everyone back sitting in the lounge.

Ntsika: Sit down.

I sit keeping my eyes down.

Ntsika: The little girl who was crying in my dreams is not Phume.

I look at him so he can go further.

Ntsika: It was your other daughter.

I look at him confused.

Ntsika: The baby you saw, Tinyiko's baby is yours not Sbonga's baby.

And I realise that it's true I mean estimating her age in my head it makes sense, that's when I slept with her and told her it's all in her head.

Me: She is my daughter.

I say to myself.

Me: I want to see her.

He nods, Mageba walk in with Shaka and Tinyiko who is holding a baby close to her chest and she has tears in her eyes. I get up and stand in front of her.

Me: "Can I hold her?"

She shakes her head as tears rolls down.

Me: I won't hurt her I just want to hold her please.

Shaka touch her shoulder then she slowly give me the baby, I look at her, of course she is mine, I sit down with her in my arms.

Ntsika: "We have to do things the right way not what Sbonga did though he saved her life".

My brother went through all the trouble for Tinyiko.

Ntsika: "We have to pay for her so she can use our surname then come home to stay with us".

Tinyiko shakes her head in defeat.

Niko: "This is why I was hiding her and begged Sbonga to help me, I knew you would want to take her away!"

She keeps wiping her tears.

Niko: "I already can't be in Phume's life you can't take her as well".

Me: With Phume it was your decision Niko, you wanted nothing to do with her, so don't try to make us feel bad for your own choices.

She stares at me with so much hatred in her eyes.

Niko: "One good day Lethu, one good day you will be at my messy I am telling you".

Me: Never, you mean nothing to me Tinyiko but just a woman who keeps popping up my babies maybe you hope I will love you again but it won't ever happen.

Niko: "Why would I want you to love me again you are not even half the man Sbonga is".

I feel flames burning inside of me, did she just say that to me. I give the baby to Miyah who is close to me and get up stepping closer to where Niko is seated but Shaka get up first and stand in front of me, the boy is way younger than me but his demeanor and calmness makes you want to respect him.

He raise his eyebrow I step back and sit down.

Shaka: Stop coming at my sister like that Lethu I don't like it and I hate even the fact that you

pointed a gun at her not once but twice but I will let it slide for now.

He is the only one standing in the room and his voice is deep everyone is quiet as he stares at me like he is waiting for an answer, after a long time he sits down fixing his watch so calmly like he didn't just low key threaten me in my own home.

Ntsika: So Mageba as I was saying, please allow us to come and pay what is due to your family then we will take our child.

Tinyiko: "No, I won't allow that, I won't, fuck your tradition."

She gets up and takes the baby from Miyah walking out, I chuckle maybe she thinks my ancestors are a joke, she will learn.

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TINYIKO

*

I have been packing my bags in my room, I want to leave with my child before they take her away. I stop packing and take the baby to Mom then drive to the hospital.

I find Sbonga's ward and walk in, he is asleep I sit down and hold his hand, he moves opening his eyes, he smiles a little but I can't stop my tears from falling.

Me: "I'm sorry, this is all my fault".

He tries to sit up but it's hard I fix his pillows and help him sit up, he pull me to sit in bed in front of him.

Sbonga: I told you I hate seeing you cry.

I wipe my tears.

Me: "I am leaving".

Sbonga: To where?

Me: "I don't know, far away from here, they want to take her".

Sbonga: Are you ready to watch her die?

I cry harder, he watch me cry until I calm myself down.

Me: "So I should let him take her?"

He huffs.

Sbonga: Giving a baby to his or her father's family doesn't mean you are throwing her away, that is where she belongs but you and Lethu just have to find a way to work around this whole thing and allow you to see your daughters.

Me: "He said I keep popping up his babies hoping that he will love me".

Sbonga: Is it true?

I get up but he hold my hand I sit back down.

Sbonga: Don't leave or you will watch Awethu die, the ancestors will take her from you themselves.

Me: "I will let them take her then beg Lethu for the rest of my life to see her".

He sighs.

Sbonga: I wish there was something I can do.

Me: "I have to go".

Sbonga: Don't run away, fight.

Me: "It's a lose before I can even fight because I don't know where to start".

Sbonga: I will be here.

Me: "No, I think it's better I stay away from you, I don't want you to get hurt again I was so scared thinking you are not going to make it".

Sbonga: You want to stay away from me?

I don't answer.

Sbonga: Okay.

Me: "Don't do that to me".

Sbonga: What do you want me to say? I am just saying okay because at the end of the day it's your decision.

He looks at the door, I turn and Lethu walk in I try to get up from the bed but Sbonga hold my hand making me sit. Lethu stands infront of me looking at his brother.

Lethu: I am here to give you my blessings, you can have her.

Sbonga shake his head laughing a little.

Sbonga: you think I need your blessings to be with her?

Lethu: Sbonga I want all of this to end I don't want to fight with you.

Sbonga: I told you I won't act on it, I haven't done anything with her and I won't do anything.

Lethu: You mean that?

Sbonga: You said it yourself she will never love another person other than you so yeah..

Are they talking about me like I am not here, so Sbonga is really in love with me but how, when? I mean he watched me with Lethu and watched me break down because of him, he loved me after all of that?

Lethu: Please forgive me for shooting you.

Sbonga: Sure.

Lethu look at our hands, Sbonga is still holding me then he slowly let go of my hand.

Lethu: Uhm I will see you tomorrow.

Sbonga nods as Lethu walk out, I look at him he look away but I turn his face forcing him to look at me.

Me: "You have feelings for me?"

He doesn't say anything.

Me: "That is why you did all those things for me?"

Sbonga: It doesn't matter, you love Lethu and you have two kids with him, he is my brother I won't act on my feelings I just pray they fade away soon but it's been too long it hurts me.

I don't know what to say after that.

Me: "I have to go".

He nods, I get up and walk to the door then slowly turn to look at him, he is looking up I just walk out and drive back home. All this time I thought he loves me as a friend because we

grew up together I didn't think it was deeper than that.

I take his advice and stay, running away will do more harm than good, I can't watch my daughter die so I guess it's the Gumedes way, it's always that or the high away anyway.

They are now here to pay for whatever amount to make Awethu take their last name and do a ceremony for her. I am looking at her sleeping.

Me: "I wanted to watch you grow everyday something I couldn't do with your sister but life isn't fair on me I guess this is the way God wants to punish me for neglecting Phume".

We get in the cars and drive to the palace where the ceremony will take place, I see Sbani pushing Sbonga with a wheelchair, he can walk but I guess his wound it still painful, I quickly walk away before he can see me. I stay in the bedroom as they perform their ceremony. I am sitting in bed a door opens and

Sbonga rolls his wheelchair in and look at me for a while without saying a word.

Sbonga: "I know I will sound crazy for saying this but how about we ask Lethu to take you as a second wife so you can stay with your daughters, you love him anyway so it won't be hard".

Me: "Udakiwe".(You're drunk)

He seems stunned.

Sbonga: What!?

He says in disbelief.

Me: "Udakiwe".

I repeat that for him slowly making sure he sees every sign I make.

Sbonga: Sniko..did you just say ngidakiwe?

Me: "I did".

He push his wheelchair closer and look at me, I look back at him he is really drunk to even think such a disgusting thing about me, beg Lethu to take me as a second wife? What

nonsense is that!?! I am angry at him for even allowing his mind to think that because I know he is not stupid just acting like it.

Sbonga: Take that back.

Me: "No".

Sbonga: Take it back Niko.

I shake my head. He grabs my hips and pull me towards him then move his wheelchair back making me fall on my butt I look at him shocked but he has tears in his eyes laughing his lungs out.

He stretch out his hand to me but I slap it away, he is still laughing, I get up he hold my waist looking up at me still with that amused face.

Sbonga: I'm sorry.

Me: "Go to hell man, my ass hurts".

He laughs again I move away from him sitting down in front of him, a door opens Lethu walk in while we are still laughing I even forgot

about the stupid suggestion he made when he came in here, he stares at us for a while then look at Sbonga.

Lethu: King is calling you.

Sbonga nods and wheel himself out Lethu follows him but come back in again.

Lethu: Stop acting like a bitch throwing yourself at my brother it's not a good look, maybe he just wants to smash and pass like I have been doing but if you're cheap and weak you will fall for it.

I blink looking at him, this guy hates me man.

He walk out I just look out the window, looks like the whole community attended but then people in rural areas wait for no invites, they smell goat meat they are there brother!

I lock myself up in here for the whole day, I am nothing here but just a baby mama anyway so I don't want to be up and down like Ntombi and Nomonde, they are wives here.

Later I go to my car to get my charger but I feel someone's presence behind me when I turn they put a sock over my nose I feel drowsy as they drag me, I feel weak as I can feel the car moving to God knows where.

When I wake up I am in a room, it's pink with a lot of teddy bears, it looks like a baby's room, I walk to the door and try to open it but it's locked I bang on it, a man I have never seen in my life walk in and look at me smiling, he hugs me too tight then look at me again.

Him: You are finally home.

Me: "I want to leave, I want to go home".

Him: "But this is your home, your room".

Me: "I want to go, I have to be with my daughter".

He doesn't say anything but just walk out, everyone will think I ran away I know they will because I am "crazy". I am even scared because I don't even know this man and what he will do to me, now Lethu will just take my

baby with joy, I failed another daughter yet again, I am no different from my mother.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 8

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SBONGA

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We are still at the palace I am standing in front of the mirror looking at the bullet wound a little below my left nipple, I put a patch on it, my mind is not here I am thinking about Sniko, when I held her waist today it felt right yet it is so wrong, she has my brother's kids and she loves him not me, I don't think she will ever

love me, she takes me as a brother, a friend
nothing more.

I sigh and sit down in my bed, I want to go to
the room she is using and watch her sleep but I
won't do that seems like Lethu is watching my
every move and I don't like it but I will let it go
I am still pretty much angry at him for trying to
shoot Niko while she was holding a baby which
makes me believe that my brother is crazy.

I get in bed and huff brushing my head, my
door opens and grandma walks in. She gives
me some pills and sit on my bed.

Ziyanda: What is happening?

I look down.

Me: I promise I have tried to stop loving her
grandma it's not happening but I won't do
anything.

She sighs.

Ziyanda: Promise me that you and your
brother won't hurt each other again Sbonga.

Me: I just want him to leave Tinyiko alone he is always hurting her.

Ziyanda: I will talk to him but just don't fight anymore.

I nod, she kiss my cheek and walk out.

I try to sleep but I can't, I want to see Niko before I sleep. I slowly get up and walk to her room, I move the handle for a while but she doesn't open maybe she is asleep. I open the door but the bed is still made, I look everywhere for her but I can't find her I notice her car is opened I go there and find a charger on the ground but she is not here. I am so confused where is she? Maybe she is with Lethu because his wife left home when she found out about him cheating and made another baby with Niko. I close her car and lean on it, I am hurt.

I go back to my room but stay awake the whole night, in the morning grandma calls everyone for breakfast. I sit around the table and watch as Lethu walk in holding Awethu in

his arms and Phume is following behind him, I keep looking at the passage hoping to see Niko walk in but she is not here.

Me: Lethu..

He look at me.

Me: Uhm where is Sniko?

He stares at me squinting his eyes I know I shouldn't have asked that but I just want to know.

Lethu: I last saw her with you yesterday.

Me: She wasn't with you last night?

Lethu: of course not, some of us are not "in love" with her, we don't care.

Ziyanda: Lethukuthula!

She says with a stern voice Lethu look down, food doesn't want to go down my throat anymore, where is she?

Now everyone is calling Mageba to ask if Tinyiko maybe went back home but her car is

here and the fact that I found it opened doesn't sit well with me.

We are at the lounge Mageba is angry standing at the centre of our living room, he is demanding his daughter.

Mageba: I allowed my daughter to come here because I trusted you Ntsika! So where is she!?

Lethu: Not to sound insensitive King but maybe she ran away, she has done it before so you should file a missing person report, this is the work of the police not us.

I groan, if I wasn't hurt I was gonna shut him up with a hard punch on his face.

Tinyiko once ran away from home when we were just 12 after having a mental breakdown it was the first time I saw her like that, she just cried and a sound actually came out of her mouth, it was scary then the next day she was not home, they found her at the hospital with cuts on her wrists which we found out she did herself with razors but I don't think this is the

case, she wanted to be there for her daughter, she was willing to fight.

Mageba drove out with Nadia and King so they can look for Niko, I stand behind Lethu as he plays with Phume.

Me: Did you do it?

He turns looking at me.

Lethu: What!?

Me: You took Niko.

Lethu: Took her where?

Me: You tell me.

He chuckles.

Lethu: Tinyiko is crazy Sbonga the sooner you understand that the better for all of us, we will have peace.

Me: Yet you keep going back to that girl you say is crazy.

Lethu: She is an easy target, you should try it she won't say no.

Me: What happened to you Lethu? I thought you cared about her.

He doesn't answer I walk out calling Nadia.

Nadia: Boh..

Me: Landi have you found anything yet?

Nadia: No, she doesn't have her phone with her and we don't even know where to start.

I sit down wiping my face.

Nadia: Mageba wants to offer a reward but I told him to wait a little.

Me: Wait? Niko's life might be in danger and you are saying Mageba should wait! Wait for Niko to be killed!!!?

I am shouting I really don't understand.

Nadia: I have been doing this for years Lethu so don't question me boy.

Me: Landile please..

Nadia: I am doing everything I can to find her Sbonga! People will take chances claiming they

know where she is and that will make finding her a bit hard.

I sigh, I should trust her, she really has been doing this for years, finding missing people whether dead or alive bringing back trafficked girls all the way from overseas.

They have been searching for Tinyiko day and night for seven full days I am losing my mind and seeing my brother so calm makes me so angry, I feel like he has a hand in Niko's disappearance.

I sit on the couch defeated, I don't know where will I start looking, I am scared for her, what if they are abusing her wherever she is.

My phone rings it's a private number, I answer.

Me: Hello.

Silence.

Me: Hello.

I hear a beep sound meaning the person pressed a button in the phone, I quickly get up.

Me: Niko..

I am sure it's her but she can't say or hear anything I feel like crying.

Me: Where are you? Please come back plea..

The phone beeps again I sit down and wipe my eyes, I want to tell her to send a text and let me know where she is but she won't hear me.

I toss the phone on top of the table looking at it, the call hasn't been dropped.

I rush to my room and get my laptop, I connect my phone to it and try to hack on that phone but it's impossible I am getting frustrated.

Me: Come on!

I keep trying everything uncle Carl taught me about hacking the systems but nothing is working I guess they aren't using smartphones which are easy to hack.

I get up and scream in frustration, maybe she is scared wherever she is.

The phone drops and a text comes through.

"Please come get.." that's all they wrote I believe 'me' is missing maybe whoever took her found her with a phone and this is all she managed to type, now I have the number I think I can find her. I quickly search it's location and it's here in Durban but outside town, I rush to my room to get my jacket and a gun then run to my car, I drive to the place in speed and in 20 minutes I am parked outside a big house and there is a Pitbull walking around the yard, I step out and it stares my way, if Tinyiko is in there then I am going in I don't care what that dog might do to me. I open the gate and it runs to me I pull out my gun and shoot it, it falls on the side wincing in pain, it's getting dark outside I open the front door and tip toe inside searching the rooms I can hear someone talking. "You are my baby girl and this is your punishment for being a bad girl". The voice is very deep, it sounds like a very old man, I slowly push the door and find a man next to a bathtub and Tinyiko is inside

shivering, he is bathing her, I point the gun at him.

Me: Turn around..

He quickly turns getting up and look at me, Tinyiko is still sitting there shivering she is not even looking at me.

Me: What the fuck are you doing?

Him: I am giving my baby girl a bath.

Me: Who are you? Are you crazy!?

He doesn't seem fazed by a gun in his face.

Me: Don't move or I will shoot.

I send a location to Nadia then punch this man hard on his jaw and quickly knee him on his balls he hold it going down on his knees, I rush to Niko pulling her up, she is butt naked and she is just quiet and blinking slow.

I grab a towel and wrap it around her body then give her my jacket, the water was ice cold this man is a lunatic.

Me: Niko..

She keeps blinking I don't even think she can see me.

Me: Come back...please look at me.

She blinks again then stare at me.

Me: I'm here okay and I am taking you home.

I hear quick footsteps and Nadia is here.

Nadia: I got your text with this location and drove here as fast as I can, Sniko?

She says looking confused.

Me: There is your guy, I am taking Niko home she is not okay.

I pick her up and walk out, I put her on the backseat and drive to the flat I was paying for her and Awethu to use. I take her inside and make her sit on the couch then kneel in front of her.

Me: "Talk to me".

Nothing.

Me: "At least cry I want to know that you are here, come on".

I don't want her to go to a mental institution again.

Me: Please.

I see her hands shaking.

Me: It's okay, just show me any emotions, cry, show me anger, anything.

She slowly get up then start wrecking the room, the vase the TV screen it's all in pieces on the floor I am Just watching her, i want her to let it all out..she finally stops and go down on her knees breathing heavily then a scary scream escapes her lips tears rolling down her cheeks I kneel in front of her and pull her into a tight hug, she cries for some time, I pick her up and take her to bed then sit next to her, she has her eyes closed now I think she fell asleep. I get up and go clean the living room, Mageba rush in while I'm still cleaning, he look around then look my way.

Mageba: She did this?

I nod, he huffs wiping his face.

Mageba: Where did you find her? I just received a call from Nadia saying you found her.

Me: Some man took her to the townships I don't even know what's his story but hopefully Landi will get him to talk.

I finish cleaning and we sit down waiting for Niko to wake up.

Me: Please don't send her to the hospital.

He sighs.

Mageba: But it gets too much for her sometimes, what can I do?

He says defeated, I don't even know how to answer that.

We hear footsteps Mageba quickly get up and rush to her, he hold her tight as she cries on his chest.

Mageba: I'm so sorry.

He keeps repeating that in his shaky voice, it's sad.

They finally sit down Niko look at me.

Niko: "You found me".

I nod.

Niko: "I was scared".

Mageba's phone rings he get up answering it while walking out.

Niko: "Thank you".

Mageba walk in and look at Niko.

Mageba: Nadia wants us to come to the station, are you okay with that?

She nods and walk to the bedroom, she come back in jeans and my jacket, she still had her stuff here.

We drive to the station and walk in, Nadia is here with a detective, whenever there is an important case she leaves her comfortable office of being a station commander and take it on herself, she has never been one to stick to the rules.

The other cops walk in with that man and he sit down, I feel Niko's hand holding mine tight.

Nadia: Niko do you know this man?

She shakes her head.

Nadia: He says you are his daughter.

Niko: "It was the first time seeing this man when he took me from the palace".

Nadia: How did you know she was going to be at the palace?

The man is staring at Tinyiko.

Him: He told me.

Nadia: Who is "he"?

He doesn't say anything.

Nadia: Who told you about Tinyiko and how do you know she is your daughter?

Him: He told me.

He keeps saying that but doesn't say who is this "he" Nadia is getting angry.

Tinyiko zone out when she has to answer questions and Mageba takes her home, I go home as well.

I take a shower and wear my clothes I want to make sure Tinyiko is okay, I make my way out and bump into Lethu, he look at me smiling.

Lethu: Hey hero,I heard you found Niko.

I pass him and get in my car driving to Mageba's house, I go to Tinyiko's room and find the Queen there begging her to eat.

Me: Hello my Queen.

She sighs and greet me back.

Me: Can I talk to her?

She nods and walk out leaving her food here I sit in her bed.

Me: You are not hungry?

She shakes her head.

Niko: It hurts.

I look at her as she lift her pyjama top up she has red marks all over her skin even her boobs,

it looks like belt marks, I didn't realise all of this when I found her naked because she was shivering I wanted to get her covered up.

Me: That man did this?

She nods getting up and show me her back which is worse I am shaking in anger.

Niko: "When he found me with his phone he hit me with a belt and took off my clothes forcing me to get in a bathtub with cold water, all these past days he was forcing to bath me saying I am his baby girl".

Her tears are falling as she tells me this

Niko: "He even touched me in my private part".

Me: Did he..did he..

I fail to continue, she shakes her head I guess she got what I wanted to ask, rape is a very sensitive issue to her so I am even afraid to say that word.

She keeps rubbing her back, that must hurt, I walk out and ask for some pills for the pain from the Queen and go back to give it to her.

Me: I have to go I will see you tomorrow.

Niko: "Please stay till I fall asleep".

I nod, she shifts then pat a space next to her I take off my shoes and get in next to her she lays her head on my chest my heart is beating fast, I slowly run my hands on her hair, she lift her head up and look down at me, I find myself pulling her and kiss her, she kiss me back then quickly move away giving me her back, I shouldn't have done that so I get off bed and wear my shoes, I promised that I won't entertain my feelings for Niko. She hasn't turned as I stand by the door looking back at her, I sigh and walk out, maybe I should try to hook up with someone I might finally stop loving Niko.

It's morning and I am tempted to go check on Niko but I stop myself.

I go to the kitchen to make some tea then sit outside the veranda, Nadia sits in front of me.

Me: Morning.

She nods and sigh.

Me: What's wrong?

Nadia: That man committed suicide yesterday.

Me: Without telling you who told him Niko's whereabouts?

She nods.

Nadia: But we did find out that he was once admitted to the mental hospital after his daughter died in a fire, Tinyiko is not his first victim, he kidnapped his neighbour's daughter once saying she is his daughter.

Me: But why Tinyiko now, she is far from his home.

Nadia: I believe someone made him believe she is his daughter, that "he" he kept saying led him to Niko but I guess we won't find out who is he anymore.

Me: It's Lethukuthula.

She stares at me.

Me: It's him Landi.

Nadia: No Sbonga don't start, how do you think your brother know that man!

She shouts at me.

Nadia: This shit between you and Lethu is messing with your head huh!?

I look down, she clicks her tongue walking in, I go to Lethu's room.

Me: You got Niko kidnapped Lethu!

He rolls his eyes.

Lethu: Life doesn't revolve around your Niko I have two beautiful daughters keeping me occupied.

Me: Can you please leave her alone it's enough now.

Lethu: How about you leave her alone Sbonga! For fucks sake get yourself a girl and stop going after my leftovers, you're pathetic!

I shake my head and walk out, I am slowly hating him.

I decide to take a walk as I walk past Mageba's house I see Niko standing outside rubbing her shoulders it's cold and she is only wearing a t-shirt, I walk in and stand in front of her.

Me: Hi.

She nod looking sad.

Niko: "I miss my daughter I wish I can see her".

Me: Let's go see her.

Niko: "But your brother won't allow that".

Me: Come..

I take her hand and we walk home I find Lethu in the lounge with Awethu sleeping next to him.

Lethu: What is she doing here?

Me: To see her daughter.

Lethu: Wena Sbonga ungiwayela amasimba.(You're full of shit)

I chuckle.

Me: I know and so are you brother.

I step closer and take Awethu next to him, he get up and try to take her from me but I move back.

Me: You don't want to fight me Lethukuthula believe me you don't I still hate you for shooting me so try me brother fucken try me!

He squints his eyes I go to Niko and give her Awethu, she hold her carefully her eyes are teary. I look at Lethu he is fired up but I dare he step any close.

Me: This is the right time to fetch your gun, I want to see you try today.

Lethu: Give me my daughter Niko!

Niko gives me Awethu back and walk out I give him the baby.

Lethu: You are trying too hard, inswayi iyakubulala boy.(salt is killing you) once you

get laid you will stop acting like a lost puppy running after Tinyiko.

He says laughing walking away, I slowly walk out and see that Tinyiko is already halfway home, I get back inside and sleep in my bed, maybe I am acting a little too desperate I should let them sort out their issues.

A text from Niko comes through it reads "Thank you for today".

I don't reply.

"Is it true that Lethu's wife left him". Another text from her.

Me: "You want to try things out with him again?"

Niko: "Musa ukuhlanya(Don't be crazy) bengithi siyahleba(I wanted us to gossip!)

I laugh out loud shaking my head.

Me: "I don't gossip".

Niko: "But I really need some juicy stuff come on give me something".

I laugh again, this girl is something else.

Me: "You came to the wrong person baby, try your sister Nomonde that one gossips too much".

Niko: "I'm grateful for everything you have been doing for me Sbonga, goodnight".

I type "I love you" but quickly delete it, I want someone to teach me how to unlove a person because this might lead to death, I already had a near death experience because of it and I don't wanna die this young, I am too hot to die!

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 9

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It's been three days since I last saw my daughter it was brief but it meant a lot to me. I have been trying to send texts messages to Sbonga but he is not replying we last talked when I told him how grateful I was for everything he has been doing for me but now he is ignoring me I guess, maybe he is distancing himself from me but who wouldn't I would distance myself from me too I come with a lot of problems.

"Are you ignoring me Sbonga? I just want to know if my kids are okay that's it I won't bother you again".

My phone vibrates finally he replied but I didn't expect this response from him.

Sbonga: "0792498798 this is their dad's number you should ask him".

I swallow spit, maybe he is fed up with helping me.

Me: "Oh ok thanks".

I reply then walk out I go to my brothers house and find them eating their breakfast I sit between Shaka and Luyanda, I just came here to pass time.

We stay for hours just talking then I go back to my room and look at Lethu's number I am sceptical about calling him he might just cuss at me but I really miss Awethu.

I start typing "Hi Lethu it's Tinyiko I want to ask if the kids are okay"

I put the phone down and start biting my nails I'm afraid of the response I will get if there will be any.

My phone vibrates I take it with my shaky hand and open it.

Lethu: "Where is your Hero? Your spokesperson? Isn't he supposed to be the one helping you see the kids?"

I guess he is referring to Sbonga who seemingly wants nothing to do with me.

Me: "Can I please see her even if it's once a week please".

Lethu: "You want to rub off the craziness on my kids?"

I rub my eyes.

Me: "It's okay then I don't want them to end up crazy like me".

I put my phone down and walk out and nearly bump on mom.

Nombuso: Niko you almost knocked me down.

Me: " I'm sorry I guess I wasn't looking where I am going".

Nombuso: "Are you okay?"

I nod and sit on the couch holding the cushion to my chest.

Nombuso: Niko.

She sit in front of me.

Me: "I'm tired".

Nombuso: The last time you said that you wanted to end your life so please don't do that please you are hurting us Tinyiko.

Me: "No one understands even Sbonga who I thought is my friend".

She sighs and sit next to me I put my head on her lap she brush my hair slowly I think I am falling asleep.

I wake up with a blanket over my body still sleeping on the couch but Mom is not here, I look outside it's a bit dark I go check the time it's around 18:30 pm, I walk to Gumedes home and find them eating dinner, they all stop eating and look at me, I move my eyes around their table and they stop at Sbonga he look down on his plate.

Me: "I'm sorry to bother you but I am here to ask if I can see Awethu".

Lethu: And I said no.

Me: "King Ntsika please".

I say looking at him I can see him sighing.

Me: "Please".

Ntsika: Let her see her.

Lethu: Dad no.

Ntsika: Sbani go take Awethu and bring her here.

Sbani get up and walk down the passage,
Lethu get up as well and come to where I am standing I step back and stand far from him.

Lethu: Making yourself a victim huh? You hd my daughter from me, how long did you think you can do that? You wanted her to die right?

I shake my head.

Lethu: Then what were you hoping?

Me: "That I can keep her and be a good mom".

He chuckles.

Lethu: You? A good mom come on Niko,. A person like you can never be a good mom.

I see Nadia standing next to him then grab his hand walking out with him, Sbani walk in with Awethu, I take her and go sit down on the

couch with her, she is growing and pretty too I guess they are taking good care of her.

She wakes up and start crying I am tempted to take out my boob but Phume is next to me in a second with her bottle I smile and take it from her, I forgot that I don't stay with her anymore. I feed her then she falls asleep again Phume is still standing next to me.

Phume: Can I hold her?

I nod and signal her to sit on the couch so she won't drop her, I give her the baby but make sure I am still holding her as well, she looks excited holding her sister I am smiling I am with my daughters, I look up and see Sbonga standing by the passage looking our way when our eyes lock he just turns and walk away.

Lethu and Nadia come back and Lethu stand there looking my way, I take the baby from Phume and walk closer to Lethu and give him the baby, he takes her.

Me" Thank you".

Lethu: Meet me tomorrow during lunch at my school but first do your hair you look ridiculous with that thing on your head".

He walk away after that, I plaited my natural hair into four line conrows I guess it's ugly. I go back home and go to bed.

In the morning I wake up early and rush to the salon to change my hairstyle and drive to Lethu's school. I go to his office and walk in, he is sitting on his chair holding a pen I stand there looking at him.

Lethu:. you are late!

Me:"Sorry I got held up at the salon".

Lethu: sit down.

I sit down.

Lethu: "I don't like it when you involve people in our business like what you did with Sbonga and also asking King if you can see the baby, when we made those babies there was just the two of us no one else so please don't involve them".

I nod.

Lethu: "Come stay at home if you are really serious about being a mom".

Me: "But how? Isn't your wife coming back?"

Lethu: Now that is my business yours is to decide if you want to be a mom or not".

Me: "Ok, did you talk to your parents about this?"

Lethu: "I will today so you have only today to think about this".

I nod.

Me: "Can I go?"

He nods, I get up and walk out.

I am in my room thinking about what Lethu said about moving in maybe this is my chance to fix my mistake with Phume and raise Awethu, my phone moves I look at it.

Lethu: "I talked to them so I expect you here tomorrow".

I sigh and go join my family for dinner so I can talk to them.

Me: "Dad, Lethu asked me to come stay with them if I want to be a mom to my kids".

They stop eating looking at me.

Nombuso: "What about his wife?"

Me: "I don't know but I want to be with my kids".

Mageba: and what will you be in their house Sniko?

Me: "I don't have another choice, no one fought for me when they took my daughter! You were all there watching, you still are!"

I get up and go to my room, I start packing my bags not all of them I will be coming back home from time to time.

Shaka walk in and stand by the door watching me pack.

Shaka: "Do you know what you're doing?"

I ignore him.

Shaka: Selling yourself short to that piece of shit!

I guess he is talking about Lethu.

Shaka: He already has no respect for you and now you are giving him a platform to do as he pleases.

Me: "You will understand once you have kids, oh wait, you won't have a similar problem as mine because you are the next King and I am a nobody just an adopted child who is crazy".

Shaka: Sniko..

Me: "I am doing everything I can to be there for my kids, every opportunity given to me to be with them I will take it".

He shakes his head.

Shaka: Ok.

He walk out I sit in my bed and look down.

In the morning it's the weekend meaning everyone is home, I drag my bags to my car, my family is outside looking at me.

Mageba: Sniko let me try to talk to Ntsika maybe we can find a common ground, don't go.

Me: "You should have done that the minute they took my baby".

I get in my car and drive out.

I take out my bags from my car and wheel them in, I stand by the door as everyone look my way.

Lethu: Let me show you your room.

I follow him and my room is right next to his.

Me: "Thanks".

He nods and walk out, I pack my clothes in the closet.

I feel someone's presence and I know who it is so I slowly turn.

Sbonga: When he told us you are moving in yesterday I thought he is lying you wouldn't do that but here you are.

I look at him blankly.

Sbonga: What are you doing Niko?

Me: "Being with my kids".

Sbonga: Is it?

Me: "Last time I checked you wanted nothing to do with me so why are you suddenly so concerned".

He shakes his head.

Sbonga: you don't know what you're doing, Lethu will hurt you, he will break you Tinyiko.

Me: "I am just here for my kids Sbonga".

He nods and walk out.

Four days pass and I am spending most of my time with Phume when she comes back from daycare and spend all the time with Awethu, Sbonga hasn't said a word to me and Lethu only comes to my room to get Awethu and Phume when he comes back from work.

I am just sleeping in bed with Awethu he walk in and stand next to bed checking on Awethu then sit on the couch.

Lethu: Come here.

I get off bed and stand in front of him, he look up at me.

Lethu: "You still love me don't you?"

I don't reply.

Lethu: "I know you do, you just can't stop".

He pull me to his lap.

Lethu: Are you on injection?

I shake my head.

Me: "I have a loop, IUD."

He nods.

Lethu: Good, Awethu is still young we don't want any baby for now, we will give them a brother when she is maybe three years".

I try to get up but he gently hold my waist.

Lethu: I love you.

Me: "You do?"

Lethu: Yes.

Me: "But you are always angry when i'm around".

Lethu: "I'm not angry anymore I want us to try again".

He says and kiss me, we kiss for a while then he stop.

Lethu: Take off your clothes baby.

I get up and take off my clothes as he take off his then sit back on the couch, he pull me to his lap and slide his dick in, he grabs my waist moving me fast then he start moving even faster underneath I hold his shoulders he is sweating then he finally cums and move me so I can get up, I do and wipe myself he does the same and wear his clothes walking out, maybe there is still a chance of us being together I really do love him, he is my first boyfriend.

In the morning I go to the laundry room and Sbonga walk in and take his laundry basket without even greeting me then walk out, I guess we are not friends anymore.

I don't see Lethu the whole day then later at the dinner table he is around.

Lethu: Dad..

They look at him.

Lethu: Can you help me talk to my wife, I want her to come back home.

I look at him, he look so serious.

Lethu: This is her home I paid full Lobola for her she needs to come back and give me an heir I want a son from her.

No one has said a word to him they are just looking at him then Nkanyezi put down his fork.

Nkanyezi: And do you think she will agree to come back with Sniko here, the same reason she left you for? Do you think we are fools?

Lethu: No dad, if I have to choose who gets to stay then it's my wife Tinyiko can go back home.

I feel like my head is spinning I look around the table Sbonga get up and walk out.

Lethu: please help me get my wife back.

Nkanyezi: You asked Tinyiko to come stay here and now you want her gone what is wrong with you.

Lethu: We will find another way but she has to go.

I get up and go to the room I was using and pack my clothes then go to his room and pack Awethu's clothes he walk in.

Lethu: What are you doing in my room?

Me: "I am leaving with my daughter".

He smile shaking his head.

Lethu: You are one crazy woman. Get out of my room.

Me: "I will once i'm done packing".

He steps closer.

Me: "If you put your hands on me I will get you arrested".

Lethu: Do you think anyone can believe anything you say? Niko you are crazy I have been saying.

I take the bag and try to walk past him but he grabs my top pulling me back and grab the bag throwing it on the floor.

Lethu: Get out.

Me: "why.. Why.."

I want to ask him why he is doing this to me but looks like I have lost all the things Sage taught me about sign language.

He push me out, I stand by the passage breathing heavily then slowly go down and sit on the floor leaning on the wall.

I feel a hand on my shoulder I look up it's Sbonga he gives me his hand pulling me up then walk away. I take my bags and load them in my car then drive back home, I walk in and go to my room, I look at my phone it's indicating a message.

Sbonga: "Don't try to kill yourself, he is not worth it".

I take off all my clothes and go to the bathtub I open cold water and get in, one thing that man who kidnapped me did was show me that I can focus on the water being cold and shut down everything. I sit there for hours then step out shivering I lotion and wear my black clothes I always do when I'm feeling sad or angry, I walk out with a back pack and start picking up stones all the way to Gumede's house putting them inside the bag. The gate slides open I walk in and start throwing stones hitting their glass doors and expensive windows, I run out of stones and stand there as the King and Nadia walk out first then all of them follows.

Lethu: What the hell! I told you she is crazy!

They are looking at the damage I did to their fancy house but how dare they stay in this fancy house while I suffer because of their son!

Lethu: Nadia call your cops she should be locked up.

Ntsika: Niko go home, Sbongakonke take her home.

Lethu: No I will take her..

Ntsika: Sbongakonke take Niko home now.

Sbonga slowly walk towards me then look at the gate, I look at Lethu.

Me: "If I were you I would sleep with one eye opened".

I walk out leaving Sbonga there, once I am at my gate he pull my hand.

Sbonga: You shouldn't have done that.

Me: "I may be crazy but I know you don't do what your family is doing to me, you are watching me suffer none of you care because it's all about you and your stupid selfish ancestors! I hate all of you Sbonga I wish I can burn your entire house down with all of you in it".

Sbonga: "Your kids are in that house Niko".

Me: "Doesn't matter I don't have access to them anyway".

Sbonga: But I told you that Lethu will do something to make you look crazy Niko, look at what you did now, you are letting him control you and your emotions he knows exactly which buttons to press and you are making it worse by sleeping with him anytime he wants.

I look at him.

Sbonga: Yeah I know because he came to gloat to me and my brothers.

I don't know what to say.

Sbonga: You are slowly turning into this lunatic he says you are and I hate it, I hate you for letting him.

Me: "You hate me?"

Sbonga: Yes, yes I hate you.

I blink rapidly and he turns and walk back home, I walk in and go to dad.

Mageba: Princess.

Me: "I'm sorry for leaving".

Mageba: "It's okay, I can still talk to Ntsika".

I nod and go to my room.

In the morning I walk out and find Lethu on the ground wiping blood on his face Shaka is looking down at him and there is an officer next to them.

Me: "What is going on?"

Shaka: Get the fuck out of my property.

The officer walk out first as Lethu is still trying to get up.

Lethu: I got a restraining order against you for threatening my life I don't want you anywhere near my kids and my home you hear me.

He say still holding the side of his face then walk out, I look at my hands they are shaking Shaka hold them tight.

Shaka: It's okay..

He take me inside, I sit down and rub my eyes, I guess it's all over I will never see my kids again and it's all my fault for allowing myself to be weak letting Lethu walk all over me and now I don't even have Sbonga who once took a bullet that was meant for me but what was I thinking going back to the same guy who had a gun pointed at me while I had my daughter in my arms, am I that desperate?

I wake up early and clean the whole house then make breakfast as a sign of apologising to my family for leaving after they told me not to and dad is happy I am still alive, he checked my wrists first if I didn't have any cuts and I don't.

I am watching a show that is interviewing the four princes and seeing Lethu makes me sick, they ask him about his wife.

Lethu: Oh my wife is back at home raising our kids.

Host: Kids? We didn't know she was pregnant.

Lethu: Oh we had a surrogate and we didn't want to put her on the spotlight.

So I am the surrogate I guess.

Host: Why surrogacy?

Lethu: We can afford it and someone was willing to carry a child for us so we said why not.

I stare at the screen in shock, when did Lethu become so cold and insensitive? Or was it always there maybe I overlooked it because I love him? I ask myself that question as I continue to stare at him, he is laughing and talking like everything is okay while I am breaking inside.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 10

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Today it's one of those days I feel really down I just want to lock myself up and shut everything and everyone out, I want to be left alone with my thoughts which sometimes is the worst thing I do to myself because I end up hurting myself.

I take my phone and look at the screen it's a picture of me holding Awethu and Phume is smiling looking at her in my arms, I smile, one day we will be together, I hope.

I take a shower then go eat breakfast mom and dad are wearing matching outfits they look great.

Me: "You guys look great."

They smile while I take pictures of them.

Nombuso: You don't want to come with us?

Me: "For what? I don't eat goat meat, it smells bad".

Dad laughs shaking his head.

Mageba: But you've never tried it because you once heard Sbongakonke saying it smells bad and makes you have a stomach bug.

I laugh, he still remembers that, Sbonga is the only brother between the four who hates goat meat and when we met he told me he got really sick once because of it and never ate it since so I didn't even want to get close to it and right now Mom and dad are going to a ceremony to a relative's house to eat goat meat.

Me: "But he was right it smells bad"

Mageba: No it doesn't and it tastes nice.

I shake my head, they laugh walking out, I eat breakfast and go back to my room. After two hours of staying there I text Sage.

Me: "Hey Mr G can you please send me the name of the prison that woman is in."

I am talking about my mother I have never seen her ever since she was sentenced and I don't even know the prison she is at.

Sage: "You want to see her?"

Me: "I think so".

He send the name and it's fairly close.

I drive there and step out walking inside I ask to see her then sit down waiting.

I see her slowly walking towards me she is so skinny but still looks good, she is beautiful, it looks like she is shocked to see me, I remain seated till she get to me she already have tears in her eyes but they don't move me at all. She sit down smiling through the tears.

Mama: Niko hey i'm so happy to see you, I have been waiting for you for so long thank you for coming.

Me: "This is not a friendly visit mama, I wanted to see how you've been doing after ruining my life".

She wipe her tears.

Mama: I'm so sorry for what I did but look at the bright side you ended up with a rich family you are a princess now so it was a blessing in disguise.

I find myself slapping her the warder next to us tell me to leave i get up.

Me: "I will never forgive you for what you did to me".

Mama: I did it for us baby, we were gonna have a nice life and you stop staying at the shelter.

Me: "That shelter was warm and had a sense of home nothing about you gave me that, I will ask my dad to make sure you rot in here".

Mama: Baby you are a princess today because of me.

Me: "You think taking money from a man to rape your deaf 8 year all daughter is a joke! This is a joke to you!"

I am getting angry walking around the table towards her I bang the table hard everyone is startled and the warders forcefully push me out, I walk to my car fuming I hate that woman and she is not remorseful at all if she has reasons for what she did.

I get in my car and breathe calming down then drive to the mall, I sit down after ordering lunch. I see one of the fours walking in with a girl I want to believe it's Sbani but the guy is laughing and you can't miss that silver so it's definitely Sbonga.

They both go and order then turn to sit down his eyes are now on me, I smile awkwardly and wave a bit, he slowly walk up to my table.

Sbonga: "Hi".

Me: "Hello, she is beautiful".

He look at me then smile a little.

Me: "Why are you smiling?"

Sbonga: That's my colleague no need to be jealous.

I smile shaking my head.

Me: "Me? Jealous?"

Sbonga: "But too proud to admit it".

He smiles even wider and his smile moves something inside my tummy, which is something I have never felt before and it suddenly makes me shy.

The girl comes to us with their order and smile offering a handshake.

Her: Tinyiko Sniko Zulu it's so good to see you in person!

She seems loud I just smile at her.

Me: "Bye Boh".

Sbonga: "I'm not getting a hug?"

I get up fixing my dress then hug him but we both quickly move away and look everywhere but each other, things are just awkward between us today I don't know what's happening.

Sbonga: Uhm I'll see you.

They say goodbye and walk away finally I can breathe it felt like decades holding my breath.

Today is that day where our two families do a gathering, when everyone is available but I haven't been going for years because Lethu didn't want me there but today I feel like going. I wake up early and start at the salon I do long twisted braids and they style it, they do my face, eyebrows and all then I buy a dress then go home, I freshen up and wear it with heels, long ass heels in my closet then take my phone I know everyone is already there because maZiyanda wants everyone in time I guess I will make a grand entrance I only need a red carpet.

I step out of the car and walk towards the table all eyes are on me, everyone is quiet even Lethu, I look at them smiling then wave a little they seem shocked. Sbonga clears his throat a hand is on his mouth that's how I can tell I look at him but he look away.

Me: "Is it okay if I join you ma".

Ziyanda: Of course baby, have a seat.

I nod, Boh get up and pull an empty chair next to him for me.

Me: "Thank you".

I sit down and Ziyanda dish up for me happily, she has a good heart.

We eat then I ask for more just for the fun of it. I keep eating everything on the table.

Lethu: A lady watches what she eats you can't just eat everything.

Me: "Says who? You?"

Lethu: Yeah.

Me: "Then tell your wife that and leave me alone".

Sbani has his hand on his mouth I know he is laughing.

Buhle: And what is she doing here?

She says coming to the table holding my daughter.

Ziyanda: she is Mageba's daughter and the mother of that baby you are holding?

Uphendulekile?(you got your answer?)

I sense a tone full of attitude maybe she doesn't like her I don't know, Ziyanda loved everyone last time I checked.

Buhle: Daddy I think the princess wants you.

Me: "Pathetic"

Lethu stares at me.

Me: "When are you getting an heir from your wife Prince Lethu, it sounded so urgent on that interview".

Sbani: Niko! Niko!

He is laughing so hard I smile at him.

Me: "Thank you for the lovely meal but I have to go."

I bow to my father and his Queen Nombuso then King Ntsika and his wife Ntsoaki then kiss maZiyanda's cheek.

Me: "Bye".

I cat walk to my car I just feel so alive today and I want to enjoy this moment because sometimes it can be short lived with people like Lethu around.

I drive around the neighborhood then stop at the park, I step out and walk towards a clean small pond there I sit down watching the birds flapping their wings so freely I tell myself that will be one day, I will be free.

Hands cover my eyes I inhale the scent and hold his left hand moving it away.

Me: "Sbonga."

I am still facing a different direction he is standing behind me then he sit next to me.

Sbonga: You still know how to tell if it's me.

Me: "You still know that if I am happy I come here".

This is my go to place when I feel all jolly and alive.

Sbonga: "I pay attention".

He brush my cheek a little then laugh.

Sbonga: Lethu almost killed you today Sniko you had him by the balls I felt him getting heated from across the table.

Me: 'Oh he'll live".

He can't stop laughing.

Sbonga: "When you left he went pink".

Me: "Shame".

He look at me with that smile and it turns something in me again.

Sbonga: You are beautiful, that dress and your hair suit you.

Me: "Thank you".

Sbonga: "Can we kiss? Just a kiss.."

I look down he moves close and put his index finger under my chin and peck my lips once then give me a kiss that leaves me out of breath, I keep avoiding his gaze but he keeps his eyes on me.

Sbonga: What do I do with all these feelings I have for you Niko? Please tell me.

He is now serious.

Me: "I don't know what to say".

Sbonga: "I don't know what to do so you're better".

We laugh at that.

Me: "I'm so messed up and I have been with your brother".

H rubs his head.

Sbonga: I want you all to myself I want to fight your demons with you I will never leave.

Me: "But you almost left me once, when you got shot and it was because of me I don't want that to happen again".

He nods.

Sbonga: I have been in a friendzone for too long qoma Ntombi(Say yes lady)

I grin.

Sbonga: You look ridiculous with that grin on your face.

Me: " I want to go away just for the day to a beautiful peaceful place I need to breathe

Sbonga: Can I come with you?

I nod.

Sbonga: Let me go leave my car at home I don't want those people tracking me I will leave my phone as well.

Me: Ok.

I stare deep at the pond it even have beautiful fish floating around.

Boh comes back and we go to some resort that has a beach front it looks amazing, I am standing at the balcony watching the waves, a hand turns me around and he gives me wine in a glass he ordered here.

Sbonga: Is this your ideal place you wished?

Me: "More than ideal, thank you."

I have only went to resorts like this with my sisters or our family gatherings.

He step closer and kiss me, we kiss for some time he is breathing out loud my body is so relaxed not like the last time I kissed Lethu I was so tense scared of what he might do next with Boh there is nothing like that.

We sit in bed, he is playing with my hand pulling my fingers.

We are kissing again and he is on top of me I can feel his hard dick my dress has rolled up to the waist.

He stop kissing me then move sleeping next to me, maybe he just realised how wrong this is, I fix my dress.

Sbonga: Uhm Niko..

I look at him.

Sbonga: uh..well I have never done it before.

Me: It?

He nods.

Sbonga: I mean sex.

I stare at him, I know he has never had a stable girlfriend all three of them were flings, yes he has only hooked up with only three girls but none of them last a week he dumps them but I thought maybe he is just practicing being a player, you know the "smash and pass" kinda thing.

Sbonga: It's just that.. no one has made me feel like this other than you.

His eyes moves to his crotch it's visibly hard looks packed too.

I don't know what to say after that.

Sbonga: "I would have wished to do it with you when we are both in it emotionally and physically."

I kiss him he moves getting on top of me again we take off our clothes, his hands are moving all over my body so gently.

He strokes his dick, he look scared he kiss me again and try to find way to my cookie with his

dick he finally stop at the entrance he is shaking a little staring down at me already sweating.

Sbonga: Do you want this Niko?

I nod and pull his neck, we kiss hard as he slowly moves all of his shaft in I close my eyes as pleasure I have never felt before hits me.

Sbonga: Fuck...

He gives me slow strokes he is still shaking sweat dripping down his face, he looks handsome.

He ups his pace but still very gentle I grab on the sheets as I feel an unexplainable wave hits me my body is trembling as he goes deeper then kiss my neck hard I feel a bit of his weight on top of me, he look down at me like he is searching for something he also looks scared.

I pull him to me and hold him tight his dick is still twitching in me.

He get off me and come back with a white towel from here and wipe me.

He sleep next to me but he is not looking at me at all, I turn his head.

Me: "What's wrong?"

Sbonga: Uhm was it okay?

He is moving his eyes around, so he thinks he was bad.

Me: "Honestly I am not just saying this but it's the truth, I have never felt something like that before, you made my knees go weak and a very intense feeling rushed in down there never in my life have I felt something like that ever".

Sbonga: You are lying, so that was your first orgasm? You know I actually felt you cum though it was my first time.

Me: That was foreign to me.

He nods and kiss my forehead.

Me: "Thank you for allowing me to break your virginity".

He laughs and end up coughing so bad I just stare at him amused, I knew he was gonna laugh.

Sbonga: "Get me water I am dying Niko".

I just smile and get off bed giving him water, he drink it up and pull me on top of him.

Sbonga: "Usile"(you're naughty)

He kiss my lips then hug me tight now I feel like crying I have never felt at peace like I do right now.

He turns and we sleep on the side, he keeps wiping my tears.

Sbonga: I will be here for as long as you want me to.

I sleep in his arms till the next day, I feel a kiss on my forehead, I open my eyes he is looking at me, his eyes are different from what I've woke up to before, I feel like they are telling me everything is gonna be fine.

Sbonga: "I never thought this was possible, waking up next to you feels surreal.

Me: "You don't regret it".

Sbonga: Not in a million years, I love you.

I move to his chest at the back of my mind there is a voice screaming that this is wrong but my feelings right now are not even in conflict, this is damn right!

We do it again before leaving and it's magical nobody told me sex is this good man! And this time he was going all in on me kissing me holding me with so much care.

Then it's back to home, he is parking my car back at the park.

Me: "You want to walk?"

He nods.

Sbonga: Unless you are okay to be seen with me since we both didn't sleep at our homes and also I don't want you to see my walk of shame when I walk inside.

I shake my head.

Me: "Really?"

Sbonga: "And my eyes are so clear I didn't sleep last night".

Me: "Guilt?"

He shakes his head.

Sbonga: "Love, from right here."

He put his hand on his chest.

Sbonga: Wanted to make sure it wasn't a dream.

Me: "Get out of my car Romeo".

Sbonga: "I prefer Bonny and Clyde and I have to remind you, see when you trashed my home you kinda trashed my window as well so at night I feel cold".

Me: "Ikhaya likababa linezindlu eziningi"(my father's home has too many rooms)

He laughs.

Sbonga: Look at you!

He pulls my nose.

Sbonga: "We'll talk right".

Me: "We will".

He kiss my lips and step out jogging away, I go home and tip toe to my room, I change and make breakfast moving my head to the beat my ears has never heard before but I have seen Sbonga a lover of "music" moving his head when he listens to it.

Dad startles me by holding me from behind picking me up a bit.

I hold him tight hugging him.

Mageba: You look unusually happy".

I just smile dishing up, later I go to my room and throw myself in bed as I see a text from Boh but frown at what is there I feel like busting my head on the wall.

" It was good while it lasted I can't believe you fell for it I would never betray my brother you

are just a very cheap, weak girl, now go jump hills"

I check the number a hundred times and it doesn't change it's Sbonga's number and just like that my mood dropped to zero I pull the covers over my head I am literally shaking, I move my blanket over my nose and mouth then close my eyes.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 11

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SBONGA

*

I run inside the hospital like I am being chased by a cheetah even Usain Bolt is no match for me right now. I am sweating as I stand in the front desk waiting for the nurse to tell me Niko's ward, Mageba called Ntsika while I was with him and when I heard she was having a seizure I took Lethokuh

le's car keys didn't have time to ask him I know he will understand.

I bang the desk the nurse jumps in fright.

Me: I'm sorry but I'm sure it's not that hard finding Princess Sniko's ward Miss.

She now look scared and I hate that, I am not like that.

Me: I'm sorry I am just too worried.

She nods and point at the book I look at it myself and run down the passage I look like a mad man.

I push the door finding Shaka and Mageba here holding her hands on her either sides.

Me: What happened she was okay this morn..she was okay..

I stop myself from making it obvious she was with me.

Mageba: That's what worries me, we used to tell if she is sad and getting suicidal but now when she mask it off it scares me.

Me: Suicidal?

Mageba: She was literally suffocating herself to death with her bed cover.

I look down maybe it's guilt of what we did eating her up..

We stay for hours and she is not waking up, my family has come and gone but not Lethu.

Mageba went to get food for us it's been too long..she flaps her eyelashes opening her eyes I get up.

Me: Niko hey I'm sorry for what we did in a resort I promise I will forget about it just don't kill yourself please.

My heart is breaking as those words comes out of my mouth.

Niko: "Get..out".

Me: But I asked you Niko if you're okay with it you said yes!

My voice is shaky screaming at her.

Shaka: Get out if you gonna scream at her like that.

Me: Sorry little King,i'm sorry.

I walk out I am blinking for my tears not to show all these people I am crying. I go back to the car and put my head on the steering wheel.

Later Mageba knocks and tell me they are leaving and will return tomorrow I nod and make my way in, her eyes change full of anger as soon as I walk in.

Me: Niko I am not Lethu please I will never hurt you.

She throws her phone at me it falls on the bed, I slowly pick it up and widen my eyes as I see a message from my number to her.

Me: I didn't write this!

Niko: "of course you want to prove that I am crazy".

Me: Niko no...you know me.

Niko: "I thought I did but after this Boh".

She covers her face with her hands I sit next to her and pull her hands she slap them away.

Me: It wasn't me!

Niko: "Only me and you know what we did so are you saying I sent that text to myself".

Me: No.

Niko: "You and your brother played me and I allowed it yet he warned me".

I sigh.

Niko: "Get up I don't want to find myself slapping you".

I get up and walk out.

I still have her phone on my hand I check the time and it was probably minutes after we came back from the resort and I was probably taking a shower, someone took my phone, I get in my car and drive home, I search for my phone where I left it but it's not here I think I have an idea who did this shit.

I barge in his room and Buhle quickly covers her body with a towel.

Buhle: What the hell! Don't you knock!

Me: You wouldn't turn me on even if you were the last woman on earth so breathe baby and let it go.

Lethu get up from his bed.

Me: I want my phone you piece of shit.

Lethu: What phone?

Me: Give me my phone Lethukuthula!

I am so angry I want to beat him together with his wife.

Me: You need help Wena you are not normal.

Lethu: Couldn't you find yourself a pretty Virgin to do it with? Niko really? Is it still tight though?

Me: Lethu I am so close to hurting you.

Lethu: Baby bro finally got laid by a hoe..

I push him to the wall and smash his head I start throwing punches at him Buhle is trying to stop me screaming her annoying voice at me, Lethu is groaning in pain but he is laughing I spit on him.

Me: From now on you're not my brother, don't even look my way because I will hurt you so bad with that stinking attitude.

Lethu: So you really slept with her huh?

I start trashing his room looking for my phone I find it in his drawers I beat the fuck out of him again then walk out.

Nadia: Hey watch it!

I am still clicking my tongue.

Nadia: Udinwe Yini?(what made you angry?)

Lethu: That he finally slept with Niko when he didn't sleep home last night.

Me: What has that got to do with you?

He is now angry but I don't give a fuck, I go to my room and charge Niko's phone for her I hope she will believe me when I explain to her tomorrow.

It's morning and I am not going to work before I talk to Sniko.

I walk in her ward she is wearing peach tracksuits she smell good I guess she just finished bathing.

Me: "You are going home today?"

She nods coldly.

Me: Please believe me sthandwa Sami(my love) I didn't send that text.

I see a little smile but she is trying to hide it.

Me: I would never do that to you not after our special first night together.

She is looking at me blankly.

Me: You believe me right?

She nods.

Me: You do?

Niko: "I know you will never hurt me."

I step closer and hug her she hugs me back.

Niko: "I'm sorry for even thinking you would hurt me please forgive me".

Wow, I hold her to my chest her arms are around my waist.

Me: I love you.

She is just holding me tight but keeps looking at me.

Me: Let's go home.

She nods and get up, I give her back her phone and we go to my car.

Me: "I found my phone in Lethu's room".

Niko: "I should have known."

Me: Can I take you out to eat?

She nods, we look for a restaurant at the mall then order, I keep holding her hand.

Me: Niko.

She nods.

Me: "Are you mine now or should I be worried that you're still in love with my brother?"

Niko: "You are my sanity when I am with you I don't have to be worried about being judged, so what would stop me from being yours."

She blinks, God's creation, My God, she is beautiful.

Niko: "What I feel for you is different from what I have been feeling for Lethu, I know you're here but with Lethu there is no telling, he wasn't with me emotionally I didn't know what insult will come next that I got used to him like that, it was okay for me".

I pull her and hug her tight as she cries on my chest, Lethu did more harm than good, he found a girl who already was struggling

emotionally and made it worse with the things he kept saying to her.

Me: Let's go.

I take her bag and hold her hand, it feels right like this not what i've watched for years with my brother.

I start by buying us a meal then we go to the park and sit there eating quietly.

Niko: "I want it to stop".

I look at her.

Niko: "The voice in my head always telling me to end my life everytime I am in pain emotionally".

Me: How about you tell me everytime you hear that voice then I will be with you and you will listen to my voice instead.

She nods and blink the tears away, I will do everything I can not to add stress in her life I want her to get better.

I drive her home and stop at the gate.

Niko: "So Lethu knows about us?"

Me: Yes.

She nods.

Niko: "I hope he won't hurt me".

Me: I will make sure he stays away from you.

She kiss me and walk inside, I drive home and join them for lunch, grandma is still around.

She moves her eyes around the table then shake her head, we all look at her

Ziyanda: Lethukuthula.

Lethu: Grandma.

Ziyanda: What does your name mean?

Lethu: It means bring peace.

Ziyanda: So how do you always do the opposite?

Lethu: What did I do grandma?

Ziyanda: Why is Sniko not allowed to see her daughters?

I feel like smiling, maybe grandma will fix that so my girl can be there for her kids, my girl, it feels so good saying that about Niko.

Lethu: She wants babies now? Who is supposed to understand when she decides she doesn't want them anymore?

Ziyanda: Is that question directed to me?

He doesn't say anything.

Ziyanda: One day I will die and I don't want to leave this mess behind.

Nadia: Mom please don't talk about dying you're too hot to die.

Grandma burst in laughter.

Ziyanda: I am getting old baby I am seated with my third generation on this table..

I smile looking at her, may God keep her for me to see my own kids.

Ziyanda: I called Niko here so we can talk, I don't like that she can't see Phume and Awethu.

Lethu: But they are my kids.

He mumbles.

Ziyanda: What was that Lethukuthula?

Lethu: Nothing gran..

Ziyanda: Ngizokusakaza ngempama mina.(I will slap you)

Lethu: I'm sorry.

Buhle: How do you treat Lethu like a child he is married with kids.

Miyah: Are you perhaps questioning our parenting?

Buhle: No but can you at least treat him a little different from his wifeless brothers.

Miyah: Now you are telling us what to do with our kids?

Lethu: Mama..

Miyah: I'm just asking.

I see Mageba's car driving in and he step out, he goes at the passenger seat and open for his

daughter Niko, I am staring at her as she smiles looking at her dad, they hold hands coming towards us, they both bow greeting Ntsika then us, Niko's eyes moves around the table then stop at me, she smile looking away I let out a silent chuckle, oh she's mine alright.

They sit down.

Ziyanda: Mageba Ntsika told me about your concerns which is Niko not being able to see Phume and wethu which I think is not fair and I agree it sometimes may trigger Niko's mental state which we don't want to happen.

Mageba nods, at least someone sees it.

Ziyanda: So I Ziyanda Lukhele Gumede say Niko is allowed to see her daughters anytime of day she wants in this house that I built with my late mother's money, anyone has a problem with that please raise your hand..

Ntsika starts laughing.

Ntsika: Really Pink?

Ziyanda: I need to know so people can pack their shit and leave.

Lethu: You are chasing me out?

Ziyanda: You're the one who's got a problem with what I'm saying? If yes then damn right I am chasing your ass out and see if you will survive not money wise but ancestrally.

I can't stop myself I laugh out loud, Ntsika is in tears and so is Sbani.

Ziyanda: So Prince Lethu what is it gonna be?

Lethu: Fine she can see them.

Ziyanda: Not that we needed your approval but thank you.

Grandma is on fire today.

Niko: "Can I see them now please".

Everything about her is sexy to me even the way she moves her hands when she speaks her language.

Grandma nods.

Lethu: I will come with you.

Now that doesn't sit well with me, he get up and go to where Niko is seated, he take her hand I feel like he is doing all this to spite me, Niko slowly pull her hand from him then walk away, he follows her.

Minutes pass I keep looking at the door that they will walk out but nothing then we hear a scream we all get up and run inside Niko is on her knees and Awethu is on the floor crying hysterically, Lethu is staring down at them.

Ziyanda: Lethu what happened?

Lethu: This is exactly why I don't want her to see my kids, she dropped her!

I look at Niko she has her head bowed down and her hands are shaking, I kneel in front of her as grandma take Awethu on the floor.

I pull her chin up, her eyes are red but she is not crying.

Me: Baby..

Niko: "He...pushed...me, he made me drop her, I almost killed her".

Tears start flowing.

Niko: "I keep messing up".

I shake my head.

Me: Lethu did this not you.

Niko: "I'm scared it's coming".

I pick her up and take her to my room, she sit in bed I stand in front of her staring deep in her eyes.

Me: You know I love you right?

She nods.

Me: And killing yourself will hurt me, you want to hurt me?

She shakes her head.

Me: Then stop thinking about it everytime something bad happen, I love you Sniko.

She wipe her tears.

Me: You feel better?

Niko: "Yes, thank you".

She is still shaking.

Niko: "Can I see if she is okay?"

I nod, we walk out and everyone is at the lounge Lethu is talking.

Lethu: My kids life matters to me more than anything.

I shake my head, he was willing to hurt his daughter to make Niko look crazy.

Lethu: Niko needs a lot of help before she can even try being a mom.

Niko: "He is right, I do need help, but so does he".

She points at Lethu.

Niko: "The sooner he gets help the better for my kids, this entitlement and ego he has is not normal."

Lethu: "Are you saying I am crazy like you?"

Niko: "I'm not a doctor I can't diagnose you but you have issues probably bigger than mine".

Lethu: Don't fuck with me Niko.

Niko: "Oh never again"

She look at me and smile a little I chuckle.

Niko: "Ma thank you for allowing me to see my kids but know that I didn't drop her he pushed me so I can drop her"

Ziyanda: You did what!

Lethu: I told you she is crazy you all saw her having one of her episodes, she dropped her.

Nkanyezi: Tell the truth Lethukuthula, did you push her to make her look bad?

Lethu: No!

Me: Of course you wouldn't say yes.

Lethu: Shut up! Shut up Sbongakonke! You are the problem here! Why did you sleep with the mother of my kids and now she wants to kill my kids so she can have yours!

I look at him confused.

Me: Grandma the sooner he gets help the better.

Lethu: Why would you sleep with someone your brother have kids with huh! Why are you getting between us Sbonga!?

Me: getting between who?

Lethu: Me and Niko, she always come back to me.

Me: Well maybe not this time brother.

Lethu: We will see about that.

I look at Niko, what if it happens again and she go back to him, they have history and they have kids.

Mageba and Niko left, I am in my room thinking about what Lethu said, Niko wouldn't go back to him and hurt me, no.

My phone beeps I take it it's Niko.

Niko: "Schools are closing where are you taking me for a vacation?"

I chuckle.

Me: "Where do you want to go?"

Niko: "Suprise me and make bookings".

I laugh a little, is this how girls ask for vacations or I just got myself a rare one

I search beautiful places for holidays then book one at Umhlanga, I want local don't really like traveling far away from home.

It's our first day at Umhlanga we are eating good food and drinking some wine, I have never done this with anyone it feels good.

Niko: "You know these are the things I always wished to do with my boyfriend".

Me: You asked me, why couldn't you ask Lethu?

She look sad.

Niko: I don't know.

Me: Were you always scared of him?

She shakes her head.

Niko: When we were still kids I wasn't and the first few months when we started dating it was great but then it changed when he

wanted extreme foreplays so I can say sex changed everything about our relationship.

I nod.

She sit on my lap wrapping her arms around my neck and kiss me, she take off my top, I take off her dress and move us to bed, she get on top of me my dick deep in her she is slowly moving her waist I am groaning in pleasure this feels amazing, she ups her pace I grab her waist and we both move in the same pace I cum and flip us not removing my dick I start all over again going faster then cum again I catch my breath sleeping next to her.

Me: Thank you for being here with me.

We stay for the whole week and it's been amazing our phones are off we don't want any stress it's just us here.

We are in bed naked after we made love.

Me: So Uhm do you think you will have more kids in future?

Niko: Oh most definitely I want a big family so I want three more.

I smile I thought she won't want any more babies after what Lethu did to her.

Me: that's good.

Niko: How many kids do you want?

Me: Five.

She nods smiling.

Niko: You would make a great dad, you have a good heart.

Me: Thank you.

We pack our stuff and go to my car, I switch on my phone first messages comes flooding, I check mom's first.

Pamella: "Your brother has been involved in a car accident, come home I have been trying to call you".

I frown, which brother, I call Landi.

Nadia: Boh..

Me: What's going on?

Nadia: Lethu was involved in a car accident last night but it's not bad he is going to be fine.

Me: Oh I'm on my way.

Nadia: Ok.

Niko: "Is everything okay?"

Me: Uhm Lethu was involved in an accident but they said he will be fine.

She nods, I thought maybe she will panic and want to see him.

I drop her off first then drive to the hospital, I walk in his ward he is awake and has a few cuts.

Me: What happened?

Lethu: As if you care, you are the last one to come to see me but you call yourself my brother, fucking Tinyiko is more important to you.

Me: You should have died man, a world would be a better place.

Lethu: i'm not going anywhere before I see you and your hoe suffer brother.

Me: Let it go, she doesn't love you anymore let it sink in bro.

Lethu: Oh no brother I don't care I just want to hurt the both of you and I will, I will break your little girlfriend and you will watch her die slowly right in front of you.

Me: Lethu you should stop because I am not afraid to kill you so Niko can have peace.

He laughs.

Lethu: Peace..yeah right.

Niko and I are so much in love we are together every chance we get and I am tracking her whereabouts just to make sure she is safe I don't trust my brother, he has been too quiet ever since he came back from hospital.

I am seated with my brothers and the siblings, Langa, Nadia , Ntsika and Nkanyezi.

Ntsika: You want to talk Sbongakonke?

I clear my throat nodding.

Me: Uhm I want to propose.

They look at each other.

Me: And I need your blessings.

Nkanyezi: Uhm propose to who?

Me: I want to propose to Tinyiko.

Nadia: So it's true that you have been with her?

Me: Yes.

Nadia: Yhoo.

Me: Please I want to marry her.

Lethu: Over my dead body.

Me: King...

He sighs shaking his head.

Me: Please.

Nadia: Are you sure you love her or you just want to fix the mess your brother made with her.

Me: I didn't just love her yesterday Landi, I have been in love with her for years, and it's not about Lethu, nothing I do with Niko is about him, he is one irrelevant piece of crap to us.

Sbani: Oh damn!

Lethu: It won't be happening, never.

I chuckle and take out the ring on my pocket.

Me: I already have a ring I just need a blessing, a go ahead..

They look amongst each other and Lethu is so angry.

Nkanyezi: Well if it's love then who are we to stop you I mean if Niko is happy with you then go ahead, she deserves happiness after everything that has been happening to her.

Me: Thank you dad, thank you.

I look at King he nods and that's all I needed. I rush to Mageba's house and find them sitting outside at the veranda I bow.

Me: Zulu Mageba, if what I am about to do here is an insult please don't hesitate to throw me out.

He nods, I go to Niko and go on my knee then take out the ring, she stares down at me with her eyes popped out.

Me: I have always known that I would want to make you my wife I just needed a chance and now that I have it I don't want to let it pass, so Sniko please will you marry me, I already asked the blessings from my family I just need you to say yes.

She is still shocked.

Niko: "You want me to be your wife?"

Me:: Yes more than anything.

She look at her dad, he smile looking at her.

Niko: "Yes".

Me: Give me your hand phela.

She smile giving me her left hand I put on her ring she stares at it then at me, I get up and hug her.

Me: Thank you.

Niko: "I feel like this is a prank".

Me: It's not believe me.

Mageba get up and shake my hand.

Mageba: I am choosing to trust you so don't disappoint me.

Me: I won't.

She keeps looking at her ring then look at me, I hold her in my arms, It may look like I am moving too fast but I am a man who knows what he wants and that is Niko as my wife.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 12

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I have been looking at the ring in my finger for the whole day, I still can't believe Sbonga proposed to me but I won't lie I am so happy about it, he treats me like a queen, he checks on me every chance he gets and also he doesn't think I am crazy whenever I have one of my episodes but tries to help me go through them.

My phone vibrates I take it and smile at AA text from Boh.

Sbonga: "I don't feel like sleeping alone while I have a fiance, do you think it's right?"

I send one back.

Me: "I don't think it's right, maybe a fiance can allow you to sneak in".

I know he is laughing at that, he loves to laugh like their uncle King Ntsika that man laughs till tears come out of his eyes.

Sbonga: "You want the King to kill me, I haven't even paid what's due to him so I can't sneak in".

Me: "He won't see you come on, I miss you".

Sbonga: "Ok I will come but very late".

I smile and get up changing my bed covers not that they are dirty but this is my husband to be he should be comfortable. I clean my room then go eat dinner.

Nombuso: Girl you are glowing like that ring on your finger.

I smile shyly.

Nombuso: I am happy for you Sniko saMageba.

Me: Thank you mah.

Nombuso: I can't wait to see your big day.

She looks so excited.

Later I open the backdoor for Sbonga he walk in and go to my room, I walk in and lock he push me to the door kissing me then pick me up.

Sbonga: Thank you so much for saying yes baby.

We get in bed he is holding my left hand looking at the ring.

Sbonga: "Do you like it?"

I shake my head.

Sbonga: Uhm you can give it back I will get a new one, uh maybe you should show me the one you love then I will buy it I'm sorry I don't know anything about rings.

He looks so sad, I kiss him so he can calm down.

Me: "I love the ring Sbonga and I love you".

Sbonga: You mean it?

Me: "I mean it".

I can see that he is relieved he really wants to please me.

I sleep in his arms it always leaves me at peace.

He kiss my lips I open my eyes looking at him.

Sbonga: I have to go before your parents see me.

I sit up, he is putting on his t-shirt.

Sbonga: Get up and walk me out Niko.

Me: "What time is it?"

He look at his watch.

Sbonga: 4 o'clock.

I widen my eyes

Me: "So you didn't want to sleep alone only to leave me this early Boh".

Sbonga: Come on baby I don't want to seem disrespectful to your dad..

I sulk he comes to bed and hold my hand.

Sbonga: Angithi we have the rest of our lives together.

Me: "I guess.."

Sbonga: You guess?

I roll my eyes.

Sbonga: I will see you later ok.

Me: "Ok"

He kiss me, I get up he hold my waist.

Sbonga: I love you.

Me: "I love you too".

I walk him out then go back to my room i quickly step back as I see Lethu sitting in my bed holding my phone in his hand, I try to reach the handle but he grabs me and push me to bed.

Me: "Please don't hurt me".

He turns the key I am shaking like a leaf moving back from him, I look at the door the handle is moving that means Sbonga is back, Lethu is in front of me I push him back hard and run to the door banging it he pull me back and squeeze my neck pinning me down in bed,

I am trying to fight him off, I see him moving away with full force Sbonga is on top of him punching him, the cops are here maybe my dad called them or Sbonga, they pull Sbonga from Lethu, he is shaking in anger his face is red sweat dripping down his face, I have my hand on my neck it hurts. They pull a bruised and bleeding Lethu up and cuff him.

Sbonga haven't looked my way not even once, dad sit next to me and pull me to his chest, I hold him tight I am still shaken, this means he has been in my house waiting for Sbonga to leave so he can kill me, dad needs to take him out of our system but he has to do that to all four brothers then I will open the gate for Sbonga myself.

The cops are gone with Lethu and Sbonga's head is on the wall still haven't looked my way, dad has left my room.

I get up and hold him from behind, he turns and hold me he is still shaking his heart is beating so fast.

I sit down he is wiping his eyes they are red, he was definitely crying.

He finally sit next to me.

Sbonga: What if I didn't forget my phone here, what would have happened to you! He was gonna kill you.

Me: "But you came back, you are always there to save me."

He shakes his head his eyes are teary.

The next day we are seated in the lounge with the Gumedes and Nadia keeps shaking her head.

Mageba: I'm afraid I have to take all of you out of my security system for the safety of my daughter, if any of you wants to come to my house you will call first.

Luyolo walk in with his hand on his pocket and scan the room it's been too long without seeing him.

Luyolo: Come here.

I get up and stand in front of him, he pulls me to a tight hug then look at me his hands are on my shoulders.

Luyolo: You're okay?

I nod.

Luyolo: I'm sorry, but I am here now and I will fix this.

Me: "Thank you".

He pull my hand I sit down next to him.

Luyolo: Mageba.

Dad nods.

Luyolo: I'm sorry for what Lethu did I will take care of him.

Mageba: Good.

Sbonga is still not okay, and I feel like he is avoiding me but I will give him his space, Lethu went to the palace Luyolo forced him maybe he will come back changed.

I take a walk past Gumedes house I am just looking down thinking about my life I feel a hand gentle turning me around its Sbonga.

Sbonga: Hi.

I just look at him.

Sbonga: Are you good?

Me: "Yes".

I turn to walk away but he hold my hand.

Sbonga: Uhm..I..

Me: "What? You don't want to marry me anymore?you can have your ring back.

I take off the ring but he quickly stop me.

Sbonga: No, I still want to marry you Niko, I'm sorry.

Me: "Three days without contacting me, or you blame me for Lethu leaving".

Sbonga: I wouldn't blame you for that come on baby I was just..I just felt really bad for what happened to you I blamed myself I shouldn't have tried to leave that early and..

He wipe his face.

Sbonga: Please forgive me.

Me: "I thought you don't want me anymore".

Sbonga: I want you and my family is coming month end to pay Lobola.

I nod and hug him, I missed him so much.

People are busy buying their outfits for my traditional wedding at the end of the month, yes Sbonga will pay Lobola and we will do a traditional wedding same day.

Today I am meeting with my doctor to get the loop removed. He removes it and I drive back home I find Ntsoaki standing by our gate shaking.

Me: "Ma are you okay?"

Ntsoaki: I need to speak to your father.

I open the gate and she walk in first I drive my car in.

We are sitting in the lounge with my whole family and Ntsoaki is standing at the centre still shaking.

Ntsoaki: The Lobola should be accepted by her blood brother not you Mageba.

We just stare at her.

Ntsoaki: Her blood brother should accept the lobola.

She keeps repeating that then walk out, we look at each other.

Me: "Where will I get my blood brother? This means I won't get married right".

Dad seems stressed now.

Mageba: I guess we have to look for your family.

Me: No I don't want another family you are my family.

Mageba: You heard what Ntsoaki said Sniko, we need to meet your mother.

So today we are meeting my "mother" in prison I am with dad.

Mama: To what do I owe this visit from the whole King.

She says smiling I want to smack her face.

Mageba: Can you tell us anything about Niko's father we need to talk to him.

She laughs.

Mama: Honestly I don't know who he is.

Mageba: Your daughter is getting married can you do this one thing for her and tell us what we need to know.

Mama: I don't know who her father or her mother is.

I look at her confused.

Mageba: What do you mean?

Mama: I gave birth to a child with albinism and I was scared of what the people of my community would say when I came home with her because having an albino child was an

abomination and also not safe so I did an exchange and took Tinyiko instead of her.

I stare at her in shock

Me: "What?"

Mageba: That is crazy!

Mama: I wanted to save my daughters life and Tinyiko was one of the abandoned child anyway.

Me: "Yet you sold me oh you have such a good heart don't you".

Mageba: Now where do we start.

We go back home then I go meet Sbonga.

Sbonga: Did you find anything.

I shake my head.

Me: "Only that she is not my mother".

I explain to him what that woman said and he is shocked.

Sbonga: So what do we do?

Me: " Cancel the wedding I guess".

He squints his eyes.

Sbonga: Ufuna ukuxabana nami?(you want us to fight?)

Me: "Ufuna ngithini?(What do you want me to say)

Sbonga: Don't get cheeky with me Miss Zulu you gonna have a problem.

Me: "What are you going to do?"

He literally lift me up putting me on his shoulder and go towards the sea I am trying to get off I am scared of the sea, like I don't understand it at all and the story I heard about it moving apart for dead people to cross over at night freaks me out he knows this.

He finally put me down I look behind me water is stopping too close I am crying real tears and he is laughing his lungs out, why is this water even moving like that!

I push him away from me and walk away, he stands in front of me still laughing.

Me: "I hate you".

He wipe my tears and kiss my forehead.

Sbonga: Oh you made my day Sniko.

Me: "You are not funny at all or even handsome".

Sbonga: Kuhlanguanaphi ke lokho?(What does that have to do with this?)

He laughs again.

Sbonga: I don't understand why are you so scared of such a peaceful place baby, the sea waves are beautiful.

Me: "I am sure it's because those creatures under the sea are moving around, I don't trust this place".

He is having the time of his life laughing at me.

Me: "Go away".

We go home with him still laughing, I walk inside and find Shaka standing by the window looking deep in thoughts I tap his shoulder.

Me: "Are you okay?"

Shaka: "Can you give me your right hand?"

I show him confused he hold it tight.

Shaka: "The ancestors are trying to communicate with me, they say we mustn't look far".

Me: "Look far for what?"

Shaka: "The blood brother".

He is still holding my hand staring deep in my eyes I feel uncomfortable what is happening with him. He finally let go and walk away just like that.

Late at dinner he look at dad.

Shaka: Your late wife only had your brother's kids?

Dad stares at him then nod.

Shaka: Are you sure?

Mageba: Why are we talking about this?

Shaka: Niko is my sister.

Mageba: Of course she is.

Shaka: My blood sister.

We all look at him like he is crazy.

Mageba: That is not possible.

He takes his phone and make a call and few minutes later Letlotlo walk in and bow a little, we all go to the lounge he kneels.

Mageba: Shaka just told me Niko is his blood sister what is going on?

Letlotlo: The ancestors haven't said anything so I guess we can try and find out ourselves.

He tell me and Shaka to kneel then cut our palm spilling our blood on the floor, he starts shaking the smoke of the incense fills the room after a while it's clear we look at our blood it has become one, it merged we look at Letlotlo.

Letlotlo: Prince Shaka is right my King,they are brother and Sister.

Mageba: But how?

Letlotlo just packs his things and walk out just like that I guess that we will have to find out on our own.

We go back to my mother and ask for the name of the hospital then go there asking for the records of years ago from when I was born, my dad, Shaka and I are sitting down we've been looking for over an hour but we can't find any clues we don't even know what we are looking for, the files even have dust. Dad has been staring at the file in his hands for too long.

Shaka: Dad is everything okay?

He look at me then back at Shaka.

Mageba: Uhm..I...we..we have to go.

The movement of his lips shows he is stuttering.

We walk out but he goes to some doctor's office and we all sit down.

Mageba: I need to do a DNA test, all three of us.

Shaka and I are looking at him confused but the doctor take our samples.

Mageba: I need the results tomorrow is that possible?

The doctor agrees to speed it up for him at a price of course.

We go back home dad seems distant.

Shaka: What did you find dad?

He doesn't answer, I don't think he even heard him.

I go to bed after sending a text to Boh saying goodnight and telling him how much I love him because I really do.

The next day we are waiting at the doctor's office for the results, he walk in and give dad the papers, dad is staring down at them and the papers are shaking and so are his hands.

Shaka: Mageba..

He look at us.

Mageba: You are both my kids.

Shaka: But how?

Mageba: She is your half sister, Ntombi's mother, my late wife gave birth to her but left her at the hospital.

He wipe his forehead shaking his head.

Mageba: That woman hated me, She took my kids away from me, first it was Nomonde then Sniko! She should have gave me my daughter not make me raise her kids with my brother while mine suffer out there without me!

I still don't get it, I am just looking at him crying, seeing an old man cry is very sad I want to cry too.

Mageba: How did I miss this all these years!

Shaka taps my shoulder I look at him I must have zoned out.

Me: "So you are my biological father?"

He nods.

Mageba: I'm sorry I didn't see it all these years, I'm sorry I wasn't there for you when you were a baby I..

He breathe out.

Mageba: Please forgive me Mageba, Zulu omuhle, Sthuli sikaNdaba.

Me: "So I am a real princess?"

Mageba: Yes you are, this explains how much it rained when I took you to the palace for the first time but I didn't pay attention I thought it's because I was home.

Me: "Ntombi is my half sister?"

He nods.

Me: "You are my real dad, like for real"

Shaka smack my face.

Mageba: Hey don't do that to my daughter!

It feels weird seeing him say that now that I just found out I am his real daughter.

He drive home, Nomonde and Ntombi are here, we step out and hug them then go inside.

Ntombi: So did you find anything about Niko's family so we can continue with the wedding planning.

Mageba: We are her family.

Nomonde: Yeah but dad you know what she means.

Mageba; She is your little sister, Nokwanda, Ntombi's mother left her at the hospital when she was born.

Ntombi: NO!

She exclaims.

Mageba: She probably found out she was mine not my brother's baby then left her because she wanted only my brother's kids.

Monde: So all along we stayed with Niko but didn't see that she is a true Zulu! Shame on us.

I smile as they hug me excitedly.

It's the day of the negotiations early in the morning I am sitting in my bed looking at my ring smiling I am getting married today.

My phone indicates a message and it's from the last person I wanna hear from.

Lethu: "Congratulations I hope it lasts".

That's it, this is my day so I will just ignore his ass then send my husband to be a text.

Me: "I miss you".

I didn't see him yesterday because we were both busy with our final fittings.

Sbonga: "I can't wait to make you mine".

Me: "Can't I see you before the whole thing?"

Sbonga: "No baby, that is said to cause bad lucks so I will see you at the palace today".

Me: "Sbonga ngiyakukhumbula phela"(but I miss you)

I am so close to tears I don't know why I miss him so much.

Sbonga: Sthandwa Sami bekezela sobonana soon.(My love be patient we will see each other soon)

I toss the phone in bed and go to the bathroom, I shower after crying so hard then wear my dress, Mom walk in and sit next to me, she is smiling.

Nombuso: Were you crying tears of joy?

I shake my head, she frowns.

Nombuso: The Gumedes are here already baby why aren't you excited.

Me: "Sbonga doesn't want to see me now".

Nombuso: But baby he can't see you before the wedding.

We're I just cry once again, she pull me to her lap brushing my back.

Nombuso: Maybe this is just nerves Niko you gonna be okay.

I nod wiping my face, my sisters walk in, I still can't believe they are both my half sisters from

mom's side being Ntombi and dad's side being Nomonde.

Monde: Wamubi so eshada lo? ukhalelani!(Why is she so ugly while getting married?, why are you crying?)

Nombuso: She wants to see Sbonga.

Monde: Ayi!! Ungasihlanyeli Wena!(No way don't be crazy!)

I know she is shouting I cry again why is she shouting at someone who is about to get married is she crazy.

Monde; Oh man I'm sorry princess kaMageba okay..

She hugs me, I just hate all this crying I am doing but I just can't stop myself.

Dad walk in and look at us.

Mageba: What did you do to my daughter Nomonde.

She gasps.

Monde: Why me dad!?

Mageba: It's got to be you! Sniko Sam your brother has just finished accepting the lobola from your husband's family now WWE need to get ready to leave but before that you all need to serve them some breakfast.

Me: "So it's done? The first part?"

He nods I hug him tight I am happy now.

The cars are a convoy all the way to the Palace I am now wearing a traditional Zulu wedding attire I do look beautiful even I say so myself.

We step out of the cars as stand by the gate. A crowd from inside comes to us they seem jolly and singing there is a camera man here capturing these moments I wish I can hear everything happening but still I am grateful that at least I can see it and it's my day.

They make way and my oh my, my Zulu man emerges wearing a Zulu attire (Ibheshu) and I am shocked to see that he has a tattoo on his upper body just a little writing and it seems like Chinese letters I don't know, he look so

good, he smile I am all shy as he comes close and bow, I am a princess after all.

Sbonga: Ndabezitha.

He bows to my father.

Sbonga; May I?

Dad nods as he take my hand we walk inside the crowd is behind us.

There is a pastor waiting for us there, we stand looking at each other, he is smiling I just want to hug him.

The pastor open with a prayer which I don't see because I am looking at my handsome ever smiling man. I see him taking a mic then shake his head looking at his two brothers Lethu is not here.

Sbonga: Sbani come here.

He gives him the mic then look at me.

Sbonga: "I want to use the language you understand better and Sbani will translate for everyone".

My tears just roll down, he wipe them.

Sbonga: "I never thought this day would come I have been waiting for it for so long, I knew you were mine the day first day I saw you I know we were just kids but my heart knew thank you for giving me this chance I won't mess it up".

I smile.

Me: "Thank you for loving me even when I was at my worst, you know how to bring me back from that dark place and the love you show me it saves me from a lot, I love you so much Gumede".

The pastor ask for the rings and bless them, we put them on after he take off my engagement ring, his eyes move to the entrance Lethu is standing there with his hands on his pockets he look angry but there is nothing he can do I am Mrs Sbonga Gumede now.

Lethu: King! Uphi uNtsika(where is Ntsika)

People look shocked, he is obviously shouting.

Ntsika get up and so are his siblings they are looking at him.

Lethu: So there are favourites here! My wife has never stepped foot here and we never did a traditional wedding but here is Sbonga with this..this..

He looks at me like I am just a piece of shit.

Lethu: He came with this thing here and you allowed him to do a traditional wedding why Ntsika, tell me why!?

Ntsika: You are addressing me like that?

Lethu: Damn right I am.

Ntsika walk up to him and a slap lands on his cheek, I feel really dizzy like I have been standing for too long.

I just walk away and find an empty room, I sit down fanning myself I feel sick, Sbonga walk in and kneel in front of me.

Sbonga: You're okay?

Me: "I feel sick".

Sbonga: Look baby I'm sorry about what happened, grandfather promised he won't bother us but..

Me: "It's okay I don't feel sick because of that I don't know what's wrong with me".

He nods, I touch his tattoo on his chest he look at my hand.

Me: "What does it mean?"

Sbonga: Sniko.

Me: "Don't lie".

Sbonga: I'm not.

He get up and kiss me, we end up in bed naked with him making slow love to me I am holding him tight, once we are done he wipe us then look for something, he comes back to bed with his phone I guess this is his room I didn't pay much attention I was too sick. He shows me the Chinese alphabets and translation he was right the name is Sniko, the man has my

name on his chest, he is definitely my forever, I hope he is, I am Mrs Sbongakonke Gumede now.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 13

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SBONGA

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I am the happiest man alive after marrying the love of my life a week ago, she is my wife traditionally and legally because after our traditional wedding we went to sign in court, I am not a fan of a white wedding at all. We are still at the palace so Sniko can do her duties as

a wife so my ancestors can see that she is here.

I just woke up I move my hand next to me but I don't feel my wife, I quickly open my eyes sitting up, I don't want her to move around here without telling me because I don't trust Lethukuthula even though grandpa dealt with him last time he tried to ruin my wedding and told us he won't bother us again I still don't want to let my guard down when it comes to my wife, her safety is my number one priority.

I get up and rush to the bathroom I sigh in relief when I find her there but frown when I see her washing the t-shirt I was wearing yesterday it's early in the morning, it's not even six o'clock yet and we don't do washing in our bathrooms.

Me: Baby..

I touch her shoulder, she turns.

Me: "Why are you washing my t-shirt so early".

Niko: "I couldn't sleep your cologne was suffocating me".

Me: It smells bad?

Niko: "No but I think you put too much on yesterday I can't take it".

I nod.

Me: I'm sorry I didn't realise I sprayed too much.

She continues then try to walk out but I stop her and hang it in the bathroom then we go back to bed.

Me: I don't want you walking out of this room while it's still dark outside ok.

She nods.

Niko: "I just couldn't sleep".

I pull her close and hold her, seconds later she is out sleeping peacefully with her hand on my chest.

I wake up first and leave her in bed because she woke up early she needs more few hours to sleep.

I go join my family for breakfast I will take Niko's to our bedroom.

Me: Good morning.

Ziyanda: Morning where is Niko today, our early bird.

Me: She woke up early and went back to bed so I let her sleep.

She nods smiling.

Ziyanda: You love her don't you?

I look down smiling.

Me: Yes I do.

Ziyanda: I can tell, you make it too obvious just like your grandpa, he loves me can't even hide it right Lu.

Grandpa laughs and kiss her cheek, I want Niko and I to be like them, never get tired of each other and count over 30 years of marriage

with no breakups, I look up to my grandparents with a lot of things, success, marriage, family and a whole lot more.

I take her breakfast and go to our room, I find her looking at herself in the mirror but her mind is not here, I stand behind her and massage her shoulders, she look at me through the mirror frowning.

Me: What?

She turns looking up at me.

Niko: "I told you not to spray too much of your cologne, it gives me dizzy spells".

Me: But I didn't spray any today.

Niko: "So I'm crazy because I can smell it all over you".

Me: No.

Niko: "Then what?"

She is getting angry and I don't understand why.

Me: I will change Niko Yhoo.

I take off my t-shirt and look for another one, I keep smelling them they all have my scent so I don't know what to wear I just sit in bed like that, she goes to my clothes and open my bag, next thing she is on her knees vomiting I rush to her.

Me: Baby what's wrong?

She is gagging, she is even having hiccups I get her water then clean up the floor she is looking tired sitting in bed, next thing she takes my whole bag and walk out, I go to Nadia.

Me: Landi can you borrow me one of your t-shirt please.

Nadia: Not my experience shit Boh.

I stare at her.

Nadia: My clothes are really expensive.

Me: Did you hear me asking?

Nadia: I will punch your tooth out and you will need another silver to fill it up.

Me: Now you're being personal.

She laughs, I got a silver U-shaped filler on my tooth because some boy in our teenage years punched me and broke my tooth.

Nadia: Where are your clothes?

Me: Probably all in the washing line.

Nadia: Why?

Me: Apparently I spray too much cologne and it makes Niko sick.

She burst in laughter.

Me: It's not funny Landi she literally went sick earlier vomiting and all.

Nadia: Oh man that is bad.

Me: So your t-shirt..

Nadia: No.

Me: But you wear your twin brother's clothes all the time!

Nadia: You have your own brothers Neh.

I sigh and go to their closet I take the t-shirt and leave the room she is shouting at me, she wears men clothes so I will take them! I go check on my wife and she is really hanging all my t-shirts in the washing line.

Me: But we are supposed to be leaving today are they gonna dry.

She shrug her shoulders, I follow her to our room she takes my cologne and throws it at the dustbin now that's some "expensive shit" right there.

Me: Sniko you can't just throw away that.

Niko: "So you'd rather watch me die?"

Me: Where have you ever heard someone dying because of a cologne Sniko?

She rolls her eyes taking her food.

We eat lunch together before we leave for Durban.

Lethu: Hey my leftovers pass me some salt there!!

He shouts I lift my eyes up he is looking at my wife with a huge grin.

Luyolo: Lethukuthula!

Lethu: What!?! She is my leftovers grandpa I used to bend her over as well.

Me: Animkhuze (reprimand him) before I turn this table upside down with him under it.

Luyolo: That's it, you see that mental institution Niko used to go to, you my friend are going there.

Lethu: Ngeke ukubone lokho(That's not happening) I am not crazy like this slut.

I slowly get up and go around the table I grab him and turn him around.

Me: You want to see crazy?

He chuckles, I punch his throat hard he gasp for air I grab his arm and go to grandfather's gym room locking it I punch him again then take a chain rolling it on my fist then start beating him up with it, he is wincing like a dog

on the floor his white t-shirt has blood all over it someone is banging on the door I want to kill him but mom's voice stop me.

Pamella: Don't kill your brother Sbonga..open this door please!

She is crying , I let go of the chain and open the door, she push me out of the way and go kneel next to Lethu who is groaning in pain, i walk out and sit outside looking down, an ambulance drive in and they go in with a stretcher then come back with Lethu, nothing in me moves I am not sorry for what I did. An ambulance drive out and so is mom's car, Niko sit in front of me and shake her head.

Niko: "I don't want this Boh".

Me: What do you mean by this?

Niko: "You turning into something you're not because of me, you almost killed him, he is your brother".

Me: Are you still in love with him?

Niko: No, and this isn't even about that, would you live with yourself if you were to kill him?

I just look at my hands they have his blood.

Niko: "I know you love him but try and ignore him when he says something about me, as long they won't kill me then let it go please".

Later we are driving back to Durban I am smelling like water if there is such because my wife threw away my cologne maybe she has to buy me one that won't "suffocate" her.

It's been a week staying at home Buhle is giving my wife a hard time with Awethu and Phume but I told her to respect her or she will pack her clothes very soon. Lethu is still at the hospital I guess I did a number on him.

I am with Nadia at the back she is drinking her beer.

Me: Are you okay?

She drink it all up.

Nadia: Pamella thinks I am taking sides between you and Lethu.

Me: Being my side?

She nods.

Nadia: There are no sides here Lethu is wrong and we can't sugarcoat that just because we don't wanna seem like we are taking sides.

Me: So you guys are not okay?

Nadia: No, she even said she will be staying at the palace, I think she wants to divorce me.

Me: What no! Mom wouldn't do that no..

She takes another beer and gulp it down she is really stressed.

Her phone rings she stares at it then give it to me it's written *My Wife*"

Nadia: Answer it..

Me: Hello ma.

Pamella: Uphi uLandile?(Where is Landile?)

Me: She is here.

I put the phone on speaker.

Nadia: Pamella..

Pamella: Lethu didn't come there?

Me: Isn't he at the hospital?

Pamella: They said he discharged himself last night.

Me: And he didn't go to the palace?

Pamella: No Sbonga he didn't.

I brush my head, I feel like my wife's life is in danger, she was free here with Lethu back home.

Pamella: Are you going to look for him Landile?

Nadia: Yeah and you should come home Ella.

Pamella: I am driving there now.

I get up and go look for my wife but I can't find her in the laundry room where she was at, I look everywhere but I can't even find the kids or Buhle they are all not here, If they got along I would say they went out, I walk out my wife's car is here but Buhle's car isn't here now I am

getting really worried. I run to our room and look for her phone it's not here and she had it on her pocket, I go check on its whereabouts on my computer and I can see the red dot is still moving from one area to another in speed which means she is in a moving car and it looks like a secluded place. I take my jacket car keys and a gun then rush to Nadia.

Me: Landi we have to go, someone took my wife it might be Lethu or his wife.

She get up, she is drunk but I need her to come with me to maybe stop me from actually killing her son today.

I drive to where the dot is showing I am trying to keep calm I will find my wife unharmed, I am just glad that I thought about keeping tabs on her for her safety.

Nadia: Hey where are you taking me?

She says looking around, this place has sugarcane all over no house at all I am freaking out as well.

Me: Niko is here.

I see a car passing mine in the opposite direction and it looks like Buhle's car. I stop my car and get off as it shows that I am close to Niko's phone, I call it but it's pointless her phone only vibrates. I look around and see it on the ground with my watch.

A gunshot makes me drop everything but I can't move.

Nadia:. Is that a gunshot?

Another gunshot leaves me shivering in fear.

Me: Niko no..

I feel paralyzed I can't move, Nadia pull me up looks like alcohol has left her system.

I am already in tears looking for my wife everywhere I don't know where the gunshot came from, another one hits I look at Nadia.

Me: He killed her Landile.

She push me out of the way and start running, I follow her, she stops on her tracks I look at

where she is looking it's Lethu with a gun on his head Niko is bleeding on the floor and so are the kids next to her.

Me: No!

I run to her kneeling next to them she is shivering.

She slowly raise her hands up but fail.

Me: Niko no don't leave me, please don't leave me.

She coughs, I feel like I am in the movie and someone will come and say cut and everything will be okay.

Nadia: Put the gun down Lethukuthula! Put it down..

I pick Niko up and run to my car with her I put her at the back then run back I take Phume but she is not breathing blood is coming out of her chest, I look at a little Awethu she is cold blood is everywhere, Niko won't survive this, she may survive the shooting but this.

I look at Nadia she is looking at Lethu who still has a gun on his head with his eyes tightly closed.

Me: You better shoot yourself before I do it myself.

Nadia push him and give him hard blown punches he falls on the floor.

Nadia: Go with Niko I will take care of all this.

I feel crazy, I run to my car and drive to town, I go straight to the hospital they take her in, I sit down thinking about those innocent babies who lost their lives, my wife who I don't know if she will survive, how can Lethu do this, how do you start shooting a baby.

The doctors and nurses are running to theatre I just let my tears fall, I didn't protect her enough I failed her.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 14

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LETHU

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I am staring at the two bodies on the ground, my kids lifeless bodies. I crawl to Phume and pick her up.

Me: I'm sorry, I'm sorry princess I wanted us to be together with your mom, she belongs with us.

I take Awethu she look so peaceful and that's all I want for them, peace.

I hear sirens I just continue to sit with my kids, Nadia took my gun before we can all have peace, I am sure Niko is at peace as well.

"prince Lethukuthula". A voice says behind me, I look back and it's an old man with cuffs hanging on his pants.

Him: Get up.

I put my babies down and get up.

Him: Turn around.

I do as he says, he put cuffs on me, I look at Nadia she is sitting on the ground with her head bowed down.

They push me to the back of the van then drive away.

I am now in the cell alone looking up, I need to know if Niko is dead so I can also kill myself then we will be with our kids.

An officer take me to an interrogation room Nadia is standing at the corner still looking down.

Detective: Prince Lethu.

I nod.

Detective: We need to ask you a few questions?

Me: Go ahead.

Detective: Earlier today we found you with your kids dead bodies, what happened?

Me: I gave them peace.

Detective: Peace?

Me: That's what I said.

The detective look at Nadia but she is not looking our way at all.

Me: My kids were being raised by a step Mom while their Mom is alive and kicking, married to my brother so I had to force her to raise them one way or another so we will raise them together in the after life.

Nadia: You had to force her Lethu! Sniko was willing to do anything to be with her daughters but you were always in the way!

Me: Is that how you see it, I did everything I can to give that girl a chance but she was too crazy I guess.

She shakes her head walking out.

The whole week ends with these people asking the same questions over and over and I am tired I just need to know if Niko is dead or alive.

A woman walk in my cell accompanied by a warder she sit in my bed smiling.

Her: It's okay you can leave us.

The warder walk away.

Her: Hi Prince Lethu.

Me: Hi.

Her: I am Doctor Precious Zindela a psychologist.

Me: Ok.

Her: How is everything in here? Are you okay?

Me: Yeah I'm okay.

Her: Can we talk about personal stuff?

Me: Like what?

Her: Your past relationship with Princess Tinyiko KaMageba.

Me: What about it?

Her: How was it?

Me: it was fine until I had to force her to accept our daughter but I failed because she is crazy.

Her: Crazy?

Me: Yes, she is always in and out of the mental institution.

She smiles.

Her: Why do you seem fine with being in here?

Me: I know my brother will try to kill me but all I just want to know is if Tinyiko made it so I can do that myself.

Her: You want to kill yourself?

I nod.

Her: Why?

Me: We couldn't be together in this life, my brother got between us so maybe in the after life we will be together with our kids.

She writes something down then look at me.

Her: Do you feel bad for killing your kids?

Me: No, I know they are at peace that's what I want for us.

She nods and get up.

Her: It was nice meeting you prince Lethu we will talk soon.

I nod.

I am taken to an interrogation room again and my family is here but not my brother.

Me: Hello.

They are staring at me I just sit back on the chair looking back at them, Ella is crying.

Ntsika: How can you do this to your own blood Lethu?

Me: I have been saying, I want only peace for them.

They shake their heads.

Luyolo: We will have to do what we should have done long time ago when you started abusing Niko.

Me: How did I abuse her?

Luyolo: The verbal abuse Lethukuthula! We saw it but turned a blind eye, who knows what you have been doing to her behind closed doors.

Me: I am no abuser if anything she is the one who hurt me rejecting my kid, hiding Awethu then marrying my brother.

Luyolo: Landile tell them to come in..

Nadia walk out and come back with three buff men wearing all white.

Me: Who are these people?

Luyolo: They are here to take you to a psychiatric hospital then after we find out

what's wrong with you, you will then serve you time you have become an animal.

Me: Animal for letting my kids rest! I am not going anywhere rather let me stay here and wait for anyone who will tell me if Tinyiko is dead or alive so I can end my life as well!

Nadia: What did I do for the ancestors to hate me like this!

She has tears in his eyes looking at me.

Nadia: You are crazy! You are fucken crazy Lethukuthula your kids are dead! You killed them in cold blood!

Me: Their mom didn't want them!

Luyolo: Take him away.

I get up and look at these men.

Me: Don't step any close or I will hurt you.

They grab me I am trying to fight but they are too strong then I feel a sting on my arm it's a syringe I feel tired and close my eyes.

I wake up in a white room and look around there is a bed and a desk only then that woman who came to me in my cell walk in.

Her: Hello Prince.

I nod.

Me: Why am I here?

Her: I want to get to know you.

I look at her she squints her eyes, she is pretty.

Her: Do you enjoy seeing someone cry?

I shrug.

Her: I have noticed that every bad thing is everyone's fault but you, have you ever done anything wrong?

Me: No everything I do I have valid reasons.

She sighs and continue to ask me a lot of questions.

They do a psychiatric evaluation for over two weeks and I am not bothered I know I am not crazy nor have any disorder they can evaluate all they want.

I am sitting with Nadia and Mom at the doctors office, she is looking at the file then she sighs looking at us.

Pamella: Is there something wrong with him?

She put the papers down.

Doctor: Yes, Me and my team have gathered that your son has NPD

Nadia: What the hell is that?

Doctor: Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

I laugh.

Me: Are you saying I am crazy?

Doctor: Narcissistic people don't see any need to apologize, they passive aggressive, find excitement when they see their victims cry or beg, they are never at fault always find a way to shift the blame to their victims.

Nadia and Pamella look at each other..

Me: Don't tell me you actually want to believe what he is saying.

Doctor: I have been asking him questions about his previous relationship and I have gathered that he has all the signs of a Narcissist.

Nadia: Lethu..

I look at her.

Nadia: Do you remember the day we found Awethu on the floor with Niko on her knees.

Me: What has that got to do with anything?

Nadia: You did it right? So she was telling the truth when she said you pushed her?

I sit back on a chair.

Me: I want to go home.

Nadia: You killed your kids Lethukuthula.

Me: Where is Niko?

Doctor: He needs help because he is becoming a danger to himself and those around him.

Me: I am perfectly fine and I need to go home.

Doctor: We still need to run some tests on him.

Nadia: So he can't go to jail?

Doctor: No, well not now, I believe there is more to this than just being an Narcissist.

They keep talking but all I want to know is if Niko is alive or not so if she is I will find a way to get out of here and kill her and myself our kids needs us on the other side.

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SBONGA

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I am drained both emotionally and physically, I don't know what to do with myself, my wife is still at the hospital but she can't breathe on her own so they are using ventilators, she hasn't woken up from the day of the shooting and I haven't left the hospital since then, I am scared of the situation she will wake up to, at home they are busy preparing for the funeral I don't want to see any of that so I prefer staying here between these cold hospital walls.

I feel a hand on my shoulder, I look up it's
Doctor Gasa he is my wife's doctor.

Doctor: Come this way please.

I nod and follow him to his office.

Doctor: How are you feeling?

Me: I don't know.

He sighs.

Doctor: So...I have some news.

I look at him so he can continue.

Doctor: Your wife is pregnant.

I stare at him in shock.

Me: She...she is?

He nods.

Doctor: But the situation she is in, not able to
breathe on her own chances of the baby
surviving are slim.

I have a lump in my throat as he says that, she
already lost two kids, she can't lose this one as
well.

Doctor: This baby depends on her to survive and that is putting a lot of pressure in her body so I suggest you consider we do a medical abortion to

He doesn't get to finish I get up and shake my head.

Me: No! You can't do that..you can't do that to her, no!

Doctor: Sbonga her situation is bad and the baby is making it worse..

I drop on my knees, I can't take all this pain I am in right now I can't.

"Boh" it's Lethokuhle, I am still on my knees tears falling on the floor.

Sbani: We are here for you brother.

They are kneeling next to me.

Letho: I'm sorry.

I want to talk but words won't come out.

Sbani: Grandma is calling you home.

Me: I can't..I can't leave.

Sbani: You will come back, please.

They help me get up and look at me.

Letho: Let's go home we will come back with you.

I nod, we walk out and Letho drive home.

The minute I step in and see a candle on the floor and grandma sitting on the mattress flashbacks of Phume and Awethu's cold body fill my head I turn and walk out, I can't stop the sob that escapes my mouth, my whole body is shaking.

Ziyanda: It's okay..

She pull me into a tight hug, I let it all out, she keeps saying everything will be okay but I don't believe her, this is too much for me.

I wipe my tears and look at her, she is crying as well.

Me: I want to see Lethu.

She shakes her head.

Me: Please, you will come with me.

She nods and walk in, she comes back with the keys and drive to the Psychiatric hospital, we walk in she ask if we could see Lethu but we should be in the same room, s we will see him through a glass window.

We sit down then he walk in and sit looking at us.

Lethu: Hi grandma I didn't think you will come see me.

Ziyanda: Kodwa yini le oyenzile Lethu.(What did you do Lethu)

Lethu: Where is Tinyiko?

I get up and bang the glass hard with my fist but it doesn't break, I wish it could so I can kill him.

Ziyanda: Sit down.

She hold my hand I sit down.

Lethu: If she is still alive tell her I am coming for her.

Me: I will kill you Lethukuthula I swear on my child's life I will kill you.

Lethu: You have a child or you are delusional?

Me: You will see delusional, when you come out of here you better run and never look back because I am baying for blood and it's your blood.

He chuckles, grandma is now crying.

Ziyanda: You broke this family apart Lethukuthula and I will never forgive you for it.

Lethu: Grandma I didn't mean to hurt you but Sbonga did this when he went after Tinyiko, you didn't stop him..

Ziyanda: You never treated Tinyiko like a human being, she deserved better.

Lethu: And better is my brother!?

He shouts.

Ziyanda: Yes! And deep down you know that too.

He get up and walk away, grandma and I go back home. I am standing by the door looking down, she brush my back.

Ziyanda: You have to do this, they are your kids since Lethu is not here and you married their Mom.

I nod and walk in, I look at the candle and huff going to sit on the opposite mattress on the floor next to Ntsika, he squeeze my shoulder.

Me: I need your help.

Ntsika: Yeah.

Me: The ancestors have been quiet for too long, I need you to talk to them for me please.

He nods.

Ntsika: They have been too quiet maybe there is something we did wrong.

I sigh.

A week pass Niko is still not waking up and tomorrow we have to bury the kids, we will

have to do it without her, we already delayed hoping she wakes up.

I am sitting next to her in the hospital bed, I touch her hand.

Me: You need to wake up my love, do it for me and our child that is inside of you.

The doctors are still on that medical abortion but I won't be signing for my child to be killed I know my wife is strong she will wake up.

Me: I know if things were different we would be happy that you are pregnant.

I chuckle.

Me.: I guess that is why you hated my cologne a little Sbonga is in there.

I sigh.

Me: I will wait for you till you wake up, I will be here and still love you like you deserve.

I get up and kiss her forehead then walk out, I can literally feel my body weight dropping

each day passing, I am tired even when I walk my joints hurt.

It's the day of the funeral I am sitting between Ntsika and Mageba who is also not doing good, his black and grey beard haven't been shaved for a while now he is a mess.

It's sad seeing two white little coffins in front of us in slightly different sizes and the fact that their Mom is not here to say goodbye, Lethu robbed Niko a lot and I am scared of the day she finally wakes up from that bed at the hospital.

I see grandpa taking grandma inside she look sick and I understand why, that woman values family more than anything in this world so with everything happening it's taking a part of her bit by bit.

We bury the little souls after that Ntsika and I go to his room and kneel burning the incense but the matches is not lighting up at all till we run out.

Ntsika: Can you go look for a lighter.

I get up and look for it then go back to him,
now the incense looks wet.

Me: What is happening?

Ntsika: I don't know what's happening
something is stopping me from burning it.

Me: But my child's life depends on this!

Ntsika: Tinyiko is pregnant?

Me: Yes and I need that child to live.

He sighs.

Ntsika: We should ask Shaka to burn it in their
side of the family, looks like we can't do
anything here

I just sit down leaning on the wall, maybe I am
not meant to be with Niko or she was not
meant to be married in this family, we brought
her nothing but pain.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 15

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SBONGA

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After trying so hard contacting our ancestors we failed, looks like they have turned their backs on me, I don't know what I did wrong but Shaka did beg his side of the family to protect Niko and our child so now we can only hope they survive.

I am sitting on her bedside waiting for her to wake up, I will wait even if it takes years, she is the only woman I will ever love in this life.

A door opens it's her doctor.

Doctor: Sbonga.

Me: Why isn't she waking up?

Doctor: Her body needs to heal and also a baby is taking a lot from her.

I sigh.

Doctor: We can still do a medical abortion before she turns 12 weeks which is in two weeks.

I huff brushing my face.

Me: Just give me a moment.

He nods walking out.

Me: Sniko please wake up baby, I don't want to lose my baby but if I have to choose then I am choosing you, Please baby don't make me choose just wake up.

I rest my head on her bed and cry until I feel a hand on my back but I don't move.

"He didn't just abuse Tinyiko emotionally but he did it to you as well, you are slowly sinking into depression and it's hurting me seeing my grandchildren like this, I worked so hard for all

of you to have it easy but I guess I can't control the future no matter how hard I work" grandma says with a shaky voice behind me.

Ziyanda: Don't allow yourself to sink into depression fight baby, for Niko, for your unborn baby, fight for me.

I lift my head up wiping my face.

Me: Why can't she wake up, I want her to wake up grandma.

Ziyanda: And she will because she knows there is someone who loves and appreciate her more than anything.

Me: Even the ancestors are quiet, what did I do wrong? Why are they quiet now that I need them.

Ziyanda: They will show up when the time is right, they always come through for us but their time is always the best time you will see.

I feel a movement on my hand I am still holding Niko's hand, maybe I am just paranoid.

Grandma moves and stand on her other side, I feel another movement and it's her hand I get up.

Me; Did you see that grandma?

She look at me confused.

Me: She moved her hand.

Grandma looks at her closely then she removes the oxygen mask.

She slowly open her eyes then move them around I am so happy I want to hold her tight, her eyes stop at me for a long time I can't stop the tears of joy, I knew she was gonna wake up.

Me: Thank you for coming back, thank you.

She doesn't say anything but she is still staring at me, no smile or anything.

Grandma calls the doctor and they ask me to walk out for a while, after an hour or so they tell me I can go in and now she is sitting up

with a pillow supporting her, Grandma is not here anymore. I sit next to her.

Me: I missed you.

She keeps her eyes on me but no movements at all.

Me: Uhm how are you feeling?

Nothing and that hurts I feel like she is angry or hates me.

Me: Please say something..

She doesn't move at all and I feel like crying.

Me: Niko I'm sorry I..

I see her moving her hands up.

Niko: "Where are my kids?"

I look down I wasn't ready for that question not now, how do I answer that, she hit the bed a little I look at her.

Niko: "I asked where are my kids?"

Me: Baby I..

Niko: "If you're not gonna answer me then call someone who will".

I nod and walk out, I don't think I can do this on my own, I call Mageba and Ntsika so they can be here with me.

Now they are here we are looking at Tinyiko who is moving her eyes between us.

Niko: "Baba"(dad)

Mageba nod.

Niko: "Where are my kids?"

Mageba opens his mouth but shakes his head , looks like words are failing to come out, she looks at King.

Niko: "King Ntsika, are my kids at your home?"

Ntsika shakes his head.

Niko: "Where are they?"

Ntsika: We..we buried..we buried them.

Niko: "What do you mean?"

Her hands are now shaking.

Niko: "I had a dream where Lethu shot them and me".

I wipe my face.

Niko: "Phume and Awethu are at home Sbonga?"

I look at Ntsika.

Ntsika: It wasn't a dream Sniko, Lethu shot them and you that's why you are here.

She stares at me, I am scared of her reaction from now because she might hurt the baby, I see her hands holding the sheet tight then tears are like waterfall on her cheeks then her hands moves to her head she literally pull her braids out then that scary sound start coming out Mageba quickly get up and sit in bed holding her tight, I am looking down as my own tears fall.

Ntsika: We need to call the doctor so they can calm her down this is not good for her or the baby.

He walk out then come back with a doctor, they inject her she falls asleep, Mageba rush out wiping his eyes, Ntsika hold my shoulders looking at me.

Ntsika: Remember you are her strength so you need to be strong for her right..

I nod.

Ntsika: I love you and you gonna be okay, both of you.

I nod again, he walk out, I stay with her watching her peacefully sleeping and I want this peace for her even when she is awake but it's impossible.

Later she wakes up and I try to help her sit up but she push me away.

Niko: "I hate you Lethu! I hate you".

She looks so angry.

Me: I'm not Lethu Niko..

Niko: "I am crazy! That is what you always wanted to prove! Get out!"

Me: Baby I'm not Lethu, it's Sbonga I am your husband we..

She slowly get off bed you can tell it hurts.

Me: Niko stop you gonna hurt yourself.

She comes to where I am sitting and pull me up she start hitting me with her fists, I hold her shoulders looking into her eyes

Me: I'm not Lethu and I will never hurt you.

She push me back I look down there is blood on the floor I look at her, she is looking around then breaks a glass and throws it at me I block it with my arms.

Me: Niko stop.

She keeps breaking things and throws it at me, I am more worried about the blood I hope it's not my baby maybe just her wound.

Nurses rush in and they try to calm her down.

Niko: " I want him out of here".

I slowly walk out with a lump in my throat, I don't blame her, seeing a person who looks

exactly like the one who killed your kids can be triggering.

I sit on the benches then walk in once the nurses tell me she is asleep.

I sit next to her for hours and when I see her move I get up so I can walk out but she hold my hand before I could, I look at her.

Niko: "Sbonga".

I blink, so she doesn't think I am Lethu now.

Me: Hey.

Niko: Are they really gone?

I slowly nod.

Me: I'm sorry I didn't find you sooner.

Niko: "Phume called me Mom for the first time that day before Buhle came and injected me with something and when I woke up Lethu was there".

Me: "I'm sorry".

Niko: "I want to die too".

Me: No.

Niko: "I want out of this misery Boh I am not meant to be happy so I might as well die".

Me: Then what about me?

Niko: "You will move on and find someone better".

Me: You are better for me Sniko I don't want anyone else.

She takes off her ring and put it on her lap.

Niko: "Divorce me".

Me: Niko please don't..

Niko: 'Please Boh you deserve much more than what I can offer you, I am too damaged..".

Me: You have all I need and you are about to give me a baby, you two are all I need.

Niko: "A baby?"

I nod.

Me: "You are carrying my child".

Her hand moves to her belly.

Niko: "I am pregnant?"

I nod.

Me: I know a lot has happened but please live for me and our child.

Niko: "I am pregnant?"

She ask again.

Niko: "What if you decide to kill this one too"..

Looks like she is back into thinking I am Lethu.

Niko: "I don't want to keep this baby only to be killed like you did with Awethu".

Me: Snap out of it Sniko! I am not my brother! I am not Lethu.

Niko: I will abort it.

I get up and hold her hand.

Me: This is not Lethu's baby Niko it's mine, I am not gonna kill him I will never hurt you baby please don't do that to me, I am not Lethu..

Tears make their way out of my eyes, she blinks then look at me.

Niko: "Boh".

Me: Please don't hurt me like that.

She look at her ring then at me.

Niko: "What's wrong?"

I don't understand what is happening with her.

Me: Please put your ring back on.

She takes it and put it on.

Me: Uhm did you hear what I said?

Niko: "What?"

Me: That you are pregnant with my child.

Niko: I am pregnant?

Me: Yes, Uhm It's my first child.

I bite my lower lip I have this lump in my throat.

Me: And I would like him or her to live please.

She touch the side of my face.

Me: Please don't try to kill yourself or the baby, I want the both of you.

Niko: "Why are you always lying to me? You don't love me"

I wipe my tears and walk out, I drive home and sit in my bed, Nadia walk in and sit in front of me holding my hand.

Nadia: You are my son, when you are hurting I feel it, I might look and act like a man but I am a mother you are my blood I hate seeing you sad.

I chuckle.

Me: You are a mother Landile?

We both chuckle.

Me: She keeps thinking I am Lethu and I am afraid she will do an abortion because her mind keeps telling her she is carrying Lethu's baby.

She huffs.

Nadia: We didn't do anything when all of this started, we turned a blind eye into admitting that Lethu was abusive towards her now the damage is too much, I don't even know how we can fix it.

I wipe my face.

Me: Maybe we should ask Ntsika to try talking to the ancestors again.

She nods.

We are all kneeling on the floor, my brothers, Nadia and his brothers, Ntsika is sweating as the smoke fills the room then an old man show up, our great-great grandfather.

Mkhulu: Ntsikayekhaya.

Ntsika: Mkhulu.

Mkhulu: Sbongakonke.

Me: Mkhulu.

Mkhulu: Sikunika umfazi bese uyekela umfowenu amuhlukumeze.(We give you a wife then you let your brother abuse her)

Me: I didn't get there in time I'm sorry.

He chuckles.

Mkhulu: Sikunike yena Kodwa wayeka umfowenu wamthatha phambi kwakho.(we gave her to you but you let your brother take her right in front of you)

I look at him.

Mkhulu: Akaphindele Kubo uhlulekile.(She must go back home you failed)

Me: No ngiyaxolisa mkhulu.(No, I'm sorry grandfather)

Mkhulu: Nathula Ntsika izinto zonakala! Kodwa nibiza thina mase ziphuma esandleni.(Ntsika you kept quiet when things fell apart but called us when they got out of hand)

He shouts looking at all of them.

Ntsika: Siyaxolisa Gumede.(We're sorry Gumede)

Mkhulu: Phindisani intombazane Kubo kwayo nixolise ngokubuka ihlukumezeka.(Take her

back to her family and apologize for watching her suffer)

Me: Ingane yami mkhulu, ngeke akwazi ukuhamba ngiyamthanda.(my child, she can't leave I love her)

Mkhulu: Akusasizi(it's too late) umfana uzophila ekhabonina.(The boy will live at his maternal home)ungazami ukumuvimba(don't try to stop her).

Then the smoke fills the room and he is gone, I sit down in defeat.

Ntsika: So she was meant to be with you right from the beginning.

Me: Now I am too late.

I get up and go to the hospital, I find Niko in bed and looks like they are doing an ultrasound, she is smiling looking at the screen, no one told me about this.

Me: Hi.

Doctor: Hello Sir.

I look at Niko but her eyes are glued on the screen.

Me: Is the baby okay?

Doctor: Yes, his heartbeat is back to normal, earlier this morning it seemed faint.

I nod, he walk out and Niko sit up and wear her clothes.

Me: You are not wearing your ring?

Niko: "I am going back home Boh".

I nod.

Me: Ok.

Niko: "But I need to see my kids graves first".

I nod, I don't wanna talk or I might just cry out loud, this is hard for me.

Niko: "I don't want to lose this baby, so I will give him to your family once he is born it's okay".

Me: No, he can stay with you the ancestors are on your side this time.

She widen her eyes.

Niko: "He will stay with me and not have a problem?"

I nod.

Me: Niko..

She look at me.

Me: You are leaving me but with Lethu you stayed, you kept up with all his verbal abuse, the physical abuse but with me you are leaving just like that.

Her eyes becomes teary.

Niko: "When I look at you I try so hard not to see Lethu but he keeps coming, I am doing this for me and for this remaining child I am doing everything to keep this one alive".

Me: Ok, will it be okay if I move on?

She blinks then wipe her tears with the back of her hand.

Niko: "Yes, it's okay".

Me: Ok.

I take her bag and drive her home. She slowly step out of the car and walk towards the graves that have tombstones on it, she stand there looking at them then kneel down.

Niko: "I'm so sorry, I'm sorry for failing both of you right from the beginning, I'm sorry for not fighting hard enough to get out, I...I'm sorry".

She bury her head on her hands her body shaking, I look down. She slowly get up and pass me I hold her hand.

Me: Let me take you home.

Niko: "I will walk."

She walks a few feet away from me then stop and turn back coming towards me.

She takes her ring in her pocket and give it back to me.

Me: Will I be able to come with you on the doctors appointments?

She shrug her shoulders and walk away, I sit down next to the graves and sigh. My

ancestors thinks she is better off without me
so I have to let things be, I failed her right from
the start as well.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 16

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I am in my room thinking about my kids that I
lost and I have been crying since I saw their
graves, I wasn't there to say goodbye.

Thinking about how Phume was warming up
to me she even called me Mom so suddenly I
was so shocked I thought maybe I didn't see
clearly but maybe this was her goodbye so I
will cherish that moment for the rest of my
life.

I wipe my tears as dad walk in and sit in my bed.

Mageba: Ngiyaxolisa Sniko Sam, I'm sorry that I couldn't protect you from that boy, I should have tried harder to get him away from you but..

He breathe out loud.

Mageba: I'm so sorry.

I just lay my head on his lap crying, it hurts that I have lost two kids at the same time, I was working on our relationship, all I wanted was to be a good mom to them but Lethu took them away from me in such a cruel way, I still see their lifeless bodies on the ground whenever I close my eyes it hurts.

I wake up alone I must have fallen asleep when dad was here, I look at my phone it has two messages.

Sbonga: "I feel like you used me to be with your kids and now it was easy leaving me because they are not here anymore".

I shake my head, I love him it's just that I see Lethu everytime I look at him and that just angers me I don't want to end up hurting him I love him so much.

Sbonga: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say that I just want you to come back and tell me how much you want us to try, I am willing to help you go through this".

I put the phone down and go to the mirror I lift my top up I can see the faint black line there, I brush my tummy, I am given another chance and I will try harder this time to be okay even if it means being without Boh.

I take a shower then go sit outside for some air, Shaka sit next to me and hold my hand, ever since we found out I am his real sister he loves holding my hand every chance he gets I feel the love without him saying it. We stay in silence for a while then he look at me.

Shaka: "You remember how much you loved carrying me at your back?"

I smile.

Me: "Yes I didn't think one day you will grow up and look older than me".

We smile looking at each other.

Shaka: "I love you and I am praying that life gives you a break, you have been through a lot".

Me: "With people like you by my side I know I will be okay, thank you for always acting like a big brother".

He smiles and we continue to sit in silence till Mom calls us to eat lunch, we eat then I get my bag and get in my car driving to the Gumedes. I go to Sbonga's room and find him in bed, I shake him he turns, his eyes are puffy and red even his nose.

Me: "Hi".

He just stares at me.

Me: "I came to get my stuff".

He sit up and go to the closet, he takes out all my clothes and put them in his bed, I start packing them he is leaning on the wall looking at me, I keep stealing glances at him.

Sbonga: How have you been? Is the baby okay?

I nod and finish up packing, he watch me as I drag my bags to my car then fetch the last one.

Sbonga: Are we getting a divorce or annulment?

Me: "I don't know".

He look at his hand and take off his ring, he smiles.

Sbonga: "Lethu will have a feast upon hearing that I failed to keep you, you have always been his anyway".

Me: "What!?"

Sbonga: He treated you like his property but when I came and gave you my heart and

everything in me you leave me, maybe If I was a bad boy you were going to stay.

I go to the door but he turns me around.

Sbonga: Give me a chance Niko please.

Me: "Right now I am fighting the urge to hurt you because in my head you are the guy who has hurt me so bad".

Sbonga: Let me fight with you.

Me: "I want to kill you it keeps creeping in everytime I see you, I want to kill you like you killed my kids".

I am now seeing Lethu it's him, he step closer I quickly step back and open the door running out I trip and fall so hard hurting my knee, a hand touch my back I look at him.

Sbonga: "Can I help you up".

I shake my head.

Sbonga: "You didn't hurt my son?"

He look so sad.

Me: "I want to go please move away".

He nods and move away, I try to get up but my knee hurts so bad, I can see he wants to help me but I can't let him.

I slowly walk away.

A week pass and I am looking forward to see the growth of my child in my womb, I am slowly accepting the death of my kids though some days are harder, Sbonga hasn't been in contact and I am okay with that, I keep thinking I am going crazy whenever I try to picture him because all I see is Lethu every damn time no matter how hard I try to get him off my mind.

Shaka walk in my room and look at me like he is thinking.

Me: "Hey".

He sighs.

Shaka: "Sbonga is admitted to the hospital".

Me: "What's wrong with him?"

Shaka: I don't know, they said something about dehydration, looks like he has been starving himself for a while now.

Me: "Can you take me to him please".

He nods and drive to the hospital, I go to his ward and he is awake staring into space, he lost weight massively and his lips are so dry.

Sbonga: Sniko.

He says not looking my way, I smile, he moves his eyes to me and smile a little too, I sit next to him.

Me: "You want to die?"

Sbonga: "When I got married to the love of my life it was the start of my life but when I lost her then it doesn't seem right to be alive anymore".

Me: "You want our son to grow up without a dad?"

Sbonga: Will you even allow me to be there
Sniko, ngifela ukufana nomfowethu.(I am
being punished for looking like my brother).

I look down I feel his hand touching mine.

Sbonga: Can I touch your tummy, just a little
please.

I sit in bed, he brushes my tummy I can see
tears at the corner of his eye.

Sbonga: This should be my happiest time but
the punishments is too harsh for letting Lethu
take you before me.

Me: "I have to go, I am going to see Lethu".

He quickly sit up.

Sbonga: No!

He shouts I get up and move away from the
bed, his eyes soften.

Sbonga: You..you thought I will raise my hand
on you?

I blink fighting the tears back.

Sbonga: You are hurting me Sniko, I don't know what to do.

Me: "I'm sorry".

Sbonga: "Don't go see Lethu ".

Me: "We won't be in the same room".

Sbonga: He doesn't need you to be in the same room as him to hurt you Niko, you know that please don't go, you will come back and try to kill yourself and my child's life depends on you Tinyiko.

I look at him, he hardly close to never use that name to call me, he must be really desperate.

Me: "I won't go".

He nods wiping his eyes.

Sbonga: "I miss sleeping next to my wife, making love to her, don't you miss me Sniko?"

I take my bag.

Sbonga: Nina contacted me yesterday.

Me: "For what?"

I rush to take his phone and look at it, she really did and there is a text from her "I heard you are hospitalised is it okay to come see you".

I throw the phone at him it hits his face but I didn't mean to hurt him, he wipes his face.

Me: "I didn't mean to do that I'm sorry".

He nods.

Sbonga: It's ok.

I look at him scared, what if Lethu ended up like that because of me, what if I am doing it to Sbonga too, victims of abuse sometimes become abusive as well.

Me: "Boh I'm sorry".

He covers his eyes for a while and notice his ring is back on. He look at me his eyes are red, my heart breaks.

Sbonga: You can go.

I walk out but go back in again, he is now crying with his hands above his head it's

heartbreaking, I sit next to him and wrap my arms around him, I can feel his body shaking he is crying so hard I end up crying. A door opens his grandma walk in, I let him go, she looks at us with glassy eyes.

Ziyanda: Sbongakonke..

He look away wiping his eyes.

Ziyanda: What should I do? Do you want to come stay at the palace with me for a while?

He nods.

Ziyanda: Here are your clothes go change.

He get off bed and go to the bathroom.

Ziyanda sit infront of me and hold my hand.

Me: "Do you think it's my fault, I know depression and I am seeing signs in Sbonga is it my fault, with Lethu as well?"

She shakes her head.

Me: "But Boh was fine before he was with me".

Ziyanda: He just loves you so much but with Lethu it's all on him and his big head thinking he is bigger than God.

Me: "Nina wants Sbonga".

She look at me then smile.

Me: "He will move on".

Ziyanda: And that scares you?

I nod.

Me: "But he is better off without me, I might hurt him unaware".

She nods.

Ziyanda: "You see Lethu?"

I nod.

Ziyanda: "You gonna be okay and he will be waiting for you".

Me: "What about Nina?"

Ziyanda: She failed from when you guys were teenagers, his heart knows what it wants.

He walk out of the bathroom, he look so good
I think I want to fall pregnant again with his
baby, it starts moving I touch my belly.

Ziyanda: "Are you okay?"

I look at Sbonga, he is looking at me too.

Me: "He is moving around".

I thought he was going to ask to feel it but he
just walk out.

I watch their car driving away, he didn't even
say goodbye. I drive to the hospital where
Lethu is. I watch as he sit down through the
glass, he stares at me squinting his eyes.

Lethu: You are alive.

Me: "You killed my kids".

Lethu: "It's time to do the right thing Tinyiko
for them if you ever loved them you will be
with them".

I stare at him.

Lethu: "They need you, you can't fail them
again you need to end it and go be with them".

He is trying to get into my head driving me to suicide but a movement pull me back I hold it and look at him.

Lethu: "You gonna do it right? You gonna go home and cut your wrists like you used to but this time make sure the doors are locked".

The movements are getting hard.

Me: "No".

He stares at me.

Lethu: What?

Me: "I am given another chance to fix my past mistakes".

I get up he widens his eyes staring at my little bump.

Lethu: Niko you are pregnant!?

He is shouting veins popping out on his forehead.

Lethu; It's Sbonga's baby!?

He shouts then grab a chair throwing it at the glass I step back and rush out. I go home and

sit in my room, words Lethu said keeps creeping in and I am afraid of sleeping alone I might wake up and do what he said I must do, that's how he has an effect on me, he tells me something I believe him I want to get out but I feel trapped in his web of manipulation.

I go to mom and dad's room they already in bed.

Mageba: What's wrong princess?

Me: I'm scared of sleeping on my own can I sleep here.

Dad takes his own bed cover and I sleep with mom, I am holding on to her.

I am happy that I made it through the night without thinking that Lethu is right. During the day I am scrolling on my Facebook account and I see Nina wrote a post about Sbonga on some "Get well soon Prince Sbonga" with a lot of hearts and I see Sbonga put a heart there as well, maybe he is trying to move on.

Weeks pass by Sbonga isn't sending even a text it's time I really let him go, I won't even be mad if he ends up with Nina.

The Gumedes cars have just parked at my yard, Sbonga's car is here as well, I am starting to think he doesn't really care about the baby anymore because ever since he went to the palace he never asked about him at all.

They all walk in as dad welcomes them, we all sit down.

Ntsika: Mageba.

He bows and dad does the same.

Ntsika: We're sorry for coming unannounced but the ancestors wants us to come and apologize on behalf of our son Lethu for hurting Niko and us not doing anything to stop it sooner.

Dad nods.

Ntsika: We bought two goats and two sheeps to cleanse your daughter and your home.

Mageba: I hear you Gumedede.

Ntsika: And also we are sorry they couldn't make their marriage work, the ancestors are too angry at all of us for watching Niko suffer right before our eyes.

I look at Sbonga he is keeping his head down.

Ntsika: We just want to know if we can see the baby once he is born?

Mageba: Uhm he will stay here?

Ntsika: Yes, they will allow him to stay here.

Dad look at me smiling I guess he is happy for me.

Me: "You can see the baby once he is born".

Ntsika: Thank you Princess.

We walk out as they give us the goats and sheep then dad ask someone to take them back at the rural areas since we have no place for them here.

The elders move away talking leaving me and Sbonga standing awkwardly. He slowly open his car and take out an envelope.

Sbonga: These are divorce papers.

I take them, he still have his ring on though.

Sbonga: Is he growing well?

I nod.

Me: "How are things between you and Nina?"

Sbonga: She is a good friend something I really need these days.

I nod.

Me: "When are you coming back this side?",

Sbonga: For what?

Me: "Will you be here for the birth of our son?"

He shrug his shoulders, it seems like he is getting irritated by me.

Sbonga: I don't know what to do, ngizozwa ngawe Tinyiko(you will tell me Tinyiko) He is

your child, he will get to use whatever surname you want to give him.

Me: "You are angry?"

Sbonga: I am not angry but I am mad Sniko! I am mad that I am the one punished for Lethu's doings, Lord knows I tried to do things right but no one sees it, not the ancestors not my family! Not even you Niko!

He is shouting.

Sbonga: Not even you..

He says slowly then shake his head.

Sbonga: Send me your due date and tell me if you want me there.

He get in his car and drive out leaving me looking down.

Months pass and I haven't seen or heard from Sbonga even after I sent him my due date which is in two days now and I am getting scared of those labour pains coming, I haven't even sighed the divorce papers yet.

I am sitting alone outside I have been feeling light cramps since last night, I try to get up but quickly sit down as the pain hits hard on my abdomen I take my phone.

Me: "I think it's time".

I send it to Sbonga, I see his car driving in then he step out coming to me.

Sbonga: Can you walk?

I nod and go to his car while he walk inside, he comes back with mom and my bag.

It takes long painful hours but it's worth it

I am now looking at Sbonga holding his baby boy the worst is over and he was right by my side through it all holding my hand.

Me: "What's his name?"

Sbonga: Menzezi woQwabe(an addition)
Gumede.

He look at me.

Sbonga: Or is he going to use Zulu? Have you signed the divorce papers?

I shake my head.

Me: "You still have your ring?"

Sbonga: I respect and honour the vows I took before our families and God.

Later he takes me to his home outside their yard Where King Ntsika do a little introduction for my boy then I go home, I didn't have to walk inside, I can't believe the Gumedede ancestors actually allowed me to raise this baby at my father's house maybe this is their way of apologising for allowing their son to abuse me to a point of killing my kids.

Sbonga walk in my room and sit down with our baby in his arms.

Sbonga: This is not how I imagined it would be like, seeing my first born son like I am a cheater while I only love his Mom but she left me.

Me: "Sbonga we.."

Sbonga: You have punished me enough Niko for my brother's sins can you come home so I can raise my son please Zulu omuhle..

He kneels with the baby in his arms.

Sbonga: Ngiyacela nkosazana
yaMageba(Please Mageba's princess)
Ngiyacela ubuyele Kimi.(please come back to me)

I can see how much he loves me and our son but going back to that house, is it going to do me good? But this is the man that loves me more than anything, he is on his knees begging so why not give him what he deserves and that is my love and raising his son at his home. I step closer to where he is kneeling and wipe his tears.

Me: "I will come home with you".

He get up and hug me tight then we both look at our son in his arms, I am doing this for the both of us.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 17

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LETHU

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I am getting tired of staying here doing the same things everyday that is frustrating me so bad and the fact that Niko is still out there angers me.

I get up and look outside, I have to get out of here soon.

I hear a knock then the door opens a click sound of heels makes me turn around, I lean on the wall watching her sit down crossing her legs it's a psychologist, Dr Precious Zindela.

Precious: Morning Prince.

I nod staring at her.

Precious: How are you doing?

I nod again.

Precious: You don't feel like talking today?

Me: I am just amazed by your beauty that's all, how are you?

I sit opposite her, she chuckles.

Precious: Thank you, so how have you been?

Me: Been better, I am getting used to this place.

Precious: You are no longer trying to get out?

I shake my head leaning back on the chair.

Me: Nop.

She nods.

Me: Are you married?

She giggles.

Precious: I ask the questions here.

I chuckle.

Precious: I'm not married yet.

Me: Potential partner?

Precious: Yes, very promising. Enough about me so what about you don't you miss your wife?

Me: No.

She stares at me.

Me: She was just there to make Niko jealous nothing more.

Precious: Did she know that?

Me: No..well she did find out later.

She nods.

Precious: You still want Niko dead?

Me: No I'm over that.

Precious: Are you sure?

I nod.

Precious: You do know that once we clear your mental state you will have to serve time for murder and attempted murder?

Me: But I thought this was to get me out of prison.

She sighs.

Precious:: You still don't think you have a problem?

Me: What problem?

Precious: You killed your kids Prince and tried to kill their mother.

Me: And I explained why? She rejected them do i thought maybe in the after life she will be with them.

She writes something down, I move my chair close to her and brush her cheek, she seems stunned.

Me: You had a lipstick on your cheek.

She brush it then nod.

Precious: Thank you.

I stare at her she tries to get into a staring contest with me but she wouldn't win on that. I brush her exposed thighs she quickly get up.

Precious: Uhm..I have to go.

I pull her chin up and kiss her holding her neck she push me back and rush out, I chuckle.

Me: Too much for being a "Psychologist".

I sit in bed and switch on the TV just to pass time I really don't like TV.

I watch those "celebrity scoop" show and I see our picture, me and my brothers then Sbonga's picture alone.

Me: I wonder what's the news on the boring brother.

"Prince Sbongakonke Gumede and Princess Tinyiko SnikoKaMageba Gumede welcome their baby boy". I am on my feet as they telle when and where he was born, so she actually gave my brother an heir, a whole son!

I switch the damn thing off and sit down tapping my foot on the floor, I have to get out of here!

Pamella walk in and sit next to me.

Me; Hi ma.

She nods.

Me: Heard you have a grandson congratulations.

Pamella: What went wrong Lethu? You were never like this when you were a little boy, you were full of jokes I even saw Landile in you.

Me: I changed when I met Tinyiko right? She ruined my life.

She shakes her head.

Pamella: Tinyiko didn't deserve what you did to her Lethu I wish you could acknowledge that and apologize.

Me: How when I am stuck here I want to get out, tell Landile I want to get out of here.

Pamella: Only the doctors can tell us if you are good to be out there but I don't think you are while you still blame Tinyiko for everything.

Me: Then you shouldn't come here anymore Ella, I don't need any of you..

She look at me with tears in her eyes.

Me: Stay away just like Nadia and the whole family have been doing, you took Sbonga's side right from the beginning when you allowed him to marry the mother of my kids!

Pamella: The kids you killed in cold blood!

She shouts back.

Me: Get out.

She get up and slap me so hard then click her tongue walking out.

I stay for the whole week without my family coming to see me but I don't care they can go to hell.

Miss Precious walk in and stand by the door.

Me: Hello Doc..

She clears her throat and sit down.

Precious: This is our last session, I will refer you to another psychologist.

I laugh.

Me: One kissnyana and you are ready to give up on your patient, don't be weak Precious.

She opens her notepad.

Precious: So Uhm...we will do another evaluation with five doctors then we will give the results to a judge so they can determine if you should be sentenced.

Me: Mmmm.

I get up and stand behind her and massage her shoulders.

Me: Why are you so tense?

Precious: Stop...

I kiss her neck then my hand goes to her boobs, she is breathing heavily. I pull her up and slowly unbutton her shirt and take it off, she let me while biting her lower lip.

Me: You are pretty..

I take off her bra, her nipples are erect, I push her to bed and lick them one after the other she is moaning, I move her skirt up and take out my dick, I push the panty to the side and slam into her she screams and open her legs wide, I roughly pound on her until I cum then pull out, I look at her as she take the tissue wiping herself, I wipe myself and fix my pants, she quickly pick up her bra and shirt and wear them looking the other way.

Me: You have a nice pussy just the right size, so tight.

She turns looking at me.

Precious: I shouldn't have allowed that, I don't sleep with my patients.

Me: You just did.

She blinks.

Me:.. what happens when your superiors find out about this?

Precious: I can lose my job and have a bad record no one would ever hire me.

I nod.

Me: Good to know so this will make this easy.

Precious: What?

Me: I need your help to get out of here just for the night and I will come back tomorrow morning.

Precious: I can't..

Me: And I am sure they will be interested in knowing how much you use sick patients for sex in here, you used me Presh.

She is shaking.

Precious: But you did this...I..

Me: Being in here means I have a problem right? So you took advantage of my vulnerability.

She sit down weeping.

Me: So are you going to help me or is this your last day of ever working?

Precious: Please.

Me: I didn't know it would be this easy seducing a whole psychologist, aren't you suppose to know what someone is thinking, you all did diagnose me that I have some "manipulation" skills I don't get how you fell for it.

I squat in front of her.

Me: So are you going to help me miss?

She nods, I smile.

Me: Thank you now open your fresh thighs for me.

Precious: No!

I smile and get up looking out the window.

Me: 8 o'clock tonight I want to be out and by three am I will be back.

I hear the door closing, I chuckle, she has no choice I own her now.

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SBONGA

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My wife is back home with my son I couldn't be happier, this is exactly what I need.

"sikutshelile sathi muyeke aphinde ekhaya"(We told you to let her go back home!)
A voice shouts and grandpa shows up looking angry.

Mkhulu: Angimifuni umuntu owenza umathanda Sbongakonke!(I don't like someone who do as he pleases!)

Me: Ngiyaxolisa Gumedede.

Mkhulu: Izokuzonda lentombazane ngoba awulaleli!(This girl will hate you because you don't listen)

I feel a hand roughly shaking me my eyes shoots open, Niko is crying walking around our room like she is crazy and Nadia is here, I sit up.

Me: What's wrong?

Nadia: We can't find Mengezi.

I quickly get out of bed and go to his bed it's empty.

Me: Niko!

She looks crazy looking everywhere even the closet.

Nadia: We found the gate left opened.

Me: Where is my son?

Everyone rush in.

Ntsika: Someone came in and took him.

Me: Lethu!

I wear my clothes and run out I get to my car and drive to the hospital I beg the securities to let me in then run inside. I push the door to his room and find him sleeping I pull him out of bed and punch his stomach he groans holding it.

Me: Where is my son Lethu!? Where is he?

Lethu: What son?

I punch him again and pull him to the balcony and hold his neck I am so close to throwing him down, we are at the second floor.

Lethu: St..stop!

Me: Where did you take my son!?

I am sweating, all I am thinking about is what if he killed him just like he killed his kids.

The securities grab me and push me away from him.

Me: Where is he Lethu? Tell me where my son is please.

I am thinking of how Niko will be if he killed our son as well.

Lethu: You found me asleep Sbonga I didn't even know you have a son.

Me: You are lying please tell me where he is, if you want me to break up with Niko then that's fine I will do it, just tell me where my son is.

Lethu: You will break up with her?

Me: Yes..

He laughs.

Lethu: You think I am a fool?

Me: Ngiyakucela mfowethu.(please brother)

Lethu: So now you acknowledge that I am your brother huh? But you didn't when you went behind my back hiding my daughter with Tinyiko then you married her, I wasn't your brother then huh?

Nadia walk in holding a pipe.

Nadia: Please give us space.

She says to the securities, they walk out, she starts whooping Lethu with a pipe so hard it ends up breaking, she let go of it and start punching him then grab his neck.

Nadia: You are making me curse the day Pamela decided to fall pregnant with all of you! You are making me hate ever suggesting she carries my baby.

Lethu: What did I do Landi?

He says almost out of breath.

Nadia: I'm not a fool! Your watch fell in Sbonga's room! You took his son! Where is he?

Lethu: I don't have his son!

Her phone rings, she takes it out.

Nadia: King..

Ntsika: We..we can't find Sniko, she is not in her father's house.

Lethu chuckles.

Lethu: She knows where to find her pathetic son! Dead or alive..

I shake my head walking out, I get in my car and drive to where Lethu killed his kids, something tells me my son is here.

I stop the car next to Niko's and get off, my knees are shaking as I see her on her knees holding our son I am praying he is alive, I kneel in front of her, she has her eyes closed holding him tight, a faint cry from him, he is alive. I try to hold Niko but she just get up and go to her car driving off. I drive home and find my family

sitting in the lounge it's around five in the morning now.

Ntsika: I dont know what to do anymore, we can't kill our own blood, that will hunt us forever.

Me: So we should let him hurt my wife over and over and the ancestors punish me instead huh?

Ntsika: His time is coming trust me and it will hurt.

Me: Can it come sooner I'm done watching Niko suffer because of Lethu I'm sick of it..

I go to my room and find Niko sitting in bed rocking the baby back and forth.

Me: Niko...

She look away sniffing, she then get in bed and hold the baby close to her chest.

Three days pass with Niko not talking to me or even looking my way, we sleep in the same bed with our son but we don't talk at all I have

tried making a conversation with her she just ignore me.

I am waiting for Lethu in his room, he is with a doctor. He walk in and stand by the door smiling.

Me: Hi brother.

He chuckles.

Lethu: Sbonga.

Me: Can we talk please.

He sit on a chair looking at me.

Me: What do I have to do so you can leave Niko alone? I will do anything just tell me what you want..

Lethu: Fall in love with Nina and marry her.

Me: What?

Lethu: She always wanted you so I will leave Niko alone once I see you with Nina happy together and I want that to happen before the end of this month.

Me: I don't love Nina.

Lethu: I don't care! Leave Tinyiko and marry Nina, if you love her as you claim you do you will do anything to keep her and your son alive so it's either that or I keep coming.

Me: Lethu..

Lethu: End of this month little one, now get out of here.

I get up and look at him.

Me: Your day is coming brother and I feel like it will be here very soon.

He laughs.

Lethu: Get out..

I chuckle and bow my head a little.

Me: Gumede..

I walk out and drive home, I find Niko in our room sitting in bed.

Me: Hi.

She look away I hold her hand.

Me: I love you, I'm sorry for the things that have been happening to you, you still want to be here with me right?

She nods.

Me: Thank you.

Niko: "I love you".

I hold her in my arms, I am not letting her go no ancestors or Lethu will break us up, I refuse.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 18

*

I have been having sleepless nights because of fear that Lethu might come back again and

take my son away, I can't even fall asleep for an hour I am jumpy all the time it's draining me.

Sbonga walk in wearing only his boxer shorts, I am still amazed that he has my name on his chest and the guy looks good though he lost weight a bit but he still got it.

He snaps his fingers I look at him.

Sbonga: Are you okay?

I nod.

Sbonga: Do you want to get some rest a bit you look tired, I will watch the boy.

Me: "No I'm fine".

He sit in front of me.

Me: "Where did you go yesterday? You came back down and sad".

Sbonga: I went to see Lethu.

I nod.

Sbonga: He wants me to break up with you and be with Nina so he can leave you and my son alone.

Oh..

Me: "Are you considering it".

He stares at me.

Sbonga: I'm not crazy, I know he just wants to hurt you and I don't want any Nina.

He takes my left hand looking at it.

Sbonga: I don't like that you took off your wedding ring, where is it?

Me: "I think I lost it".

He nods, he looks disappointed.

Sbonga: "I can buy another one for you if that's okay".

Me: "I'm joking it's in my bag".

He smiles.

Sbonga: You are not funny.

He pulls me close to him and kiss me briefly then pull me hard getting up letting me fall on my ass, he loves doing this and it hurts, he laughs I stare at him, I missed seeing him laugh, he is gorgeous.

Sbonga: Let me help you up.

Me: "Leave me alone".

I slowly get up but shove me back down.

Me: "What are you doing?"

Sbonga: I want to irritate you.

Me: "It's working I am getting really irritated".

He hold me under my arms and pull me up like I am some piece of paper, I wrap my legs around him, my arms on his neck, he looks at me like I am the only girl in this world.

Sbonga: I love you.

I smile.

Sbonga: I know you love me too.

I kiss him then he put me down.

Sbonga: I was thinking.

Me: "What's in that rotten brain of yours?"

He laughs.

Sbonga: So Uhm how about we go away for a while with our son, find a beach house and enjoy ourselves, what do you say?

Me: "Far from Durban right?"

Sbonga: Very far, maybe we can come back once he turns 5 months.

Me: "I thank God for marrying a man with money, ngakuthandela yona.(I loved you for it)

He shakes his head laughing then we look for places to go, once we find the place we like we make bookings immediately, I can't wait to leave and get some air.

We join the family for dinner.

Sbonga: Sniko and I are leaving for a holiday on Friday.

That is in two days.

Nadia: To where?

Sbonga: Unfortunately I can't disclose that to anyone.

They all stare at him.

Ntsika: You don't trust us?

Sbonga: I don't.

I look at him, he is just looking at his plate unbothered.

Nadia: You don't trust us?

She ask with her eyebrows raised.

Sbonga: Why should you know where my family and I are going?

Nadia: So we are not your family?

Sbonga: I don't know, are you?

I hold his hand, he look my way, I shake my head.

Ntsika: Care to explain what you mean Sbongakonke?

Sbonga: I just don't get how you let Lethu get away with so much for all these years, you did

nothing so I feel like you enabled his behaviour, he didn't see no wrong because you never tried to stop him now things got out of hand you only acting like you care, what about someone's daughter who was abused for years and you all did nothing huh?

Ntsika: We didn't know!

Sbonga: Oh yes you did!

He takes my hand and show them the burn mark at the back of my hand, I got it when I was still pregnant with Phume after telling Lethu I didn't want a baby, he literally burnt my hand with a lighter.

Sbonga: You remember when Lethu did this to her!? You all went to Mageba apologised and bluntly lied saying it was a mistake! How does burning someone a mistake! You let Lethu get away with a lot that's why he became worse, you did nothing to stop him!

This is the first time I see him talking to his family like this, he seems angry.

Nkanyezi: Sbongakonke!

Sbonga: Phume and Awethu's blood is on your hands! All of you and I refuse to let all of you kill my son as well.

Ntsika: What!?

Sbonga: Ungizwile! (You heard me)

I grab his hand tight he turns looking at me.

Me: "Stop, don't talk like that!"

Sbonga: Oh they need to hear it, if you protect an abuser then you are as bad as them, and that is all of them in this table, all of you!

I don't know what gotten into him and I don't know how to make him stop.

Nadia get up but Pamella quickly pull her down.

Nadia: Asizodelelwa uwena Sbonga Ayi la.(You won't disrespect us Sbonga not here)

Sbonga: Why is telling the truth always mistaken for disrespect? Is it that bitter?

Ntsika slowly push his chair back and walk around the table and pull Sbonga up, I get up as well.

Me: "Boh please apologize".

Sbonga: I won't be doing that.

A slap lands on his cheek I just rush out of the room going to the bedroom. He walk in after a while his face is red.

Sbonga: Pack up we are leaving.

Me: "But we booked for Friday".

Sbonga: Niko please just do as I say.

Me: "You are fighting with your family, I don't like that".

He ignores me going to the closet and start packing his and my clothes all together then our sons clothes in another bag and he then walk out.

He take our son and give me his hand, we walk out and the siblings are standing outside Nadia's face is red looks like she has been

crying, Langa as well, growing closely around them I know that when one cries the other one cries as well, that's Langa and Nadia I didn't know that they still do it even now.

Ntsika: Sbonga..

We stop walking.

Ntsika: Don't do that son please.

Sbonga: I just want peace and I won't find it here, uyangena uyaphuma uLethu la and akukho enikwenzayo!(Lethu is coming in and out of here and you are doing nothing about it) my wife and son's life comes first.

Ntsika: We will do something, don't go like this please.

Nadia: Iyekeinja ihambe Ntsika.(Let the dog go Ntsika)

She wipe her eyes.

Nadia: Letho nawe Sbani you can get the fuck out of here as well, fuck off all of you!

Sbani: But what did we do?

Letho hit him with his elbow to stop him from talking.

Me: "Boh please talk to Landi, she is hurting".

He shakes his head and go buckle up our son, Nadia is kicking her car she look crazy.

Ntsika: Sniko..

He hold my hand.

Ntsika: Talk to him, he is hurting our sister, she is already hurting with this Lethu situation, not with Sbonga too please.

Me: "I will talk to him King".

He nods and brush his head in frustration, I get in the car, Sbonga drives to the hotel.

I look at him, he is looking down playing with his ring, I shake him.

Me: "I don't want to stay at the hotel while we have a home".

He doesn't say anything.

Me: "You love your family, doesn't it hurt you seeing them like that, especially Landile?"

Looks like he doesn't want to talk.

Me: "Are you slowly turning into Lethu?"

Sbonga: What?

I look at him.

Sbonga: Niko you think I am like my brother.

Me: Let's go back home please..

He just get in bed and hold his son to his chest.

Two days begging him to talk to Ntsika who has been calling but he ignores his phone now we are leaving for our holiday, he has been too quiet maybe this fight with his family is eating him up I don't even think we will enjoy this time away.

We are finally here the view is perfect living in a glass house looking at the seaview, there are other couples here but Sbonga is still not okay, he spends most of his time watching our son sleep or he just joins him, I am sitting outside drinking some cocktail, he sit opposite me then brush his face.

Sbonga: I have been neglecting you haven't I?

I don't say anything.

Sbonga: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay.

Sbonga: No it's not, you didn't come here to watch me mop around I want you to enjoy yourself and maybe face your fear and dive in the sea.

He says laughing a little, I smile.

Sbonga: I will do better I promise.

Me: "Ok".

He just left saying he needs some air, I am in bed with our boy who is growing looking so pretty.

I wake up later and he is back.

Me: "Hey when did you come back?"

Sbonga: An hour ago, come with me.

I wear my morning shoes and we walk out I can see a man standing there looking at us.

Me: "Who is that?"

Sbonga: A pastor.

I am so confused, we get to him he greets us.

Sbonga: Man of God I want to renew my vows because after marrying my wife for a couple of months we faced some obstacles which led us to removing our rings and her leaving our home so it doesn't seem right anymore I want to do it again.

I am so emotional I am trying to blink the tears away.

Pastor: I am glad you fixed your marriage, it is very sacred and I am proud that when you felt it isn't right you came back to God to mend it and make it stronger.

Sbonga: Sniko..I believe we are meant to be together because I don't see myself with anyone else other than you, I love you and I am willing to fight each and every battle with you as my wife now and forever.

He takes out a box and give me a new ring

Sbonga: We are starting over my love.

He put it on my finger I hug him tight crying, I am too emotional to say anything, the pastor bless our union in a very long but powerful prayer, we go back to bed I am still a crying mess, what did I do to deserve such a loving man, My God I am grateful.

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Meanwhile at the Psychiatric hospital Lethu has been feeling a bit tingle under his feet so he keeps scratching it, he even took off the sox he was wearing. He scratch them once again then look at his hands he has some blood, he quickly look under his foot, he sees that his skin is peeling off like someone is cutting him and it's starting to hurt but the itch isn't stopping, he keeps scratching now his feet have blood all over them, he calls out for help but Precious was about to walk in anyway because he called demanding to see her, he has been blackmailing her into sleeping with

him or he would end her career for sleeping with "sick" people.

Lethu: My feet hurts call a doctor now!

He shouts clenching his jaws, the pain is getting to him, Precious has her eyes popped out looking at his feet that has blood all over them even the bed sheets.

Lethu: Fucken call a doctor man come on!

Precious rush out then come back with a doctor and two men they find Lethu groaning in pain.

Lethu: Fuck don't just stand there do something.

Doctor: This is self harm, we need to restrain him.

Lethu: What!?! I didn't do this!

Two men cuff both his hands on the bed he is screaming for them to stop but it falls into deaf ears, they are stopping him from hurting himself.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 19

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LETHU

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I don't know what's happening with me for six whole months, my whole skin is peeling off even my face but it's not as bad as my feet that have started having a bed smell because of blood coming out of everyday. I have been trying to call my family but they are not answering my calls the nurses are trying everything they can but it seems like I wake up everyday with new cuts under my feet I don't understand any of this.

I take a phone and call Precious who has been ignoring my calls as well.

Precious: Prince Lethu..

Me: If you know what's good for you, you will get your ass here now.

I drop the call and clench my jaws the pain is too much.

Precious walk in and stand by the door.

Me: I want to get out of here and you gonna help me!

I shout she jumps a little.

Me: Did you hear me?

She nods a little.

Me: Now help me get to that wheelchair don't just stand there!

She moves the wheelchair close to bed and wheel me to the bathroom no nurse have came in today. I tell her to wash my feet, she does with shaking hands then turn to vomit which makes me so angry.

Me: Am I disgusting you?

She wipes her mouth.

Me: Am I?

Precious: Yes! Yes you are disgusting me, your behaviour and all! You gonna die alone no one wants you.

Me: Oh baby I will die with you, you are not going anywhere, if I die you gonna be around ok.

Precious: Fuck you!

Me: Right back at you.

She grab my foot and squeeze it I scream in pain..

Me: What are you doing!?! Stop, aaah fuck...

She doesn't stop my whole body is trembling I have never felt so much pain in my life.

Precious: I'm tired of you so if you want me here! I will be here!

She starts washing my feet so rough I keep groaning and grabbing the wheelchair

everytime she touch my feet, then she push me back to the room bumping me to a wall.

Me: Stop that shit man come on!

She let go of the wheelchair and grab her bag walking out. I move myself to bed damn this shit hurts.

I take my phone and try calling Landi and luckily she picks up.

Nadia: Hello.

Me: Landile I need to get out of here.

Nadia: For what!? Angithi you are crazy so you are exactly where you should be.

Me: So you are just going to let me die here?

Nadia: Sbonga left home Lethu it's been 6 months and it's all because of you.

Me: So you are neglecting me because of Sbonga, am I not your son Landile!

Nadia: Keep shouting at me like I am your dog I will fuck you up.

I breathe.

Me: I don't need you anyway! Go to hell.

Nadia: I will meet you there bastard!

She drops the call I throw the phone across the wall, They used to drop everything for me until that Niko came and ruined everything, she is to blame! She is the reason why I am here!

I have been scratching my whole body especially my back and now it's painful water is coming out of there now and it doesn't have a good smell either.

A doctor walk in but quickly stop at the door .

Me: Hey I need something for the pain and for this itch to stop!

Doctor: Being a Prince got into your big head you don't have any respect for anyone.

Me: I don't have time for your lecture just give me the damn thing!

He throws the plastic on the floor and it gets under the bed then he walk out I cuss.

I have been trying to get under the bed but it's hard with my bruised knees and my whole body in pain, I just sit there frustrated.

I look at myself in the mirror I almost scream in horror I look bad very bad, Precious walk in and push me to the bathroom without saying a word. She wash my feet roughly but in silence I am not in the mood to talk as well I am getting scared I have never seen such thing happening to anyone but me. She push me back to my room and take her bag.

Precious: This is the last time I am coming here.

Me: Says who?

Precious: Me! You can talk to my superiors and tell them I slept with you it's fine I don't care anymore.

Me: No, you will stay.

Precious: I'm done!

She walk out I click my tongue and sit there thinking of ways to get out.

The nurse walk in, they always stand by the door and throw whatever they came to give me.

Me: Hey can you borrow me your phone.

She push it on the floor, even with food it's like that, I am like a dog to them.

I dial Lethokuhle's number.

Letho: Uhuh!

He is definately eating, he is always eating.

Letho: Uzokhuluma?(Are you gonna talk)

Me: Letho it's me.

Letho: Hi ME what can I do for you?

I sigh.

Me: This is not the time Lethokuhle!

Letho: But it's my phone isn't it?

Me: I need your help.

Letho: With what?

Me: I have to get out of here, they are treating me like a dog.

Letho: So why do you have to get out? You deserve it mos.

Me: Letho! I am your brother.

Letho: And one of us left home because of you! So bitch please leave me the fuck alone don't ever call my phone again.

Me: Wait Letho wait...please man..

He just drop the call I dial Sbani's number..

Nurse: I need to leave.

Me: Can you wait a sec geez!

I am frustrated.

Sbani: Gumede..

Me: Hi Sethu it's me Lethu.

Silence.

Me: Sbani..

Sbani: What do you want?

Me: I am in pain I need to get help or I might die in here.

Sbani: Then rest in peace Gumede, rest in peace Qwabe, rest in peace Phakathwayo.

Me: Sbani look I will pay you any amount you want I just want y..

He chuckles.

Sbani: You are really crazy Wena I thought they were joking! Do I look broke to you?

Me: I..

And the phone decides to shut down.

Me: Why didn't you charge this phone?

The nurse chuckles and walk in, she grabs her phone from my hand and walk out.

I don't get why they are keeping me here since they don't even do evaluations anymore, I am just in pain even peeing is a mission because of sores in there.

The room feels hot suddenly then great great grandfather shows up, he stares at me for a while.

Me: Phakathwayo..

I bow, he just chuckles.

Mkhulu: Ukulungele ukwenza okufanele?(are you ready to do the right thing?)

Me: Kuyini lokho?(What's that?)

Mkhulu: Uxolise kulo owamona ukwedlula bonke.(To apologize to the one you hurt the most)

Me: Ubani lowo?(who is that)

He laughs a little.

Mkhulu: Uzofunda mfana wami, Uzofunda Kabi ngokubona.(You will learn my boy, you will learn the hard way)

He is not here anymore, I asked the doctor to call Precious for me but I have been waiting for two days she is not showing up I guess she really doesn't care about her job anymore.

I just borrowed a phone I call grandma.

Ziyanda: Hello.

Me:Hi Pink.

She giggles a bit and I feel myself relaxing, she will get me out she has a soft spot for her grandchildren.

Ziyanda: Lethukuthula..

Me: How are you?

Ziyanda: I'm doing great, Wena?(you?)

Me: Ngiyagula.(I'm sick) ngifuna ukubuyela ekhaya (I want to go back home)

Ziyanda: Liphi Ikhaya? (Which home) the home you left crumbling down?

Me: Please maLukhele no one is taking care of me here, can I come stay with you?

Ziyanda: No, you are on your own.

Me: So you don't love me?

Ziyanda: Baby you can't manipulate me, I have been around.

Me: Please..

Ziyanda: Goodbye Lethu.

And for the first time I have tears in my eyes.

Me: Grandma..can I talk to Grandpa please.

Ziyanda: No..

She drops the phone I just bow my head and let the tears fall, I hate it, I hate being weak begging people that don't care about me, I won't be doing it anymore!

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SBONGA

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My wife and I are having the time of our lives away from all the mess back home, we are watching our son grow he looks a lot like me and my brothers just too pretty, he looks like a girl, has a lot of hair.

Niko: "Hey".

I smile as she sits on my lap.

Niko: "Don't you miss home?"

Me: My home is with you so no I don't because you are here.

She hugs me then look at me again.

Niko: "You seem at peace now".

I smile.

Me: I am, I have been praying a lot asking for peace within my heart and I guess he granted me one.

She nods, I see a car driving in I shake my head smiling then get up kissing my wife's cheek.

Niko: "Is that maZiyanda's car?"

I chuckle.

Me: It is..

We walk out holding hands going to her, she hugs us excitedly she is wearing sunglasses.

Me: The future is too bright Mrs Luyolo huh..

Ziyanda: Well what can I say..

She says fanning herself, Tinyiko look so happy to see her. We sit down after getting food and something to drink.

Me: How did you find us grandma?

Ziyanda: Were you hiding?

Me: No.

Ziyanda: I am married to an ex military cop and my brothers are ex military cops as well, need I say more?

I laugh.

Me: No I think I got my answer ma'am.

She nods.

Me: Uhm how is everyone back home?

Ziyanda: Not good especially Landile and Ella.

I look down, she hold my hand.

Ziyanda: Can't you at least call them.

I sigh.

Ziyanda: Please sthandwa Sam.(my love)

I nod and take her phone moving away, I call Landi.

Nadia: Mama..I...I know you said we shouldn't try to track him but I need to find him I want to talk to him.

Me: Hi Landi..

Nadia: Sbo..Sbonga... Sbongakonke..

Me: Unjani.(How are you?)

Silence then a sniff.

Me: I'm sorry.

She doesn't say anything for a while.

"Sbonga" it's dad Langa.

Me: Hi dad.

Langa: Can she come see you, she will come alone please.

He doesn't sound okay too.

Me: Yes, she can come.

Langa: Ok thank you.

I go back to grandma and give her the phone.

Ziyanda: Ngiyakuthanda.(I love you)

Me: I love you too.

It's late now and grandma is sleeping here, my wife and son are already in bed, I hear a car pulling up outside, I get off bed and stand by

the door, she step out of the car and walk towards me.

Nadia: Hi.

Me: Hi.

We stand there not saying anything, her eyes are moving around like she wants to cry.

Nadia: Bengikukhumbule.(I missed you)

Me: Nami futhi.(Me too)

She hugs me tight, too tight and I hug her back, she was right, she may look and act like a man but she is a mother, my mother.

We sit down, she is wiping her tears.

Nadia: I'm sorry.

I nod.

Me: I'm sorry too I shouldn't have left home like that I didn't mean to hurt you.

She smiles through the tears.

Nadia: But you did man, I couldn't sleep, like, I knew you were safe but knowing we are not on good terms was giving me sleepless nights.

Me: How is Ella?

Nadia: I didn't tell her I am coming here, I didn't know how you would feel if I tell your location.

I nod.

Nadia: And she is not home.

She says looking down.

Me: Where is she?

Nadia: She stays with Miyah's mother, she said she wants a divorce.

Me: What! Why?

Nadia: I don't know, maybe she blames me for how things turned out with you guys.

Me: But..no please don't break up.

Nadia: My brothers and dad are still trying to talk to her because she hasn't been talking to me.

I wipe my face, I don't want my parents to break up maybe I will have to talk to Ella.

Nadia: So how is my grandson?

I smile.

Me: He looks a lot like you and Langa.

Nadia: Then that little dude sure looks great if he looks like me and my brother we are the hottest shit alive!

I smile, this is the Landi I know and love but she is still hurting you can tell.

She uses a couch to sleep I go back to bed.

In the morning we wake up to breakfast that grandma made, Nadia is holding my son they are playing.

Nadia: You didn't tell me that this dude is a younger version of me back when I looked more like a girl.

Ziyanda: You are a girl Landile!

Nadia: I didn't say I wasn't mama.

Ziyanda: I know! I was just putting it out there.

Nadia: Then put it back in there.

Ziyanda: I will smack your face.

I take grandma's phone and walk out calling
Pamella.

Pamella: Hello mah.

Me: Hi mama it's Sbonga.

Pamella: Sbonga hey baby are you okay please
come home.

Me: Which home Ella? Landi told me you left.

Silence.

Me: You don't love her anymore?

Pamella: I will always love her, she is the love
of my life.

Me: Then why are you divorcing?

She sighs.

Pamella: I didn't mean that, we were in a bad
space fighting then I just packed and told her I
want a divorce.

Me: So you didn't mean it?

Pamella: I am not divorcing Landile, she is too handsome.

I chuckle.

Me: She and handsome in one sentence.

Pamella: She does look like a man.

We laugh.

Me: I love you Ella.

Pamella: I love you too and please come back soon I want to see my grandson.

Me: I will.

I go back inside and tell Nadia that Ella said she was just angry but she doesn't look happy.

Me: What's wrong Landi?

Nadia: I think she is just staying with me to please you guys, everyone begged her but she didn't want to hear it and now you call everything is okay..

Me: Maybe she was still angry and now she is calm.

She shrug her shoulders.

Grandma and Nadia leave and i am glad they didn't mention my brother's name I still want to maintain this peace and hearing his name is not it.

Niko has been stealing glances at me for a while now.

Me: What is it?

She slowly give me her phone I look at it and I am shocked to see Lethu on a wheelchair looking like he has aged because his face is wrinkled, looks like the picture was taken while he was unaware but the caption "The Smelly Prince" they are talking about how rude he is and that no one wants to get any close to him.

Me: Damn he looks bad.

She nods.

Niko: "You don't want to go see him?"

Me: For what? Please don't show me this again and we are extending our stay here if that's okay with you.

Niko: "I miss dad and my brothers".

Me: Uhm ok we can go then.

Niko: "We can stay only if dad can come see me".

Me: He can come baby I didn't mean to isolate you from your family.

Mageba, Shaka and Luyanda come to see her, she is happy that's all I ever want for her, happiness.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 20

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LETHU

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I am getting worse by each day, no one comes to my room not even to give me food, I feel things crawling on my back, my legs and feet are turning green, I am literally watching myself rotting and nobody cares.

I am trying to put the pieces of my phone back together so I can make a call.

It finally works, I dial Precious's number.

Precious: Hello.

Me: Hi I need your help.

She chuckles.

Precious: I told you I want nothing to do with you stop calling me.

Me: I am dying in here just..help me.

Precious: You are on your own, Prince.

She drops the call I dial my wife's number but it sends me straight to voicemail, I huff and dial Tinyiko's number but my brother answers.

Sbonga: Why are you calling my wife?

Me: Boh I need your help, it hurts.

Sbonga: And what has that got to do with my wife?

Me: Can you come see me?

Sbonga: No and fucken stop calling the "mother of my kids".

He emphasize the last part then drops the call.

I am shaking as the crawling have started again on my back, things are moving there and I am scared I don't even want to see it. I dial mom's number.

Pamella: Lethu..

I just burst into tears, she sighs.

Me: Can you help me please mama I am in pain.

Pamella: I am far from home Lethu.

Me: Then please beg Landile for me or my brothers Ngiyacela.(please)

Pamella: Landile is with me, I will call your brothers.

Me: Please hurry I might not make it.

Three days passed Pamella never called and none of my brothers came so I guess they didn't want to come or Pamella didn't bother.

The room feels hot I know grandfather is here.

Mkhulu: Lethukuthula.

I weep.

Me: Gumede please ngicela ukhulume nabo.(please talk to them)

He chuckles.

Mkhulu: Ngafika kuwena emaphupheni akho ngakutshela ukuthi hlukana naye akusiye owakho Kodwa wakhetha ukumhlukumeza.(I came to you in your dreams and told you to leave her alone she is not yours then you chose to abuse her)

Me: Ngangimthanda mkhulu.(I loved her)

He shakes his head.

Mkhulu: Umona nokuzitshela ukuthi konke okuhle kufanele Wena kunabafowenu.(jealousy and thinking all good things are meant for you not your brothers)

Me: Ngangimthanda ngempela.(I really loved her)

I wipe my tears.

Mkhulu: Sobabili siyazi akusilona iqiniso lelo3, unomhobholo.(We both know that is not true, you are greedy)

I sob as my whole body itch but I can't do anything because my skin falls off everytime I scratch it.

Me: Ngiyaxolisa.(I'm sorry)

Mkhulu: Awonanga mina(You didn't do wrong to me)

Me: Then help me apologize please Gumede.

He shakes his head and leave, I scream begging him to talk to my family but I am all alone in this room now.

I am just bowing my head down I don't know when was the last time I had a meal, I am in pain and hungry.

I hear the door handle moving I slowly move my head up, my brothers are here, Letho and Sbani they look shocked then they quickly cover their noses, I let the tears fall I am happy to see them here.

Me: Leth.. Lethokuhle..Sbani.

Even talking is now a mission.

They just walk out then Nadia walk in and she stares at me.

Me: Land..Landile I..I'm sorry.

She shakes her head looking down then she look at me again with tears in her eyes.

Me: I'm sorry.

She steps closer and kneel in front of me, she hugs me as smelly and dirty as I am.

Me: Ngiyaxolisa.(I'm sorry)

Nadia: It's okay.

She take me to the bathroom then bath me at this point I don't care about anything I just want to feel better.

She finish bathing me but the pain is still there at least I don't feel things crawling there for now.

She makes a call.

Nadia: Get the bag in my car and bring it to me.

Silence.

Nadia: Ngizokufaka impama njandini!(I will slap you dog)

She seems angry then Letho walk in and give Nadia the bag.

Nadia: I am not your friend Letho okay!

Letho: I was just saying ask Sbani Landi I meant no disrespect Gumedede.

Nadia: Fuck off!

He walk out as Nadia help me wear my clothes
I keep clenching my jaws, the shirt she is
helping me wear is getting dirty already
because of my skin and blood.

Me: Am..am I getting out of here?

She nods.

Me: Thank you.

She push me to the car and help me get inside,
Sbani and Letho drive out first and Nadia
drives behind them.

She get me inside and everyone get up, I still
smell pretty bad, I move my eyes around and
look at Ntsika he is looking at me too.

Me: Please beg them to make it stop I am in a
lot of pain.

He sighs.

Ntsika: It's not up to them or us.

Me: Then what?

Ntsika: Tinyiko.

Me: I..but..Sbonga won't allow me.

He shrug his shoulders.

Ntsika: It's up to Sniko.

Me: Where is she?

Ntsika: They are coming back tomorrow.

I nod.

Ntsika: It should come from the heart not just because you want to feel better, it won't work.

Nadia help me to my room and she gives me another bath I have turned into a baby, she is no feeding me food I wish I can just throw it all inside my tummy.

Nadia: You want more?

I quickly nod, I haven't had food for a while now.

We are now all seating quietly as a call pull up outside, My brother walk in first holding a baby boy then Tinyiko follows, when my eyes meets hers I can feel the pores on my back and

the maggots are going in and out I clench my jaws holding on the wheelchair tight I want to scream. they stop by the door staring at me.

Sbonga: What is he doing here?

Nadia get up.

Nadia: Please can you just listen to him.

Sbonga: NO! I won't be listening to shit!

Me: Sbonga...

Sbonga: Niko let's get out of here.

Ntsika: Sbongakonke just sit down for a minute please.

He hold Niko's hand and they sit on the couch
Niko is still staring at me I wish I can scream for her to stop because the things on my back seems to be moving around because of her.

Sbonga: So he is back huh?

Nadia: We couldn't let him die please understand that Sbonga, I don't want to choose you are all my kids please.

Sbonga: You don't have to choose I am choosing to stay the fuck away from here for my wife's sanity and my son's safety.

Ntsika: What can he possibly do Sbonga, look at him.

Sbonga: He does a lot of damage with just his mouth so as long as it's moving I am keeping my wife away from him.

Me: I..I won't say hurtful things again..Tinyiko I'm sorry.

She hasn't moved her eyes from me.

Me: I'm sorry.

She tap Sbonga's shoulder.

Niko: I want to leave.

He nods and get up.

Me: Tinyiko I'm sorry please forgive me.

She just walk out and Sbonga stares at me.

Sbonga: Oh I see it, you only see the wrong things you did because of pain isn't it?

I look down, he chuckles and walk out.

Me: I want it to stop!

I scream like a mad man these things are eating my skin and I can feel every bit of it.

Nadia has been bathing me with different things to try and make these things go away even salt which just made my skin feel worse but she was just trying to help.

I am in bed but I can feel eyes on me I open my eyes and Tinyiko is here staring at me, I can't sit up on my own.

Me: Niko..

She get up and stand by the door looking at me.

Me: Ngicela ungixolele.(Please forgive me)

She step closer to bed I want to move away she look scary. I am not wearing anything on my upper body I feel a sharp object moving on my chest, she is holding a small shaving

machine peeling off my already falling skin and it hurts.

Me: St.. stop Niko stop!

She doesn't stop she keeps moving it so she is shaving off my skin blood is coming out, a door opens Sbonga rush in and pull her away from me, he hold her to his chest, I am shaking because of pain and fear, who would have thought I Prince Lethu would be afraid of Tinyiko one day.

Now Sbonga is holding her shoulders looking into her eyes.

Sbonga: No..come back..for our son and me..I want my wife back.

She hold him crying.

Sbonga: It's okay.

They walk out.

We are back at the lounge Niko is resting her head on Sbonga's shoulder.

Sbonga: King this is pulling my wife ten steps back from what she has been trying to heal from so I want to know is Lethu really worth all that?

Ntsika: I hear you but him healing depends on Niko's forgiveness.

Sbonga: And I also know that it depends if he really means it or just desperate to heal.

Me: I..I mean it.

Niko: "You mean what! You killed my kids right in front of me Lethu and you shot me without hesitation, you want me to forgive that?"

Me: Princess I am sorry.

I slowly get off the wheelchair as painful as it is I kneel in front of her.

Me: I'm so sorry.

She smiles through the tears.

Niko: "I have been waiting so long for this day, I told you didn't I, I told you that one day you will be at my messy".

I bow my head then look at her again.

Niko: "You are still going to rot, you are going to feel that pain I felt for years because of you, burning me, cussing me out, using me and killing my kids, more than six years and that is exactly how long you are going to wait for my forgiveness or just kill yourself like you kept whispering to me all those years trying to lead me to suicide".

I look at Sbonga.

Me: Please talk to her brother.

He shakes his head and hold Niko's hand, Nkosiyabo walk in followed by two old men and woman then Precious she has a baby bump.

Nkosiyabo: My King they came to talk to you.

He bows, he is going to be the next King after King Phiwo who has succeeded King Ntsika.

Ntsika: you can have a seat.

Man1: We are sorry for coming to your home unannounced King Gumede but the situation brought us here.

Ntsika: Situation?

I look at Precious she is looking down.

Man1: Our daughter is pregnant and she says it's one of the Prince's child but she has concerns.

Ntsika: You can talk.

Precious: I was Prince Lethu's Psychologist and I can't allow my child to stay close to him because he showed no remorse after killing his two kids, he was proud of it so I don't want that to happen to my child, but a woman, she is a seer, she said I need to come here so a child won't give me a problem.

Me: You are pregnant with my child?

She ignores me.

Ntsika: But he or she belongs here and..

Great grandfather shows up.

Mkhulu: Menzele umsebenzi manje esakesiwini sikanina Ntsikayekhaya.(Do a ceremony now while the baby is still in her mother's womb)

Ntsika: Ngobani?(Why?)

Mkhulu: Ufanele ukusabela indodana yakhe.(She is right for fearing for her son's life)enza umsebenzi bahambe.(Do a ceremony so they can leave)

Ntsika does a small ceremony to acknowledge that the baby is a Gumede but they have to leave with him, I don't have a say in all of this but it's my son and they are taking him away I might never get to meet him.

I look at Precious, she look my way then walk out with her family.

I am still in the lounge alone looking down, my life is a mess. Tinyiko walk in and sit in front of me.

Niko: "She did well, no child deserves a father like you, I wish I had a chance too and saved my kids from you".

She get up and stand behind me, she push me out and walk around the back, she stops in front of the graves, Phume and Awethu and I wasn't here for their funeral, she sit down looking at me.

Niko: "Look what you did to me Lethu".

And now it hits me, what have I done!?

Niko: "Look what you did to the innocent souls".

She then get up and leave me here, I look at the graves and Phume's scream from that day hits me hard, that "Baba!" After I shot her baby sister, how scared she was when I pointed a gun at her, it's all coming back now.

Me: I'm sorry..I'm so sorry I don't know what came over me I'm sorry.

I sit there till late I am feeling cold, shivering when I look at my hands I have blood in them.

Me: What have I done!

I scream, Nadia stands next to me, I am crying.

Nadia: I am glad that it's sinking in, you did this to yourself, no one is to be blamed it's all on you.

It's only now that I realise all the damage I did to Niko but I am too late now the pain I caused her is too deep, she won't ever forgive me so I might be rotting like this until God decide that it's my time, it's all on me.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 21

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LETHU

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Three weeks without seeing Niko or Sbonga I think they have left, I am still the same Nadia and Pamella take turns bathing and feeding me I'm just grateful for that even though the pain is still there but just seeing that they still care makes it all better.

I am sitting in the lounge Sbonga walk in whistling, he seems happy I didn't even know they are still here I thought they left I guess he is keeping Niko away from me.

He just pass me going to the kitchen then come back eating an apple, Niko walk in smiling.

Niko: "Hey I didn't see you this morning".

Sbonga: I went to gym.

Niko: "What are you going to eat?"

Sbonga: We are going out baby, now go get ready, you look pretty by the way.

Niko frowns.

Niko: "Come on I haven't even washed my face yet!"

Sbonga: Still pretty!

He kiss her cheek and walk out, Niko is blushing, she looks happier and even gaining weight.

Me: Morning.

She look my way then walk away just like that. I wheel myself out my brother is washing his car he still looks happy as well.

Me: Hi Boh.

He look at me for a while then nod.

Me: Uhm you have a new car?

Sbonga: It's Sniko's car.

I look at the plate it is written Niko.

Me: Oh I didn't really pay attention that it has her name.

I am trying to make a conversation, I know there is still my brother in there, who has a good heart.

Me: Sbonga Uhm..I want to apologize for everything I have done I know it won't fix my past mistakes but I am really sorry I wish I can take it all back.

He look at the door smiling it's Sniko holding their son who is crying.

Sbonga: Hey big boy why are you crying come to daddy.

He takes him and he keep quiet immediately I guess the little boy wanted his dad, I look down as I wonder who will calm my son have as a dad like this.

They all walk in, I take my phone and call Precious.

Precious: Hello.

Me: Hey it's Lethu.

Precious: Can I help you?

Me: Uhm I'm sorry for calling I just want to know if you need anything I can send the ...

Precious: Who the fuck do you think you are!
You think I would need something from you
after the way you treated me, blackmailing me
into sleeping with you again!

Me: I'm sorry I just want my son to know me.

Precious: You are crazy! You want him to know
a monster? A killer! Fuck off man.

She drops the call.

I sigh and sit outside, I see grandma's car
driving in then they step out with grandpa, I
am even ashamed of looking at them.

Ziyanda: Lethukuthula.

I look at her, she has tears in her eyes.

Ziyanda: Look at what you have done to
yourself.

I look down, she kneels in front of me.

Ziyanda: Every bad did you do upon someone
else it comes back multiplied, the pain you
caused Niko it's all coming back to you now.

Me: I know..

I say in tears.

Me: I know I wish I can undo everything but I am too late.

Ziyanda: But are you sorry?

Me: I am, after seeing my kids graves I realised how selfish I was to Niko from the start with Phume, she was in a bad space and I didn't help with all the things I did and said to her, I did her wrong in so many ways, things I did to her when we were alone then made her look crazy when she started having panic attacks, the mental breakdowns, she had a problem before me but I made it worse.

She wipe her tears.

Me: I almost led her to suicide so many times, all those attempted suicide it was me, I kept making her feel worthless and told her the only way she can end it is if she kills herself.

Ziyanda: But why Lethu?

Me: Grandfather told me she belongs to one of my brothers I was angry, I asked why not me! I

wanted her all to myself and when she was with me I knew that one day I would have to let her go so I wanted to destroy her I wanted my brother to find her damaged in a way that he wouldn't even want her.

Sbonga: But guess what, I wanted her just the way she was and now that she is mine we are replacing all those bad memories with good ones so I can say trying to destroy her was an epic fail brother she is still standing.

He says behind me then they walk to their car, they are wearing matching outfits, they are suited for each other, when I was with Niko I don't remember holding her hand like how my brother does I only did it when we were still kids.

Me: I want to die so the pain can stop, it keeps getting worse everyday.

Luyolo: Don't even think about killing yourself, feeling sorry for yourself won't help, face that pain, it's yours, you deserve it tell your big head that you deserve it!

He is shouting at me.

Me: I know I deserve it.

Luyolo: Then live with it even if it takes years for Niko to forgive you, live with it!

I nod.

Me: I will live with it.

Luyolo: Good, we are done treating you like a "Prince", I think it's what made you turn into this little monster, it's over.

They walk in leaving me outside, later Grandpa walk in my room with food and put it on my lap.

Luyolo: Eat..

I look at my hands they hurt Nadia or Pamella were feeding me.

Me: My hands hurt.

Luyolo: I said eat!

I try to hold the spoon but it's hard.

Me: I can't..

Luyolo: You are hungry right?

I nod.

Luyolo: Then you will eat.

He walk out, I try to lift my hand up but it's shaking the spoon falls then a plate I blink the tears away seating there, a door opens Sbonga walk in then kneel infront of me next to the plate on the floor, he look at me for a while then chuckles.

Sbonga: Remember when we were kids you always laughed at me when I wanted to go to Sunday school but it taught me a lot of life lessons, I see Abraham in you, you have fallen into a pattern of using lies and deceit to protect yourself and this caused pain to everyone involved, me, Niko and our family, you lied about Niko every chance you got and that caused pain to Mageba because at some point you made us believe she is crazy while it was all you Lethu.

I look down, he is a believer but doesn't really go to church, he used to attend those Sunday schools and sometimes Nadia and Pamella would force us to go with him but all we did was play outside while he sit there listening, he even knows how to pray, he prays a lot especially when something is bothering him.

Sbonga: I am no Saint but I can seperate right from wrong and if I do one wrong I know to apologize without someone or something forcing my hand, just like now you are doing this so you can feel better, you wouldn't have seen the need to apologize if you didn't fall sick.

I bite my lip stopping myself from crying out loud, I feel him touching my hand.

Sbonga: Ask forgiveness from God first before seeking it from everyone, ask him for guidance, ask him to mend the hearts of those people you have broken.

I look at him.

Sbonga: Pray.

Me: I don't know how to pray.

He close his eyes and bows his head still holding my hand.

Sbonga: Heavenly father in your word it is written that If we confess our sins, you are faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness so we come before you to humble ourselves and admit that we are sinners in this world but your ear is ready to hear our cry, deliver us from evil of this world and show us the right path, I pray in the name of the father, the son and the holy spirit Amen.

He look at me.

Sbonga: Open up your heart and try to talk to him like you are talking to a friend.

I nod, I hear him but I don't understand him at all.

Sbonga: It might take a while for Niko to forgive but maybe one day she will, we just

have to give her time and not rush her the pain is still raw to her she might look fine but the emotional scars are still there.

I nod.

Me: Thank you for...the prayer.

He chuckles.

Sbonga: I know in your head you are saying I am weird.

He smiles a little then walk out, he come back and clean up the pieces and food on the floor then come back with another plate of food and feed me I am so ashamed, I can't even look at him I am moving my eyes around.

Me: Uhm won't Tinyiko be angry that you are here.. doing this?

He shakes his head.

Sbonga: I think we understand each other better so she won't be angry, she doesn't get angry with me we communicate well.

I nod.

Me: You are good to her, she seems happy.

Sbonga: I love her.

I nod.

Me: You deserve her and she deserves to be loved wholeheartedly.

He nods and get up.

Sbonga: Should I help you get in bed?

I shake my head.

Me: No I can manage thank you.

He walk out, I try getting in bed for a while but I am failing so I just take the bed cover and cover myself while still on a wheelchair I guess I will sleep right here.

I am in the room it's dark then I see a small light from afar but it keeps getting close.

Phume: Baba!

I look for her but I can't find her.

Phume: Baba!

Me: Phume where are you?

She finally shows up, blood all over her dress and the corner of her mouth, she comes to me and touch the blood on her then smear it all over me.

Me: Phume stop..

Her blood is all over me.

I quickly open my eyes looking around, I was having a bad dream and I am still on a wheelchair, I feel cold and the pain is too much I take off my t-shirt my whole body is shaking that I end up on the floor convulsing, it happens till I can't move I just lay there on the cold floor groaning in pain.

In the morning grandpa walk in and help me up from the floor I am shivering.

Luyolo: Go take a bath.

I look at him then nod wheeling myself to the bathroom then I slowly bath myself, I look at the water it's red, I go back to my room and wear my clothes after trying so many times failing.

I go sit with them outside, Tinyiko and Phiwo's wives are serving breakfast, they dish up for everyone then when Niko get too me she throws the plate in my face the food is all over me, everyone is looking at her.

Me: This is not you.

She look so angry.

Me: Don't let me change you Tinyiko, don't let anger turn you into a monster that I was to you it's not who you are.

Niko: "Look at you telling me about who I am! Didn't you say I am crazy?"

Me: i said all that to make myself feel better, you were never meant to be with me so I wanted to destroy you before you get to my brother, you are not crazy.

Niko: "I hate you".

Me: And you have every right to hate me, I don't blame you.

She Just walk away, later my door opens she walk in holding a gun.

Me: Tinyiko what.. what are you doing?

She grab my wheelchair and push me out going to her car.

Niko: "Get in the car".

Me: How? Niko I ...

She cocks the gun I feel it's mouth on my forehead.

Me: Ok..I will get in.

I slowly step my foot down I groan the pain is too much, I finally get in and she drives off, she is taking a route where I killed my kids, She pull me out making me fall on the ground.

Me: Aaah..

She drags me to exactly where she was kneeling begging me not to kill our little girls, I am now the one begging.

Niko: " I want to see you take your last breath".

Me: Please..

She take some sugarcane and start hitting me all over my body it even breaks but she keeps taking another one I am groaning like a wounded animal, she takes the lighter and grab my hand.

Me: S..St..op..this isn't you St..op.

She burns my hand like I did to her years ago and when I thought it's over she lights my pants I am moving on the ground to stop the fire my thighs are already burning.

"Niko" Sbonga shouts from afar.

Sbonga: Niko!

He finally gets to us, I am on fire Sbonga quickly run back to the car and comes back with bottled water and pour it on my pants.

Me: I..Tinyiko..I..

Sbonga: Niko!

She is now on her knees next to me, even my penis hurts I think the fire got to it too I can't

tell because my whole lower body feels hot and painful.

Sbonga calls for help then kneel next to Niko, I close my eyes letting all the pain sink in.

I wake up in the hospital bed and Nadia is sitting next to me her head bowed down, I think my lower body is covered in bandages but there is a sheet over. I slowly move my hand, she look at me.

Me: H..hey..I need water..

She nods and help me drink up.

Me: Is Tinyiko okay?

She shakes her head.

Nadia: She is here, she had an early miscarriage.

I clench my jaws.

Nadia: They didn't know she was pregnant.

Me:: They will never forgive me, pain after pain, now she lost three innocent souls all because of me.

Apparently I have been here for almost 24 hours and I am only waking up now I wish I didn't wake up.

Everything hurts in my body even my balls so they got a Urologist and they have been running some test, so the doctor has just walked in.

He starts talking those medical terms which just confuses me.

Me: Is there anything wrong in simple English please.

He looks at the file.

Doctor: Well your testicles were exposed to too much heat so it caused cause the production of abnormally shaped sperm cells resulting in infertility, we don't know if this is a permanent damage yet or just short term.

Me: So..so this means I might never have kids again?

He slowly nods.

Doctor: But we can keep running test from time to time to see if it's just short term.

I nod biting my lower lip blinking the tears away, so I killed my kids, Precious will be raising my son away from me and now I might never have kids again, when it rains it pours!

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 22

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I overheard the doctor talking to my husband about me having a miscarriage, I didn't even know or suspect I was pregnant and now Sbonga is sleeping on a chair next to me I have been pretending to be asleep for hours now because I am afraid to even face him, the loss

of our baby is my fault if I didn't put myself in so much stress letting Lethu get to me this wouldn't have happened.

I feel so much pain which forces me to call Boh, I touch his hand, he quickly wake up and wipe his eyes they are red.

Sbonga: Baby..are you okay should I call a doctor?

Me: "I am in pain".

He rush out and come back with a doctor, they do an ultrasound to check if the miscarriage is complete or not I am fighting the tears back while looking away I don't want to see Sbonga's face I am scared I will maybe see disappointment or anger and I don't want my husband to feel that way about me.

He help me up after the doctor gave me some medication and confirmed that indeed I lost the baby. I have been looking the other way ever since the doctor left, Sbonga is not saying

anything or even holding my hand maybe he is going to leave me.

I feel someone standing in front of me since I have my eyes closed I slowly sit up and hug my dad crying on his chest, I needed this hug.

He finally let go and wipe my tears, Sbonga is not in the room anymore.

I stay with dad he says some comforting words then leave. Sbonga comes back and sit down looking up, I just sleep back in bed facing the other way again.

We stay in silence I don't even know if he is still here or has left I feel like this is the end of us, Sbonga is never quiet like this with me, maybe we are headed for divorce.

Today he is fetching me I am sitting in bed after taking a bath, I still feel some light cramps on my abdomen.

He walk in and look at me I quickly look down, he stretches his hand to me I hold it and we walk out. We get home and I take my baby boy

holding him to my arms letting the tears fall, why do God keep giving me these kids because I keep failing them.

Sbonga get in bed and face the other way I cover my eyes crying for a long time. I put my son on his bed then sleep next to Sbonga, I can see his body shaking, he is crying I touch his shoulder but he doesn't turn I just cry holding him from behind, he finally turns and hold me till I fall asleep. When I wake up he is on his knees his eyes are closed tears streaming down his face, he isn't saying anything I just get up and go to the bathroom and lock it, I sit on the closed toilet seat I keep wiping my tears. I see the door handle moving I unlock, he opens his arms.

Sbonga: Come here..

I run to his arms and hold him tight, he pick me up and take me to bed, I sleep on top of him he keeps rubbing my back.

In the morning I take a bath then bath my baby, Sbonga is not here. I sit in bed while

watching my son playing on the floor, the door opens he picks Mengezi up and sit next to me.

Sbonga: Hi.

I nod.

Sbonga: Did you take your medication?

Me: "Yes".

He nods.

Me: "Are we gonna talk about it?"

He shakes his head.

Me: "I'm sorry I didn't know and it's my fault I lost her".

Sbonga: Can we not talk about it now please Niko.

He says keeping his eyes down I nod with a lump in my throat, he get up but I hold his hand.

Me: "Are you thinking of divorcing me? I'm sorry Sbonga I didn't mean for us to lose the baby, I love you please don't leave me".

He sit back down.

Sbonga: You think I blame you for it?

I can't stop the tears.

Me: "I'm sorry, if I didn't act the way I did, I would still be pregnant".

He look deep into my eyes.

Sbonga: It's not your fault Sniko I guess it wasn't meant to be, I still love you so much baby and I'm sorry for making you feel like I am blaming you it's just that..

He get up and lean on the wall looking my way.

Sbonga: I suspected you are pregnant but I wasn't sure, the weight gain and the cravings you had, which was why I always took you out to eat your favourite meal, I was happy and looking forward to get a confirmation but..

He huffs.

Sbonga: I guess God had another plans.

He rubs his palms together and brush his face.

Sbonga: I thought I was watching you closely so you don't stress too much but I guess I missed that part when you left with Lethu, I could have prevented you from losing our baby I don't know how I was so careless and let you out of my sight I...

He brush his face again.

Sbonga: I'm sorry..

Me: "I can't let you blame yourself, I shouldn't have done What I did".

Sbonga: We all deal with pain differently.

Me: "How did you deal with this one?"

Sbonga: I prayed and when I couldn't say it in words I let the tears speak for me for he knows what's in my heart.

I nod.

Sbonga: I love you and I will always be here for you, you are my life till death.

I stay in his arms, he is all that I needed if I knew this I would have dated him from the

start I know I wouldn't have ended up like this but I am glad he is here.

We go home to do a ceremony for the child we lost then go back to Durban.

I am looking at Sbonga as he takes off his clothes.

Me: "Hey".

He chuckles and get in bed next to me.

Sbonga: You have something to say?

I nod.

Me: "To ask actually".

He nods.

Me: "When are you going back to work?"

Sbonga: You don't want me around anymore?

I smile as he squints his eyes.

Me: "I do but your life shouldn't stop because of me".

Sbonga: When are you finishing your studies so we can work at the same school.

Me: "I can go back next year if that's okay".

Sbonga: Ok then I will go back to work next year.

Me: "it's nice being you, taking the whole year away from work just like that".

Sbonga: That is why Nkanyezi worked his ass off so we can have all the privilege.

I nod.

I heard Lethu is coming back today and I don't know if I am ready to see him I have lost so much because of that guy.

Nadia wheel him in and he is still the same, his skin is still falling off, it looks itchy and painful. He is wearing shorts I can see where he is burnt. He is in the middle of the lounge in his wheelchair looking my way.

Lethu: Hello Tinyiko.

I nod.

Lethu: Don't worry..Uhm I am leaving I just came here to say that I hope one day you will

find it in your heart to forgive me and so sorry for your loss.

I stare at him.

Lethu: I can see how much damage I am still doing to you by being here so I will find a place to stay and hire a nurse to help me.

Me: "This is your home".

Lethu: And it's yours too I think you belong here more than me.

He look at Nadia.

Lethu: I am ready to go.

They leave.

It's been over two months with Lethu gone I am slowly healing from losing my baby everything has been good Sbonga is always there, when I shut down he always pull me back.

He just walked in our room looking frustrated.

Me: "Hey, what's wrong?"

He look at me for a while then sit down.

Sbonga: It's Lethukuthula..

I look at him so he can continue.

Sbonga: Something is wrong but he doesn't want to talk, he seems to be getting worse.

He look at me.

Sbonga: I'm sorry I know you don't wanna hear it, sorry.

I told him he can go see his brother but shouldn't tell me anything about him.

Sbonga: He is not talking anymoreni don't know what's wrong.

He says like he is talking to himself. He wipe his face and go to the bathroom, I understand why he is like this, at the end of the day Lethu is his brother.

Today he took our son saying they are going out so I go to my car and drive to some apartments not far from home I found Lethu's address from Landi. I knock for some time but no one answers so I open the door and walk

in, I look from room to room for Lethu and find him at the back with a woman looks like she is shouting at him, then she takes a 20 litre bucket full of water and pour it on him, he starts shivering same time, she shoves him back and he falls on his back, she finally turns and see me standing there she look scared then she run past me, I step closer to where Lethu is, he is trying to get up, I stand there looking at him, he look so scared. I squat in front of him.

Lethu: Please..don't hurt me.

He is really scared, I fix his wheelchair then try to get him up, I finally do after so much struggle then push him back inside and send a text to Sbonga.

Me: "I am with Lethu, he needs help".

I sit on the couch he is still shivering.

Me: "Sbonga is coming".

Sbonga walk in and look at me confused I tell him what I saw when I came in.

Sbonga: So that woman was abusing you?

He slowly nods.

Sbonga: Why didn't you tell me Lethu?

Lethu: Because I deserve it, all of it.

Me: "I think he is feeling cold".

Sbonga take him to the bathroom, I go to the kitchen to make some tea for him, the weather isn't that hot to be poured with cold water.

They come back, I give Sbonga the cup so he can help him drink up.

We sit down looking at him.

Lethu: Can you ask your God to take me please.

He says looking at Sbonga.

Lethu: I'm tired, I just want to die, please.

Sbonga look down.

Lethu: No words I say will fix what I have done to you so I might as well die maybe you will find peace.

Me: "I found my peace in him".

I say pointing at Sbonga.

Lethu: Ngiyaxolisa.(I'm sorry)

He falls on his knees, it must hurt pretty bad.

Lethu: I'm so sorry.

I can see it from his eyes how desperate he is, how sorry he is.

Me: "I forgive you".

He blinks staring at me.

Me: "Wholeheartedly, I forgive you, you were once good to me, the four of you when we were still kids, so I am forgiving you for the younger Lethu who always knew how to make me laugh when I was feeling down, Sbonga who always had something to say about God and Sunday school teachings, Letho and Sbani for always buying sweets for me to make me feel better, I forgive you".

He cries like a little baby bowing his head on the floor, Sbonga kneels in front of him

hugging him I walk out and sit outside wiping my tears.

Sbonga walk out and pull me up hugging me tight then kiss me.

Sbonga: I know this was hard for you but thank you so much, thank you.

We walk back inside and Lethu is moving his hands.

Lethu: Thank you Niko I feel a bit better I know it will take time, thank you, you have. a good heart.

I nod.

Lethu: Uhm can I shake your hand I know you wouldn't want to hug me I still look bad.

I look at my husband he nods smiling, I bend down hugging him he seems shocked, I pull away looking at him.

Lethu: Thank you so much.

Me: "We won't be best of friends because well I can't really forget the things you did to me".

Lethu: I don't expect you to forget I myself can't forget what I did to you, I am even ashamed to look at you.

Me: "So you want to go back home?"

He look at Sbonga.

Sbonga: You can come back home with us.

He just cries all over again, Sbonga packs his clothes then we go back home, when we walk in with him everyone look at us in confusion and shock.

Nadia: Uhm what is going on?

Lethu: "Niko has forgiven me".

He says in sign language Landi quickly get up looking at him.

Nadia: You can use your hands?

Lethu: Yes.

She look at me.

Nadia: You forgave him?

Me: I did.

She hugs me then go on one knee.

Nadia: Thank you Princess thank you so much.

Sbonga: Get up Landile I feel like you are proposing to my wife.

Everyone laughs, Nadia hugs me again, she loves her kids you can tell.

King Ntsika stands in front of me smiling.

Ntsika: "You are strong and brave, I admire you and I wish you well, may you live long Princess kaMageba".

He bows his head and I do the same then follows his hug, everyone take turns hugging me.

I look at Lethu and I don't feel anything for him, no love or that fear I had everytime he was close by, he doesn't have a hold on me, I don't feel like I owe him anymore then I look at Sbonga, now I feel butterflies in my tummy my heart is beating differently everytime our eyes lock he makes me nervous in a good way it's all love.

Sbonga: "I love you"

He says smiling standing far from me.

Me: "I love you too".

I look around the room, everyone is happy and that is the kind of environment I want to be in so I'd like to believe forgiving Lethu was the best decision for me and this family.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 23

*

LETHU

*

I am still on the wheelchair but my skin is slowly healing I can now bath and feed myself

I only need help with the bandages on my lower body and my feet still hurts.

Today I woke up with my stomach hurting so bad so I am sitting in bed holding it, it's like someone is cutting me, Letho walk in and sit in my bed looking at me, we haven't been talking.

Letho: How are you feeling?

I blink maybe I am dreaming, he is talking to me.

Me: I'm...fine.

Letho: But you are holding your tummy.

Me: It hurts a bit.

Letho: So you just lied and said you are fine.

I chuckle, he just smiles that's my brother always analysing unimportant things.

Letho: I love you.

Wow.

Letho: It just that you are a pussy and you needed tough love.

I smile.

Letho: I hope this taught you some important lesson brother and you will never treat someone's child like you did with Tinyiko.

Me: I learnt my lesson the hard way so I will never dream of mistreating anyone again.

He nods, I groan holding my tummy again.

Letho: Let me get something for the pain.

He walk out and come back with King, he sit in my bed.

Ntsika: This doesn't need medication.

I look at him confused.

Ntsika: It's the birth of your son.

Then huge lightening hits my mirror it breaks into two pieces falling on the floor.

Ntsika: It would be the happiest day of your life if you didn't do so many wrong things.

I look down as tears burn my eyes.

Ntsika: But at least he will live.

Me: I wasn't gonna kill him.

Ntsika: We didn't think you would kill Phume and Awethu, we thought you loved them.

Me: I did and killing them will hunt me for life that's the part Tinyiko's forgiveness won't erase from my mind.

I sigh.

Me: Can't you at least contact Precious family on my behalf.

I sense Great-grandfather then he shows up.

Ntsika: Phakathwayo..

He bows looking at Ntsika then he look my way.

Mkhulu: Bayekele.(let them be)

I nod biting my lower lip.

Mkhulu: Konke kwenziwe uwe.(You did all this)

I wipe my tears Letho hold my hand.

Mkhulu: Ngizokutshela ukuthi udinga ukugeza umfowenu nomfazi wakhe ukuvala umkhokha omubi wesbhamu kulomndeni.(I came to tell you that you need to cleanse your brother and his wife for the bad omen of guns in this family.

I nod.

Mkhulu: Ntsikayekhaya uPhiwokuhle uzokwenza loku.(Phiwokuhle will do this)

Ntsika nods and call King Phiwo, we all sit quietly Mkhulu is still standing in the middle of my room, three cheetahs walk in followed by Phiwo then three follow behind him, they are not cubs anymore. I slowly get up from bed and bow my head.

Me: Hi brother.

He stares at me then nod.

Phiwo: Gumede..

He says looking at Mkhulu he smiles which is something you don't see very often.

Mkhulu: King Phiwokuhle.

Phiwo smile back, they tell him that I have to buy two white goats to cleanse my brother and Tinyiko but we have to do it back home at the palace.

We get in our cars and drive to the palace, grandma comes to my brothers and I, she stands in front of us not saying anything for a minute I look down.

Ziyanda: I was so scared thinking that I have a grandson that is exactly like the man I hate so much, your grandpa's twin brother Kuhle.

Me: Ngiyaxolisa.(I'm sorry)

I feel her hand on my shoulder I look at her she is smiling with tears in her eyes.

Ziyanda: I love you and I hope you really change for the better.

We hug and walk inside, my brothers, Tinyiko and Phiwo are at the rondavel doing that cleansing ceremony and I have to explain what I did to both of them then apologize going as

far as washing their feet with a goat's gall, I do everything that is being said then after the whole thing I sit alone at the back and look for Precious on Social media and luckily I find her, I see her timeline she posted a picture of a baby on a caption "He is finally here, my baby boy Phelo" she didn't show his whole face just the side, I go to her inbox and type.

Me: "Hey how are you doing?"

I just wish to at least see him just once, he is my blood.

Days pass we are back in Durban but no reply from Precious, she did block me because I can't see her name anymore.

I sit at home trying to heal and I am now counting three months since my son was born I can walk on my own but still limping since my lower body hasn't healed that well from that fire I still use bandages.

Letho walk in my room and go to the closet taking out clothes.

Me: What is going on?

Letho: I am taking you out.

Me: For what?

Letho: For some air Lethu, you can't live your whole life locking yourself up feeling sorry for yourself it's time to face the world.

Me: I don't wanna face anything.

Letho: Too bad, we are leaving even if I have to drag you out of that bed.

I sigh, I haven't been out firstly because my skin is still different since it's now healed but that old hard skin is slowly peeling off and also because I am still sad that I can't see my son.

My brother force me to go with him, he drives to the mall and we eat, he is shouting at everyone who tries taking pictures of me, this is what I was afraid of.

We walk out of the mall but I stop walking when I see Precious, he is with a guy who is

pushing a baby stroller, I slowly walk up to them.

Me: Hi.

She look so scared, she is blinking rapidly.

Precious: Siyabonga lets...we have to go.

Me: Precious I..

She quickly bend down and take the baby from the stroller and run to the car with him.

Siya: So you are the Prince she is keeping her son away from.

Me: Look man I need to talk to her.

Siya: She is scared of you.

Me: I won't do anything please.

He nods and walk to the car, I see him taking the baby from her then she comes to me alone.

Me: Hey.

Precious: I will get a restraining order against you I don't want you anywhere near my son and I.

Me: I understand, just..please can you let me see him just once.

Precious: No!

Me: Please just this one time.

Precious: You promise never to try to find us right?

She is really scared of me.

Me: I won't try I promise.

Grandpa did say I should leave them alone, she goes to her car and come back with a baby, she slowly give him to me, I hold him staring down at him, Precious is standing too close like she doesn't want me to run with him.

Letho: Wow! hey mini me..

He is standing next to me looking at the baby that is just staring at me.

Me: He does look like us and Sbonga's boy.

He nods.

Precious: We have to go.

I give him back to his Mom she turns walking away.

Me: Precious please let me see him again.

Precious: I'm sorry I can't, I don't want to lose him.

She get in her car and they drive away, I huff brushing my face.

Letho: Maybe one day she will let you see him.

Me: I don't think she will, this is the person I was gloating to about killing my kids and I kept blackmailing her into sleeping with me, she won't allow me.

Letho: I'm sorry brother

We go back home and my whole mood has dropped I am back to sitting in my bed just staring at the wall.

At night I feel someone's presence in my room
I sit up and look around it's Buhle sitting on a
chair eating an apple with a knife.

Me: How did you get in here?

She chuckles.

Buhle: Is that how you greet your wife now?

Me: Buhle get out.

Buhle: I heard you have a son now with a
Doctor.

Me: How..how did you know that?

Buhle: I know everything baby.

Me: What do you want?

Buhle: To finish the job.

Me: What job?

Buhle: The one you failed to do when I handed
her to you on a silver platter.

Me: Buhle..

Buhle: You promised me that day that if I take her to you, you gonna kill her but she is still here breathing.

Me: No Buhle I don't want to kill Tinyiko anymore.

Buhle: Too bad cause I do, all our marriage life you never gave me any attention not to mention kids because of her Lethu! You gave her another one while I was here!

Me: I'm sorry about that but..

Buhle: I want her dead and you are going to give her to me..

Me: I can't do that.

Buhle: It's either her or your son, you choose and fast.

Me: Please.

Buhle: They don't stay far from here you know, Musgrave....

She reads the address on her phone I am panicking.

Me: Buhle..

Buhle: Tinyiko or your son, I am giving you 72 hours to think about it.

She get up and come to bed, she moves the knife on the side of my face.

Buhle: Tick tock...

She giggles walking out, I rub my face, what am I going to do.

A day pass I am looking at how happy Tinyiko is with my brother and their son, how Sbonga looks at her like she is the only woman in this world, i have taken so much from this girl and I don't want to take more, she is at her happiest now but there is my son, I might never have babies again so he is the only living proof that I am a man in this world even though I am not in his life but he still has my blood running through his veins.

Sbonga: Lethu!

I look at him.

Sbonga: Are you okay?

I nod and my eyes move to Tinyiko who is playing with her son.

Sbonga: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing..

He give me a little nod.

At night Buhle is back in my room.

Me: I will tell Landi to remove you from our security system Buhle.

Buhle: That would be a bad idea pretty boy, remember our baby boy?

I look down, she put the needle on my lap.

Buhle: You have every opportunity to inject her and bring her to me like I did it for you.

Me: But my brother w...

She put another needle in my lap.

Buhle: That is for putting your boring brother to sleep.

Me: I can't do this Buhle.

Buhle: You can and you will, I will give you the address tomorrow, your last day.

Today is the "last day" and I feel sick I can't even eat, Tinyiko serves everyone breakfast even me, then my phone beeps I take it then a video of Buhle holding a baby shows up.

Buhle: I just met your boy so do the right thing! She says so cheerfully I start shaking.

Me: Excuse me.

I get up and walk to my room calling Buhle.

Buhle: Hey husband.

Me: Please don't do this.

Buhle: You want to say hi to Phelo "the one and only"?

Me: I will give you..I will give you what you want Buhle.

Buhle: Good, tonight then.

Me: But I thought it's tomorrow.

Buhle: No no, tonight.

Me: But..

She drops the call.

At night I am moving around my room like a mad man thinking about how I am going to do this, the buzzer stops me from talking, I look at the time it's around nine, I walk out of my room everyone was still in the lounge, they buzz the person in and Precious walk in crying hysterically, she scans the room and rush to me.

Precious: You took my son! You want to kill him like you did to your kids, give me my son back Lethu!

Everyone looks at me.

Me: I didn't do it.

Precious: You want to kill my son!

She cries so painfully sitting on the floor I kneel in front of her hugging her.

Me: It's not me.

Nadia: Lethukuthula!

She shouts.

Me: It's not me Landi.

She grabs my arm pulling me up, we walk down the passage going to her room.

Nadia: After everything! You are at it again!

I shake my head.

Me: It's Buhle, she has him.

Nadia: You sent Buhle again like you did with Tinyiko!?

Me: No.

I show him the video and a notification comes through I check it, it's the address.

Nadia: What is this?

Me: The address where I should meet her with Tinyiko so she can give me back my son.

She rush out I follow her, Precious is sitting on the couch still crying. Nadia run out of her room calling someone on the phone then she is out the door.

Precious slowly look up to me.

Precious: Please don't kill him, I have lost the most important people in my life, not my son too please.

My phone rings I answer it.

Buhle: Bad move, getting your mother to try and track me? I gave you the wrong address I knew you are a weak ass running to Landile everytime.

Me: Buhle where is my son?

Buhle: Give me what I want Lethu.

She drops the call, I look at Sbonga.

Sbonga: Let's talk.

He hold his wife's hand and walk away with her I follow them and find them in their room, I sit on the couch while they sit in bed looking at me.

Sbonga: You keep looking from me to Tinyiko what is it?

Me: Buhle...she.

Sbonga: She wants Tinyiko in exchange for your son huh?

I nod.

Me: I wasn't gonna take Tinyiko believe me.

He squints his eyes.

Me: I wasn't, she gave me two injections two days back to inject the both of you but I couldn't do it.

Sbonga: So you are giving up your son?

Me: No, I don't know what to do Boh.

He sighs.

Sbonga: Let me call Landi so she can come back and she is probably changing locations there is no way she can just use her number freely like this while she knows we can track it.

I nod and go back to the lounge while he calls Landile.

I sit next to Precious holding her hand.

Me: We will find him.

Precious: After this I am moving away from here, I want nothing to do with you.

Me: That's okay as long as you and my son will be safe.

She wipe her tears, my phone beeps I look at it, the baby is crying his lungs out causing Precious to scream as well.

Buhle: "Bye daddy".

She waves with a sharp knife in her hand.

Me: Buhle please don't....

Buhle: If only you stuck to the plan Lethu and killed the bitch!

A picture of my kids in a pool of blood plays in my head, this is the third one I am going to lose and it's all because of me, I feel dizzy, I let go of the phone and my body hits the floor hard.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 23

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LETHU

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Ntsika nods and call King Phiwo, we all sit quietly Mkhulu is still standing in the middle of my room, three cheetahs walk in followed by

Phiwo then three follow behind him, they are not cubs anymore. I slowly get up from bed and bow my head.

Me: Hi brother.

He stares at me then nod.

Phiwo: Gumede..

He says looking at Mkhulu he smiles which is something you don't see very often.

Mkhulu: King Phiwokuhle.

Phiwo smile back, they tell him that I have to buy two white goats to cleanse my brother and Tinyiko but we have to do it back home at the palace.

We get in our cars and drive to the palace, grandma comes to my brothers and I, she stands in front of us not saying anything for a minute I look down.

Ziyanda: I was so scared thinking that I have a grandson that is exactly like the man I hate so much, your grandpa's twin brother Kuhle.

Me: Ngiyaxolisa.(I'm sorry)

I feel her hand on my shoulder I look at her she is smiling with tears in her eyes.

Ziyanda: I love you and I hope you really change for the better.

We hug and walk inside, my brothers, Tinyiko and Phiwo are at the rondavel doing that cleansing ceremony and I have to explain what I did to both of them then apologize going as far as washing their feet with a goat's gall, I do everything that is being said then after the whole thing I sit alone at the back and look for Precious on Social media and luckily I find her, I see her timeline she posted a picture of a baby on a caption "He is finally here, my baby boy Phelo" she didn't show his whole face just the side, I go to her inbox and type.

Me: "Hey how are you doing?"

I just wish to at least see him just once, he is my blood.

Days pass we are back in Durban but no reply from Precious, she did block me because I can't see her name anymore.

I sit at home trying to heal and I am now counting three months since my son was born I can walk on my own but still limping since my lower body hasn't healed that well from that fire I still use bandages.

Letho walk in my room and go to the closet taking out clothes.

Me: What is going on?

Letho: I am taking you out.

Me: For what?

Letho: For some air Lethu, you can't live your whole life locking yourself up feeling sorry for yourself it's time to face the world.

Me: I don't wanna face anything.

Letho: Too bad, we are leaving even if I have to drag you out of that bed.

I sigh, I haven't been out firstly because my skin is still different since it's now healed but that old hard skin is slowly peeling off and also because I am still sad that I can't see my son.

My brother force me to go with him, he drives to the mall and we eat, he is shouting at everyone who tries taking pictures of me, this is what I was afraid of.

We walk out of the mall but I stop walking when I see Precious, he is with a guy who is pushing a baby stroller, I slowly walk up to them.

Me: Hi.

She look so scared, she is blinking rapidly.

Precious: Siyabonga lets...we have to go.

Me: Precious I..

She quickly bend down and take the baby from the stroller and run to the car with him.

Siya: So you are the Prince she is keeping her son away from.

Me: Look man I need to talk to her.

Siya: She is scared of you.

Me: I won't do anything please.

He nods and walk to the car, I see him taking the baby from her then she comes to me alone.

Me: Hey.

Precious: I will get a restraining order against you I don't want you anywhere near my son and I.

Me: I understand, just..please can you let me see him just once.

Precious: No!

Me: Please just this one time.

Precious: You promise never to try to find us right?

She is really scared of me.

Me: I won't try I promise.

Grandpa did say I should leave them alone, she goes to her car and come back with a baby, she slowly give him to me, I hold him staring down at him, Precious is standing too close like she doesn't want me to run with him.

Letho: Wow! hey mini me..

He is standing next to me looking at the baby that is just staring at me.

Me: He does look like us and Sbonga's boy.

He nods.

Precious: We have to go.

I give him back to his Mom she turns walking away.

Me: Precious please let me see him again.

Precious: I'm sorry I can't, I don't want to lose him.

She get in her car and they drive away, I huff brushing my face.

Letho: Maybe one day she will let you see him.

Me: I don't think she will, this is the person I was gloating to about killing my kids and I kept blackmailing her into sleeping with me, she won't allow me.

Letho: I'm sorry brother

We go back home and my whole mood has dropped I am back to sitting in my bed just staring at the wall.

At night I feel someone's presence in my room I sit up and look around it's Buhle sitting on a chair eating an apple with a knife.

Me: How did you get in here?

She chuckles.

Buhle: Is that how you greet your wife now?

Me: Buhle get out.

Buhle: I heard you have a son now with a Doctor.

Me: How..how did you know that?

Buhle: I know everything baby.

Me: What do you want?

Buhle: To finish the job.

Me: What job?

Buhle: The one you failed to do when I handed her to you on a silver platter.

Me: Buhle..

Buhle: You promised me that day that if I take her to you, you gonna kill her but she is still here breathing.

Me: No Buhle I don't want to kill Tinyiko anymore.

Buhle: Too bad cause I do, all our marriage life you never gave me any attention not to mention kids because of her Lethu! You gave her another one while I was here!

Me: I'm sorry about that but..

Buhle: I want her dead and you are going to give her to me..

Me: I can't do that.

Buhle: It's either her or your son, you choose and fast.

Me: Please.

Buhle: They don't stay far from here you know, Musgrave....

She reads the address on her phone I am panicking.

Me: Buhle..

Buhle: Tinyiko or your son, I am giving you 72 hours to think about it.

She get up and come to bed, she moves the knife on the side of my face.

Buhle: Tick tock...

She giggles walking out, I rub my face, what am I going to do.

A day pass I am looking at how happy Tinyiko is with my brother and their son, how Sbonga looks at her like she is the only woman in this world, i have taken so much from this girl and I don't want to take more, she is at her happiest

now but there is my son, I might never have babies again so he is the only living proof that I am a man in this world even though I am not in his life but he still has my blood running through his veins.

Sbonga: Lethu!

I look at him.

Sbonga: Are you okay?

I nod and my eyes move to Tinyiko who is playing with her son.

Sbonga: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing..

He give me a little nod.

At night Buhle is back in my room.

Me: I will tell Landi to remove you from our security system Buhle.

Buhle: That would be a bad idea pretty boy, remember our baby boy?

I look down, she put the needle on my lap.

Buhle: You have every opportunity to inject her and bring her to me like I did it for you.

Me: But my brother w...

She put another needle in my lap.

Buhle: That is for putting your boring brother to sleep.

Me: I can't do this Buhle.

Buhle: You can and you will, I will give you the address tomorrow, your last day.

Today is the "last day" and I feel sick I can't even eat, Tinyiko serves everyone breakfast even me, then my phone beeps I take it then a video of Buhle holding a baby shows up.

Buhle: I just met your boy so do the right thing!

She says so cheerfully I start shaking.

Me: Excuse me.

I get up and walk to my room calling Buhle.

Buhle: Hey husband.

Me: Please don't do this.

Buhle: You want to say hi to Phelo "the one and only"?

Me: I will give you..I will give you what you want Buhle.

Buhle: Good, tonight then.

Me: But I thought it's tomorrow.

Buhle: No no, tonight.

Me: But..

She drops the call.

At night I am moving around my room like a mad man thinking about how I am going to do this, the buzzer stops me from talking, I look at the time it's around nine, I walk out of my room everyone was still in the lounge, they buzz the person in and Precious walk in crying hysterically, she scans the room and rush to me.

Precious: You took my son! You want to kill him like you did to your kids, give me my son back Lethu!

Everyone looks at me.

Me: I didn't do it.

Precious: You want to kill my son!

She cries so painfully sitting on the floor I kneel in front of her hugging her.

Me: It's not me.

Nadia: Lethukuthula!

She shouts.

Me: It's not me Landi.

She grabs my arm pulling me up, we walk down the passage going to her room.

Nadia: After everything! You are at it again!

I shake my head.

Me: It's Buhle, she has him.

Nadia: You sent Buhle again like you did with Tinyiko!?

Me: No.

I show him the video and a notification comes through I check it, it's the address.

Nadia: What is this?

Me: The address where I should meet her with Tinyiko so she can give me back my son.

She rush out I follow her, Precious is sitting on the couch still crying. Nadia run out of her room calling someone on the phone then she is out the door.

Precious slowly look up to me.

Precious: Please don't kill him, I have lost the most important people in my life, not my son too please.

My phone rings I answer it.

Buhle: Bad move, getting your mother to try and track me? I gave you the wrong address I knew you are a weak ass running to Landile everytime.

Me: Buhle where is my son?

Buhle: Give me what I want Lethu.

She drops the call, I look at Sbonga.

Sbonga: Let's talk.

He hold his wife's hand and walk away with her I follow them and find them in their room, I sit on the couch while they sit in bed looking at me.

Sbonga: You keep looking from me to Tinyiko what is it?

Me: Buhle...she.

Sbonga: She wants Tinyiko in exchange for your son huh?

I nod.

Me: I wasn't gonna take Tinyiko believe me.

He squints his eyes.

Me: I wasn't, she gave me two injections two days back to inject the both of you but I couldn't do it.

Sbonga: So you are giving up your son?

Me: No, I don't know what to do Boh.

He sighs.

Sbonga: Let me call Landi so she can come back and she is probably changing locations

there is no way she can just use her number freely like this while she knows we can track it.

I nod and go back to the lounge while he calls Landile.

I sit next to Precious holding her hand.

Me: We will find him.

Precious: After this I am moving away from here, I want nothing to do with you.

Me: That's okay as long as you and my son will be safe.

She wipe her tears, my phone beeps I look at it, the baby is crying his lungs out causing Precious to scream as well.

Buhle: "Bye daddy".

She waves with a sharp knife in her hand.

Me: Buhle please don't....

Buhle: If only you stuck to the plan Lethu and killed the bitch!

A picture of my kids in a pool of blood plays in my head, this is the third one I am going to

lose and it's all because of me, I feel dizzy, I let go of the phone and my body hits the floor hard.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 24

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I am watching as Precious cry painfully kneeling next to Lethu who just collapsed on the floor. Sbonga rush in with some water and splash it on Lethu's face, he gasps opening his eyes.

Precious: I want my son Lethukuthula, I want my son.

Lethu look at Sbonga with tears in his eyes. I tap my husband's shoulder he turns looking at me.

Me: "Can we talk".

He follows me to our room and sit down while I remain standing.

Me: "I will go with Lethu".

He stares at me.

Sbonga: Go with him to where!?

Me: "To wherever Buhle is at".

Sbonga: Ungangihlanyisi Niko! (Don't make me mad Niko!)

Me: "I can't watch another woman go through the pain of losing a baby while I can do something about it, I know the pain too well".

Sbonga: And what is it that you can do Tinyiko? Tell me.

Me: "Buhle wants me Sbonga we can't let the baby die".

Sbonga: So I should let you die huh?

I shake my head.

Me: "I just want to help Precious get her son back Boh".

Sbonga: I understand that baby but I can't risk your life Niko I can't!

Me: "Buhle might tell you guys apart but not better than I can".

Sbonga: What do you mean?

Me: "We can pretend you are Lethu and we will do this together".

Sbonga: How?

Me: "She will think you are Lethu and then I will pretend as if you drugged me, we will go to where she wants Lethu to meet her then you will take the baby from her".

Sbonga: What if something goes wrong Niko? What if she is not alone I don't want to lose you I can't I'm sorry.

Me: "I trust you I know you wouldn't let anything happen to me".

He shakes his head rubbing his face, I sit on his lap and kiss his neck, he get up with me and we walk out.

Lethu looks weak on the couch.

Me: "Call her and tell her you will do it".

Lethu: N...no you can't.

Me: "Sbonga will pose as you so I will be safe".

He shakes his head.

Me: "Are you pretending?"

He look at me confused.

Me: "You do want your baby to die, you are just pretending here like you pretended to love my kids then killed them! Is that it?"

He stares at me with sadness all over his face.

Lethu: I...I will call Buhle.

He take his phone with his shaky hands and make a call.

Lethu: Buhle I will give you what you want..

He look at Sbonga then drop the call.

Lethu: She wants proof that I drugged her.

Sbonga: And what is that proof?

Lethu: She wants a picture of Tinyiko in a boot of a car.

Sbonga: Never! My wife is not going to get in the trunk!

Me: "I will do it".

Sbonga: And what if you suffocate to death!

Me: "Stop being dramatic Wena".

I walk away to my room and wear my gown, Sbonga walk in and untie it taking off all that I am wearing then take off his clothes, he makes passionate love to me so slow and sensual, the way his hands move on my body I hold him tight.

Sbonga: I love you.

He says looking at me still thrusting slow but deeper I hold the sheets tight.

Sbonga: I love you Niko.

Sweat is running down his face, he pull out and turn me around making me kneel, his hand brushes my ass then he finds his way deep in me, first time doing sex in this position he was always holding back from doing other positions maybe he was afraaid I don't know, it feels so good, as he keeps stroking I cum hard shaking but he isn't stopping, I don't want him to stop, he keeps going until he finally cums then get up going to the bathroom I sit in bed I want to smile, that sex was too good makes me falls in love with him even more. He comes back from the bathroom and wear his clothes quietly I am just staring at him feeling all tingle down there I just want a repeat of what he just did to me.

He stands infront of me giving me my tracksuits.

Sbonga: Wear this.

I nod and take the clothes, he walk out.

I follow him after freshening up and find him loading two guns.

Me: "You will give me one?"

He stares at me for a while then continue to load it.

Me: "Sbonga".

Sbonga: I can protect you Sniko or suddenly you don't trust me?

He is so cold.

Me: "I trust you I was just asking Boh I'm sorry if I offended you".

He look at Lethu.

Sbonga: Give me the phone.

Lethu does exactly that, Boh get up and pull me up from the couch taking my hand walking out with me then open the boot, I get in I see flashlight, he is taking pictures of me then pull me out and get me in the backseat of the car, he is doing all this quietly it's like he is Lethu, cold.

He drives out in speed I am even holding my breath.

He stops at some abandoned building and take out the gun, we step out of the car then he pick me up looking down at me.

Sbonga: Once we get the baby you can leave and take the car okay, don't wait for me.

He walk in the building there are candles all around the room Buhle shows up smiling I pretend to be weak.

Buhle: Oh you came you are not so weak after all dear husband.

I want to laugh, I mean can't she really tell that it's not Lethu, she was married to the guy but then again I know them better.

Sbonga: I have never been weak baby..

She widens her eyes and quickly take out the gun.

Buhle: Sbo..Sbonga..

I guess maybe their voices are different or maybe she saw the silver which is how most

people differentiate him from his brothers but I am disappointed in her for real.

Sbonga put me down she moves her gun and point at me.

Sbonga: Give us the baby Buhle.

Buhle: After I kill this bitch.

Sbonga: You won't be killing my wife.

Two guys walk in pointing guns at me now I am scared he is outnumbered, Buhle is smiling.

Buhle: There is only one of you Boh Boh.

Sbonga: There can never be one of me love while Pamella carried four of us.

I sense presence behind me I turn it's Letho and Sbani.

Buhle: You won't get that baby!

She runs back and two gentlemen walk closer to us, now they are shooting at each other, I run to where Buhle went and find her taking the baby and a bag I stand in front of her.

Me: "Give me the baby".

Buhle: I don't know what you are saying and I don't care move out of my way right now.

Me: "No".

She takes out the gun and point at the baby in her arms I freeze for a second, a picture of Awethu flashes I blink a few times and remember I am doing this so another woman won't feel that pain that I went through, I step close faster and pull the gun from her hand throwing it across the room then snatch the baby from her running out, The boys are nowhere to be found I go to the car they are still not here, I get in the car and drive home.

I take the baby and walk in Precious quickly get up and rush to me.

Precious: Is that..is that my baby?

I nod.

Precious: Can I take her?

I nod again, she takes the baby and hold him to her chest crying.

Precious; Thank you so much..

There are two old men in the room I assume they are her family, Lethu get up and look at me.

Lethu: Thank you Niko.

He look at Precious.

Lethu: Can I hold him?

Precious look at me first then slowly give Lethu the baby, his eyes are teary, seeing this side of Lethu is really shocking but maybe I will get used to it one day.

Precious: I have to go now and I am moving away.

Lethu nods giving her the baby.

Lethu: I'm sorry for all this.

She nods.

Lethu: When he grow up asking about his dad you will tell him I am a bad person?

Oh man.

Precious: I don't know.

He nods.

Lethu: can I hold him one last time?

Precious give him the baby again.

Lethu: Gumede, Phakathwayo, Mnguni kaYeyeye, Qwabe, I wish you the best of all this world could give.

He kiss his forehead and give him back to his mother, the two uncles get up and walk out.

Precious: Thank you.

I nod, she hugs me hesitantly then walk out. Lethu has his head bowed down sitting on a couch.

Sbonga, Letho and Sbani walk in, Letho is holding his shoulder looks like he is hurt.

Me: "Are you okay?"

Letho: Yep I am bullet proof all around even my dick!.

I smile shaking my head, Sbonga smack the back of his head.

Lethu: Thank you for what you did today I appreciate it.

His eyes are red.

Sbani: Where is he?

Lethu: They left, they are moving to Port Elizabeth.

Sbani: Yhoo so far.

Lethu: It's better that way.

He walk away with his head hanging down, Sbonga and I go to our room then I go dish up for him since I am not hungry, I find Lethu in the kitchen sitting on a barstool, I stand in front of him.

Me: "Are you good?"

He nods but he is clearly not.

Me: "Did you kill them because they are girls? You wanted a boy?"

He look at me.

Lethu: No I didn't mean to.

Me: "The way you looked at your son it was different, I could tell how much you cared but I didn't see that with my kids, you even went sick when the gun was pointed at him but you, you pulled a trigger on my kids and showed no care, they didn't matter only a boy does to you huh".

He look down I bang the table he jumps standing up, Sbonga walk in the room but my eyes are fixed on Lethu.

Me: " Only a boy child matters to you! You kill all the girls, they are useless huh?"

Sbonga: Niko..

Me: "I want him to explain to me how he feels so hurt when they almost killed his son while he killed his daughters".

I am getting really angry I want to cry.

Lethu: I'm sorry.

Sbonga: Baby stop.

Me: "Stop what, I want to know how this works with him, how Lethu? How is it that you feel pain now?"

He doesn't answer I take the glass and throw it his way he blocks it with his arm, I keep throwing everything I can put my hands on at him Sbonga hold me then pick me up going to our room and put me in bed, I just close my eyes and think about my beautiful babies I really miss them especially today it hurts.

I wake up in the morning still feeling sad, Sbonga is still asleep, I take my gown and wear it going around the back I find Lethu kneeling next to Awethu's grave, I kneel as well.

Lethu: The day I found out you were carrying Phume, it was the happiest day of my life and when she came into this world holding her in my arms for the first time I fell in love with her same with Awethu when I found out she was mine I loved them, I still do.

Me: "Why did you kill them, where did all that love go?"

Lethu: I wasn't thinking straight I wanted to hurt you so bad that I shut down all my feelings and let anger control me, the love I have for my kids is all the same It's just that Phelo is the only one now and I might never have kids again.

Me: "So you would kill him if you happen to be misdiagnosed and can have kids again?"

Lethu: No Niko I wouldn't, I'm sorry for what I did.

We stay in silence for some time, I get up and walk inside I find Sbonga still asleep but he is sweating, I shake him he jumps up looking around then pull me to him hugging me tight.

Me: "What's wrong?"

Sbonga: I had a bad dream, you were crying.

Me: "I cry all the time".

Sbonga: I am serious Niko.

Me: "I know you are but it's just a dream because you love me so much".

He smiles a little.

Sbonga: I do love you baby.

He kiss my cheek and roll out of bed going to our son, he take him and look at me.

Sbonga: I love the two of you so much baby and I want you happy all the time.

Me: "And I am happy with you."

I walk out to help with breakfast but find Lethu standing in the lounge looking outside the window I touch his shoulder he turns.

Lethu: Hi.

I nod.

Me: "I'm sorry for the way I reacted and the things I said".

Lethu: "I understand that it won't just go away, what I did to you is wrong".

Me: "But I shouldn't bring it up every chance I get".

He look so sad.

Lethu: I think he is better off without me, I am too messed up to raise a son, there is nothing to look up to I have a bad history

He sighs shaking his head.

Lethu: Another man will raise him, he will call him dad, I won't see him grow up.

He is really hurting his eyes are moving all around the room trying to stop the tears, I touch his shoulder and walk away, I search for Precious on Facebook and it's easy finding her because she has a picture of a baby boy that looks like my boy as a profile picture, I send a message.

Me: "Hello Presh I want to know if you arrived safe at PE".

I keep myself busy doing laundry then go back to my room and check my phone.

Precious: "Hi, yes we arrived safe, thank you for what you and your husband did".

Me: "My pleasure, can you send me his pictures please from time to time he look so much like my son it's cute".

Precious: "That's fine, I can add you on WhatsApp if you don't mind".

We exchange numbers and she send a lot of pictures I get up and go to Lethu I show him the pictures, he is smiling going through them.

Lethu: He looks like me.

Me: "Of course you do aren't you his dad?"

He smiles looking at me.

Lethu: Thank you for this Niko.

I nod and take my phone walking out, I bump into Sbonga he stares at me for a while then take my hand, we go to our room and sit down.

Sbonga: Uhm you and Lethu...

I look at him so he can continue.

Sbonga: You were in his room for a while.

He seems nervous.

Me: "Is that a problem?"

He shakes his head but still keep his eyes on me.

Sbonga: You wouldn't hurt me right?

Me: "You think I would get back with Lethu?"

Sbonga: I don't know Niko...

Me: "So you don't trust me?"

Sbonga; I do, I'm sorry.

Me: "I was showing him the pictures that Precious sent of their son".

He nods and play with his knuckles.

Me: "Yini?"(what's wrong?)

Sbonga: It's just that Uhm..the dream I had it felt like deja vu like I dreamt about it before you were with me.

Me: "I told you it was just a dream I am with you now and I love you, I hate that you think I would get back with Lethu".

Sbonga: Ngiyaxolisa.(I'm sorry)

I take my car keys and drive home just to cool off and find dad talking on the phone.

Mageba: Zipho is out!?

He seem shocked.

Mageba: Do you know where she is?

He rubs his face.

Mageba: Ok thanks for letting me know.

He look my way and try to smile hugging me.

Me: "Hello".

He nods.

Me: "Zipho is out?"

That is his brother's daughter that was in jail, he thought she was his for years.

Mageba: Yes and I am scared she will want revenge on Nomonde and Qhayiya or even me for killing their mother.

Me: "Maybe she has changed dad".

Mageba: I doubt.

I stay with mom and dad the whole day then walk out so I can go home but find all my tyres slashed, dad checks his cars and they are all slashed, we rush back inside calling the cops, I video call Sbonga.

Sbonga: I am on my way to fetch you.

I nod and wait for him.

He walk in with Sbani and hug me.

Sbonga: "Sorry for what I said, I didn't mean to upset you".

Me: "It's okay".

I smell something like a gass leak I look at Sbonga.

Me: "Can you smell that?"

He look around then pull me so fast that we end up on the floor then smoke fills the room.

Sbonga: Sbani get the Queen out of here..

He picks me up and run out it's only now that I realise that my dad's house is in flames, Sbani walk out holding mom's hand then dad walk

out limping, I hold Sbonga's t-shirt tight as a girl in black walk slowly behind my dad with a gun in her hand, I know it's Zipho I have seen her pictures but now she looks older.

Zipho: This is the end of you Mageba...

She says that cocking the gun I shut my eyes tight, not my father.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 25

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I am in tears as dad stares at me smiling while a gun is still pointed at his head, my body is shaking.

Mageba: "I love you".

I shake my head.

Mageba: "You will go through this, you are a true Zulu, strong and brave, Mageba" Sthuli sika Ndaba, Mtwana.

Me: "Please don't kill h..."

I freeze as soon as dad's body hits the ground, I let go of Sbonga and run to him.

Mageba: I..I'm sorry you..had to see to-see this.

Me: "Please don't leave me dad, please".

He stares at me not blinking and I know he is no more, Mom kneels next to me, she is crying then she slowly close dad's eyes and sleep on his chest, I look around Zipho is not here anymore Sbonga and Sbani are just standing there with their heads bowed down, I get up and walk in my room locking it. Not so long ago I found out the man that adopted me was actually my biological father now someone just came and took him away from me. I can

see the door handle moving but I sit still on my bed.

Later I take off my clothes and shower for a long time then go back to my room, I find Sbonga sitting in my bed, he probably took the spare keys. He can't even look at me in the eyes.

Sbonga: Sniko I'm s...

I shake my head.

Me: "I'm fine, I just want to be alone".

Sbonga: Baby I ..

Me: "I want to be alone Sbongakonke".

He nods and walk out, I just get in bed I feel like I am alone in this world and that I was born to suffer.

In the morning I wake up and go to mom and dad's room I find her in bed crying holding dad's t-shirt to her chest, I sit next to her, she sit up looking at me with so much fury.

Nombuso: You did this Sniko!

I look at her confused.

Nombuso: You did this! It's all your fault bad luck always follow you, you are a curse! First it was your daughters and now Mageba found out you are his daughter he dies, it's your fault!

She is shouting.

Nombuso: Get out of my house Niko.

I sit there not moving I am puzzled that she would say that to me.

She get up and grab my hand dragging me to the front door then push me out.

Nombuso: Stay away! You are married right? Stay with your family and leave mine alone I don't want to lose Shaka as well because of your curse.

At this point I have nothing to say and no tears to cry I am just numb. I walk out of the gate and make my way home. I get in my room and find Sbonga putting our son to sleep. I sit in bed looking down, he pull my chin up looking deep into my eyes.

Sbonga: I am here with you, you know that right?.

I nod.

Me: "Mom chased me out of the house calling me a curse, she said it's my fault that dad died".

He is shocked.

Me: "Am I a curse?"

Sbonga: No, no baby you are not a curse.

Me: "But I feel like one, I lost my kids and now dad left me".

Sbonga: Maybe your mom is just in pain she didn't mean it.

Me: "She did I could see it in her eyes, she meant it".

My phone vibrates and I look at it, it's Precious.

Precious: "Hey I saw the news about King Mageba, it's fake news right?"

I reply.

Me: "It's true".

I put the phone down and get in bed.

Later I wake up and find Nomonde sitting next to me, I sit up.

Nomonde: Hey baby.

Me: "Hi".

She looks bad, you can tell she has been crying.

Nomonde: I am going home tomorrow, are you coming with me?

I shake my head.

Nomonde: You will ride with Sbonga

Me: "No".

Nomonde: Oh Uhm when then? We have to help with the Funeral arrangements, it will be back home in the rural areas.

Me: "I won't come".

Nomonde: Are you okay little sis?

Me: "I'm not your sister Monde go bury your dad alone I'm not going?"

Nomonde: What?

Me: "I said I'm not going".

Nomonde: What is going on?

Me: "Leave me alone, would you".

She look at the door as Sbonga walk in.

Nomonde: Is she okay Boh?

He shrug his shoulders.

Me: "I'm right here Nomonde, I said I am not going to your father's funeral that doesn't mean I am crazy, or does it?"

Sbonga: Sniko don't do that.

Me: "You all need to leave me alone all of you! I don't have a father, I never did".

I am getting really mad my hands are shaking.

Nomonde: Sbonga..

He sighs.

Sbonga: Uhm your mom said something to her so she is upset but I will talk to her.

She nods and get up.

Nomonde: I love you Sniko Ka Mageba.

I look away.

She walk out, Sbonga sit next to me.

Sbonga: You will have to go home Niko.

Me: "Home? Where is home?"

Sbonga: At the Mageba homestead where your dad took you for the first time and it rained because you are his princess.

Me: "He is not here anymore".

Sbonga: That doesn't take away the fact that he is your father and you need to bury him for closure, you need to say goodbye.

I sleep on his lap, he brush my hair.

Today we are all leaving for the rural areas, tomorrow we are planting my dad, King Mageba, I didn't go with Nomonde my heart is still heavy because of what Mom said, they

tried to talk to me about going home early but I just couldn't.

We walk in the rondavel and as soon as mom's eyes meets mine she throws away the blanket and get up shocking everyone.

Nombuso: What is she doing here!?

Everyone's eyes are all out.

Nombuso: I don't want her here! Get out!

The elders try to calm her down but she is having none of it.

Me: "Mama".

Nombuso: You killed him!

Me: "You were there, Zipho killed him".

Nombuso: Because of your curse, you are a curse Tinyiko.

Me: "Were you tolerating me because of dad? now that he is not here you don't love me?"

She starts crying.

Me: "Please let me bury my dad my Queen".

She shakes her head.

Me: "What did I do?"

Shaka get up and stand next to his Mom.

Shaka: Sit down my Queen you are causing unnecessary scene here, she is a Zulu Princess.

She sit down immediately, I look at Shaka I am so close to crying, he bows his head a little.

Shaka: Princess.

I nod and hug him crying.

Shaka: You gonna be okay.

Me: "I don't think so, not after this".

Shaka: I will talk to mom she is just hurting I'm sorry.

The service starts at night and we do the viewing of the body because only men will go to the graveyard, I speak to him from the heart

Me: You took me in when I had no one, you loved me, showed me that not all men are animals, you never gave up on me even when I brought too much trouble in your life you

stood by me, I love you dad I wish you didn't have to die so soon I still needed you but it's God's plan, visit me in my dreams and show me the right path in this life I love you Ndabezitha.

I step back and walk out of the house sitting outside, I can see the gentlemen walking out with his coffin I just go back inside.

The elders tell us we have to stay home for ten days because Shaka has to take after dad and be a King.

Now we are attending a meeting, Mom is wearing black clothes as a sign of mourning for dad, she has never looked my way ever since her outburst when I came home.

Bab'Zulu: It is of great sadness that we lost our King so sudden, he was a great leader.

He look at all of us.

Bab'Zulu: So now that he is gone we need a new leader that will take on this role and by

tradition his son Shaka is supposed to be the King but..

I look at him.

Bab'Zulu: We can't have a King without a wife, Shaka has to get married first.

Shaka: But..but dad I am still young I can't get married now.

Bab'Zulu: Then you can't take on this role.

Shaka: Then who will? This is my birth right, I am an heir.

Bab'Zulu: You are an heir but for now your sister will be a regent until you are ready.

Nombuso: Which sister?

Bab'Zulu: Siniko ka Mageba.

Nombuso: When has an illegitimate child ever been a regent?

I look at her, she is so serious.

Nombuso: Why not my daughter Nomonde?

Bab'Zulu: She is Mageba's daughter from his first wife, a royal Princess.

Nombuso: That's not gonna happen, Shaka or Nomonde will sit on their father's throne not her.

Me: "I don't want to be a regent so Nomonde can go ahead and take that seat".

I get up.

Bab'Zulu: Siniko take your rightful place.

I shake my head.

Me: "I don't want to fight with my family please leave me out of this".

Bab'Zulu: Your father knew about this Siniko you have to do this.

Nombuso: Don't lie about my husband because he is not here anymore Zulu please respect him, he knew Shaka is the rightful heir to that throne to take after him.

Bab'Zulu: And he will when he is ready.

Nombuso: Then Nomonde deserves that seat.

Me: "She is right, Ndabezitha".

I walk out and lean on my car breathing out, I don't have to be here anymore, my dad is gone and it looks like I was only coming here because of him, now that he is gone no one wants me and I am okay with that.

I get in my car and drive back to my son and husband. I drive in and find Sbonga standing outside holding our son, I step out of the car, these are my people.

Sbonga: Here is mommy boy.

He says smiling, I stand in front of them smiling as well.

Sbonga: We missed you.

Me: "I missed you too".

He kiss my lips and I kiss my son's forehead. We walk in and I start telling him what happened at the meeting back home.

Sbonga: Maybe the Queen is just depressed and frustrated.

Me: "That doesn't mean she should take it out on me Boh, I am just as depressed".

Sbonga: Give her time baby.

Me: "She made it clear that her kids are Nomonde and Shaka, only those that are from her womb not me an illegitimate child".

Sbonga: She called you that?

Me: "Literally".

He shakes his head.

Me: "All I want is peace with just me and our child, nothing else matters".

He smiles kissing me.

We go to bed and I am just sleeping on my husband's chest.

In the middle of the night I can sense dad's presence in the room, I sit up looking at him.

Me: "Mageba".

He hold my hand but doesn't say anything.

Me: "You came back for me".

He is quiet just holding my hand, I feel a hand shaking me I wake up looking around.

Sbonga: Were you dreaming about your dad? You kept calling his name.

I nod still looking around it still feels like he was really here in this room with me.

Sbonga: You miss him huh?

I nod and lay my head on his chest, he wraps his arms around me. Why didn't he say something to me? Why would he come to my dreams but not say anything? Maybe he realised that he didn't really love me just like mom.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 26

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SBONGA

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I am worried about my wife, she has been pretending like she is okay but I can tell that the death of her father is taking a toll on her and her mother's sudden hate is making everything worse.

I am standing in front of her but she is just staring at one direction not blinking, I kiss her forehead, she smiles looking at me.

Me: "You want us to go out?"

Niko: "To where?"

Me: Anywhere you want.

She nods still trying to maintain that fake smile. I choose a dress for her, we get ready and leave the baby with mom.

I am trying to cheer her up in every possible way but it's not working.

I am watching her as she keep staring at the same direction and my mind quickly darts back to when she was dreaming last night I could swear I heard her calling her father's name, I don't know if I was dreaming or what, I really don't understand but she had an angelic voice and when I look at her now it could suit her, my wife is a beautiful lady and I feel lucky to be married to her.

I look behind her and quickly take out my gun from my waist making sure not to scare people around, I get up and take fast steps towards Zipho.

Me: Get the fuck away from my wife or I will kill you right here right now with all these people watching.

She smiles giggling.

Zipho: I just came to pass a message, only I or my sister will sit on that throne, no one else.

She turns and walk out, there is something sinister about her aura and those black clothes

makes it worse, she is really scary, I look at my wife she seems very scared she is even in tears.

Me: Come to me..

She get up and fall into my arms, I hold her tight then we go to my car driving back home.

Niko: "What did she say?"

Me: It's about the throne she wants it for herself or Nolu.

Niko: "But I rejected it why is she following me, is she going to kill me?"

Me: No one is going to kill you they will have to go through me.

She get in bed and fall asleep, hours later she is sweating moving around the bed then she quickly sit up looking around.

Me: Baby..

Niko: "My dad".

Me: What's wrong?

Niko: "He was leaving me in the dark all alone".

Me: It was just a dream love".

Niko: "He said I am turning my back on him".

She starts crying.

Niko: "He said he doesn't know me anymore, so he feels like mom huh? I am not his daughter now that he is gone, it's something they have been talking about with his wife."

Me: Your dad would never do that to you Sniko, you were his pride especially after he found out you are his daughter".

Niko: "But why is he leaving me?"

I sigh.

Me: Let's talk to Kayise.

She nods and go to the bathroom.

Now we are with Kayise she has her eyes closed kneeling down and we are kneeling in front of her.

She shakes her head opening her eyes.

Me: Is everything okay?

Kayise: I am coming.

She get up and walk out, I hold my wife's hand. Minutes later Kayise walk in with RJ, her son.

RJ: Uncle Boh.

Me: Hey champ.

He then bows looking at Sniko.

RJ: I am at your service your highness.

I look at Kayise.

Kayise: Only he can communicate with Mageba right now.

Me: Ok.

The boy starts shaking till sweat drips down his face.

RJ: He wants you to take after him Princess.

Niko: "No, it's putting my life in danger, his wife and Zipho doesn't want me on that throne, I can't".

RJ: You need him and he needs you as well, if you don't sit on that throne it might go into wrong people which will destroy what he has worked so hard to build, it could even destroy you".

Niko: "So he wants me to follow him? Zipho and her sister will kill me".

RJ: I will try my best to keep you safe.

Niko: "You are just a child RJ".

RJ: That was born to protect the Zulu throne".

Niko shakes her head.

RJ: Take your place your highness.

Niko: "What should I do?"

RJ: We should go home so you can sit on that throne it's yours.

She slowly nods. We go back home she start packing.

Niko: "Are you coming with me?"

Me: Yes but I think we should leave Mengezi here.

She nods and sit down.

Niko: "I'm scared".

Me: I know baby but your father believes in you and so do I.

She finish packing and we say goodbye to our baby.

We just drove inside the yard, the weather starts drizzling, RJ grunts so loud, we step out of the car and rush inside, we find the elders of the Zulu family all here.

Bab'Zulu: Sniko kaMageba.

He bows causing the Queen to quickly turn and look at us.

Nombuso: Why are you here again Sniko?

Niko: "Dad sent me to take my rightful place"

Nombuso: And where is your rightful place sweetie?

Niko: "On that throne".

She chuckles.

Nombuso: Your rightful place is on the streets Tinyiko, that is where you belong! I have tolerated you enough, you turned my life upside down, Mageba kept running after you all those years even going as far as neglecting his own son and daughter, you always seeked attention by running away from home looking for sympathy and i will be damned if I let you do it again I'm done with you!

I sigh.

Me: With all due respect my Queen please don't talk to my wife like that.

Nombuso: You disappointed me Prince, a handsome boy falling for a troublesome Kid like Tinyiko or you thought you could save her? No one can save a lunatic!

Niko tries to walk out but RJ stops her.

RJ: Sticks and stones may break my bones....

Niko: "But words will never hurt me".

He nods and look at the Queen.

RJ: You forget too soon my Queen, do you remember those words?

She look down.

RJ: Mageba used those words when they tried to break you but here you are using words to break Tinyiko.

He is young but very wise.

Nombuso: I know my husband wouldn't want Tinyiko to take the throne because Shaka is his heir.

RJ: But this is his wish and....

Nombuso: Don't lie! Why didn't he say it when he was alive then! Why lie about my husband like this!

She shouts.

Niko: "I'm not here to cause trouble I just.."

Nombuso: Then leave Sniko..

Niko: "Dad wants me here".

Nombuso: Did you hear him say that? Aren't you deaf huh!?

Niko: "Grow up".

Nombuso: What did you just say to me?

Niko: "I said grow up, that was a very low blow even for you".

She slap Niko everyone gasp in shock, I am shocked as well that happened so fast, I hold my wife back, she is not crying but she looks really mad.

Nombuso: Get the hell out!

Niko push me away from her and slap the Queen so hard causing the elders to stand on their feet.

Me: Sniko!

She is staring at the Queen like she is waiting for a reaction, like she is ready to fight.

Niko: "This is my home, I belong here and I will sit on that throne whether you like it or not, my father wants me up there and no one will stop me".

She walk towards the throne then turn looking at all of us, she slowly sit on the throne I can see flames behind her out of nowhere, all the elders go on one knee and bow their heads.

Bab'Zulu: Ndabezitha, Zulu, Mageba..

They all sing their clan praises then the flames stop like it never started. The elders get up BabZulu give Niko a little spear designed by the little beads then put on a crown on her head, she looks beautiful.

Bab'Zulu: Our regent Princess Sniko kaMageba.

They rain stars pouring hard after she said that, I take her hand helping her step down from the throne.

Me: The crown suits you my Queen.

She smiles but stops as the Queen snatch the crown on her head and throws it on the floor stepping on it.

Nombuso: No one will take away what rightfully belongs to my kids, it happened

before with Nomonde I won't let it happen again.

Niko: "I am not a threat I don't want this but I have to do it".

She is now tearing up, I take her hand, we walk out and I hold her in my arms.

Later everyone sits around the table for dinner that was prepared by the helpers.

We eat for a while until RJ grunts, I look at him he hold his head shaking it.

RJ: Help her Bhuti!

He is shouting.

RJ: Help her!

He stares at me with his eyes bloodshot red, Niko starts coughing, I look back at RJ he seems stuck on the chair, I take a glass of water trying to help Niko drink up but RJ vigorously shake his head I put it down as Niko starts vomiting.

RJ: "Take her to the hospital I can't help her".

He is using his hands, I get up and pick Niko up running out with her, I drive to the hospital.

I am sitting on the benches, the doctors took my wife in she looked weak and no blood was coming out of her mouth and nose, I don't know what to do with myself a lot is going through my mind.

I see a Doctor stepping out of her ward I stand up waiting for him.

Doctor: Hello Sir.

Me: Hi, is my wife okay?

Doctor: That was a very close call, that poison is very dangerous it almost ruined her intestines.

Me: Poison?

Doctor: Yes sir we found a poison in her system.

Me: Shit..uhm is she going to be okay?

Doctor: Yes her and the babies are okay but we need to keep a close look to make sure they are all safe.

I nod but quickly look at him.

Me: Uhm you said babies? What babies?

Doctor: Uhm yeah I thought you knew, your wife is four weeks pregnant with twins when you brought her in we did an ultrasound in there because we saw she was pregnant.

Me: What?

Doctor: Uh..

Me: Uhm can I..can I see her now?

Doctor: She is asleep for now and when she wakes up she needs a lot of medical attention because she may be in great pain.

I wipe my face.

Doctor: You can go home and come back tomorrow sir.

I sigh, I am shocked man, we lost a baby not so long ago and now she is carrying twins, I am blessed.

I go to the BnB and I go on one knee and pray to God to keep my family safe and for my kids to live and thank him for this gift.

I go to bed but I can't sleep I keep thinking about Niko and those kids she is carrying.

In the morning I am up early then drive to the hospital, I walk in her ward and find her crying with her hand on her tummy.

Me: Baby..

She look at me and tears stream down her cheeks, I rush out to call a doctor, they walk in and tell me to wait outside.

A doctor finally walk out.

Me: What is going on are my kids okay?

Doctor: Don't panic sir she will feel pain from time to time, it's the after effects of that poison.

I nod.

Doctor: We gave her something for the pain, you can go see her but she will feel a bit drowsy.

Me: Ok thank you.

I walk in and find her staring into space, I look touch her hand, she look my way.

Me: Hi.

She nods.

Me: how are you feeling?

Niko: "Numb".

Me: We are going home after you get out of here Sniko.

Niko: "But I have to be here for a while".

Me: No, we are going home and that's it.

Niko: "I'm not going anywhere".

Me: Do you understand what is going on here Sniko? They want to kill you.

Niko: "Then let them".

Me: Are you crazy?

She squints her eyes.

Me: "We are going home and that's it".

Niko: "I'm not giving in, I won't leave".

Me: What about my kids Tinyiko?

Niko: "I won't let anything happen to my kids Boh".

Me: But here we are Niko.

Niko: "I will be careful".

Me: Baby please, let this go please I know I was supporting you but I didn't think they would poison you and that you are pregnant, please let's just go home".

She shakes her head.

Me: Do you even want my kids to live or you don't care as long as you get to sit on that throne, is it that important that you are willing to sacrifice them for it".

She look away, I get up.

Me: I am going back home Sniko and I will wait for you there, if you really want us to work and our kids to live you will come straight home as soon as you get discharged but if you don't...

She blinks fast looking at me, I just walk out, I really hope she will choose me and our kids I know this must be hard on her but I don't want to lose my kids or her, I don't want to go through that kind of pain again.

I get in my car and drive back to Durban.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 27

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I'm hurt that Sbonga left me here after he told me that he believes in me, I thought he was going to support me on this.

Today I am being discharged Boh left me yesterday I know he went back home. I feel pain from time to time like my intestines are being cut by a sharp knife. I can't believe I am pregnant and that brings so much happiness to my heart, God loves me so much to give me such blessings, two babies, I am over the moon but I just wish things were not so complicated as they are.

I get up after calling Shaka to fetch me, I know I can't trust anyone but I don't have my car here because Sbonga and I came with one car.

Shaka walk in and look at me without saying a word.

Me: "Hi brother".

He nods.

Me: "You don't want me here as well right?"

Shaka: Are you ready to go?

Oh so he is just dismissing me like that.

I get up and walk out, he drives us home, I step out of the car and RJ comes to me, he bows and look at me.

RJ: Your heart is heavy my princess.

Me: "You won't understand you are still young".

He smiles.

RJ: Tomorrow we have to do a ceremony for you and let your people know you are available for them as their regent, a Queen.

I nod.

Me: "Are you ready for this journey though?"

RJ: I don't know, are you?

Me: "It's scary for me but I am doing it for my father".

RJ: I will find my strength with the help of our great ancestors.

I nod.

Me: "Thank you".

RJ: Do not trust anyone but me okay.

Me: "Ok".

I go to my room and lock, I take my laptop and contact my husband, he shows up on the screen I still feel goosebumps when I see the tattoo on his chest.

Me: "Hi".

Sbonga: "You are not on your way back home".

Me: "Please understand".

Sbonga: I understand that you are not choosing me and our kids Sniko, I understand very clear.

Me: "Baby please we.."

Sbonga: I have to go.

Me: "Boh stop ok, stop acting like a child".

He raise his eyebrow and smile a little shaking his head.

Sbonga: Wow..

Me: "I'm sorry I..."

Sbonga: "If anything happens to those babies Niko we are over".

I feel a lump in my throat.

Me: "I won't let anything happen to them".

Sbonga: I have never seen someone so selfish! Your son here is asking about you, do you even remember you left our son here Sniko?

Me: "Why are you like this Boh".

Sbonga: You are putting your life and the life of my unborn babies in danger that is why I am like this.

His face is turning red, he is frustrated.

Me: "Baby please can you give me at least two days then I will come back home, please".

He shakes his head and move away from the screen, he sit down again holding our son I smile waving at him, he wave back.

Me: "I love you Sbonga".

He nods then the screen goes blank, my battery died and I forgot the charger at home now I can only use my phone.

I sit in my bed.

Me: "Dad I am doing this for you, I am away from my family because I am honouring your wish please protect me and your grandkids".

I get in bed and send a text to Sbonga.

Me: "I love you and our son so much, I will come back home soon".

I put it down and try to get some sleep, at night I can smell some smoke I sit up in bed, looks like something is burning and it smells horrible, I rush to the bathroom and get some water in two cups ,i put one cup in a window and another one on my doorstep then go back to the bathroom putting one more cup there, I know whatever they are burning won't work. I stay in the bathroom for almost an hour, I see the door handle moving I quickly sit on the floor pretending to be asleep, someone pick

me up I am now scared maybe they are going to kill me. I feel my hands being tied up I am sitting on the chair, I slowly open my eyes, I am shocked to see Shaka here tied up on a chair as well he looks unconscious maybe whatever they burned got to him.

I try to untie my hands but it's too tight I am even hurting myself.

Shaka slowly opens his eyes and look around, he look so tired, he widens his eyes as soon as he notices me.

Shaka: Niko! What is going on? Why are we tied up, what is happening?

He shakes his head and look at me again.

Shaka: I'm sorry sis...I'm sorry for letting people get inbetween us, I have let my father down.

I wish I could communicate with him but my hands are tied.

Shaka: Please forgive me.

The door swings open like someone is pushing it with so much force, then two ladies walk in, they are wearing black, it's Zipho and her older sister Nolu, they smile looking from Shaka to me.

Nolu: So this is the "princess" that wants to take what belongs to us huh?

Zipho: Yep, I wonder why Mageba kept taking trash from the streets.

Nolu: He probably wanted to replace us sis.

They laugh.

Shaka: ZiphoZaMageba.

Zipho: Don't call me that!

Shaka: We are Zulus, you don't have to do this to us, we are of the same blood.

Zipho: I want you to die, a slow painful death like your father killed my parents.

Shaka: We weren't there, why do you want to fight a battle that isn't yours?

Nolu: Oh it is mine if you want to take what rightfully belongs to me.

Shaka: You can take the throne just let me and my sister go.

Zipho: I have a score to settle with your sister Mageba, she is Nomonde's sister and that bitch took my child and my man.

I want to beg them to let me go, I have a son at home, I should have listened to my husband.

Nolu: So Shaka I want you to sign over that house in Durban, it belongs to us.

Shaka: You want my father's house?

Nolu: Not just a house, everything, a house his money every single cent.

He look at me defeated.

Nolu: That man killed our mother and father so he owes us big time and you gonna pay.

Shaka: It's fine you can take everything.

I shake my head, that is our home, his home.

Shaka: They can take everything Niko, it's okay.

Zipho: You are a smart boy so tomorrow we will go together to the bank and to your lawyer.

Shaka nods.

I need water and I am hungry but how am I gonna tell them, will they even give me.

We stay quietly he keeps looking at me.

Shaka: I will need your help, I want to go overseas after all this if they won't kill us.

I am so frustrated on the fact that we can't communicate.

Later Zipho walk in alone she has a stick in her hand, she untie my hands and give me a very hot slap that makes me shiver.

Zipho: I will hurt you for what your father did to our mother.

She slap me again, Shaka is trying to untie his hands.

Zipho: And I will teach your sister a lesson through you.

She starts beating me up with the stick until I am on the floor the pain is unbearable, I am not moving anymore my eyes are tightly close letting her hit anywhere she wants but not my tummy, I am trying to protect my unborn kids in there, my whole body hurts, I just lie there on the cold floor.

I wake up because I am feeling really cold like someone just poured me with water, my body feels numb now, I feel a hand on my back I slowly sit up it's Shaka.

Shaka: Sbonga is here..

Just then he walk in, I am happy to see him.

Sbonga: They escaped let's get out of here.

He bends picking me up then walk out. He drives for a while, I guess we were a little far from home.

He stops at the hospital and pick me up again walking in the premises. He tell the doctors

that I am pregnant, they do a scan and Sbonga is looking at the doctor in anticipation.

Sbonga: Come on tell me something, are my kids okay?

Doctor: Yes sir they are perfectly fine.

He nods.

Sbonga: Thank you.

He walk out after that leaving me with a doctor, I follow shortly after him, I am walking slowly because my body is aching, I find him and Shaka leaning on the car.

Shaka: How did you find us?

Sbonga: RJ helped me but now he is unconscious, he is just a kid, that drained him because it was his first time tracking a person using his spiritual gift.

Shaka nods and wipe his face.

Shaka: I will give them everything so they can leave my sister alone, I am leaving for overseas but I will need help from Niko, the money dad

left her is in a different account, can she help me out a little until I get on my feet?

He was the one who knew dad's finances and for whatever reason him and dad had a joined account so if he signs over the money all of it will belong to Zipho and her sister.

I touch his shoulder.

Me: "You can take all of it".

He shakes his head.

Shaka: No that is your money Sniko.

Me: "But you need it more than me".

He sighs.

Shaka: I will see you tomorrow before I go.

Sbonga: Let's go home, I don't think it's safe for you to be at the palace.

He nods, Sbonga drives us home, Shaka buys a ticket as soon as we get home. I go to his room and sit in bed.

Me: "I won't let this go I promise".

Shaka: Don't put your life in danger, let's leave all of this alone sis.

Me: "But that is our home, our legacy is that throne".

Shaka: It won't be worth it if they kill you.

I look down.

Me: "So we just let them take everything?"

Shaka: It's better that way.

Me: "Will you ever come back?"

Shaka: Yes.

Me: "Are you going to say goodbye to your mother?"

He shakes his head.

Shaka: No and please don't ask me why.

I nod and go to my room, I find Sbonga sitting in bed.

Sbonga: What did I tell you Sniko?

I look at him.

Sbonga: "You put your life and that of my kids in danger".

He stands up.

Sbonga: I told you to leave this alone..but I guess my word means nothing to you.

Me: "You are telling me to let our legacy fall into the wrong hands?"

Sbonga: You are pregnant for God's sake, do you even care!?

Me: "Don't shout at me".

Sbonga: I don't understand Niko, you lost our child not so long ago, you want to lose these babies too?

Me: "Of course not".

I sit down and rub my eyes.

Me: "I just lost my dad, when I sat on that throne I felt closer to him, I don't wanna lose that".

Sbonga: So are you still going to dare Zipho and her sister? They are criminals, jailbirds.

Me: "But I won't let them take my home and what belongs to Shaka".

Sbonga: Let it go, Shaka have.

Me: "No".

He shakes his head and take our son walking out, he comes back again and take his phone and our baby's bottle.

Me: "Where are you going?"

Sbonga: My son and I are going to sleep in the guestroom.

Me: "Why?"

He shrug his shoulders and walk out.

I get in bed and close my eyes, I am still in pain from that beating Zipho gave me.

I wake up early and go check on my brother I find him with his bags and he is already dressed.

Me: "Hey, when did you get your clothes".

Shaka: I couldn't sleep last night so I went home to pack, I packed my father's clothes as

well they are in his car it's the only car that we will get to keep, I am meeting with Nolu and Zipho before I leave they want my father's cars.

Me: "Please don't go, cancel everything Shaka".

Shaka: I want to go Niko.

Me: " But I still need you here".

Shaka: I can't stay, Luyanda said he is going to Johannesburg next month but for now he will be staying with mom at the palace.

Me: "Are we going to communicate?"

Shaka: "You are my sister Sniko".

I hug him tight and Sbonga offers to take him to the airport I think he just want to be away from me. I hope my brother will be safe wherever he is going.

Sbonga is back but busy on his laptop, he is even wearing his glasses he is concentrating on it.

He finally stops and take off his glasses.

Me: "What were you busy with?"

He look at me and take off his clothes getting in bed.

Me: "I'm sorry Sbonga".

He sit up.

Sbonga: I was moving back all the money Zipho and Nolu took from Shaka".

Me: "How?"

Sbonga: "I don't know what is happening but they asked Shaka to transfer the money to your mother's account".

Me: "I don't understand".

Sbonga: "I think they are working together".

Me: "That's not possible, so you mean mom would hurt Shaka like this? Taking everything away from him even our father's home giving it to the enemies".

He shrug his shoulders.

Me: "Won't they try to find Shaka and kill him?"

Sbonga: No one knows where he is going but me.

Me: "Thank you for helping my brother".

I hug him but he push me back.

Sbonga: "Stay away from that palace Sniko if not, you are losing me."

Me: "What?"

Sbonga: I mean it.

He sleep and cover his head, so he is really making me choose, or maybe I should wait until I give birth then fight for that throne.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 28

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My husband and I are still not in a very good space, but we do talk, I miss being intimate with him, our talks and his jokes but he is just distant.

We are still in bed, I turn to look at him and find him awake but he is just looking up like he is thinking, I lightly shake him, he look my way.

Me: "I miss you".

Sbonga: But I am right here.

Me: "You have been distant I don't even know if you still love me or not".

Sbonga: I do love you.

Me: "You don't tell me anymore".

He sit up, I do the same.

Me: "You don't love me anymore, right?"

He doesn't answer I just cry and run to the bathroom, I sit on the toilet seat and continue to cry until my eyes dry, I can see the handle moving but I just sit there for almost 10 minutes then decide to shower.

I go to our room and he is not here anymore, I wear my short black dress and black heels then comb my hair then tie my hair up, I take my car keys and walk out. I drive to the mall and buy some junk food to make me feel better then go back home, I take my son from Sbonga's mom and we lock ourselves in my room eating all the junk I got, I see the door opening and Sbonga walk in, he looks relieved he has keys in his hand, he probably thought I would harm myself or else why would he open my door with spare keys.

Sbonga: Hey.

I ignore him and continue eating with my boy, he sit in bed looking at us.

Sbonga: Can we talk baby.

I sit up and look at him.

Sbonga: I'm sorry about earlier I didn't mean to make you cry, I love you.

He hold my hand.

Sbonga: I will never stop loving you.

He touch my tummy, he look so sad.

Sbonga: I hate making you cry, I really feel bad.

I am just staring at him.

Sbonga: And I was wrong for asking you to let go of your legacy, your father wants you to sit on that throne before Shaka and telling you to leave it alone was selfish of me.

He bite his lower lip, he does that alot when he is upset or frustrated by something.

Sbonga: Please say something.

I remove my hand from his.

Me: "It's too late now, Zipho and Nolu took everything, our home, my father's cars and the throne".

Sbonga: They can never take the throne while it belongs to you and your brother.

Me: "But they wanted it".

Sbonga: Then they will be manipulating the ancestors which may backfire.

Me: "But I can't do anything about it now, I guess I have to wait".

He shakes his head and take my hand.

Sbonga: Come with me.

He take our son, we walk out.

I stand in the lounge looking around, Letlotlo, his twins, Ntsoaki, Kayise and RJ are standing there in their traditional healers regalia their dreadlocks are falling on their shoulders, they look different. Letlotlo kneels on the floor and start clapping hands , I feel hair on the back of my head stand up and there is cold air around, I feel a heavy presence behind me I quickly turn, my dad is here holding his spear that Bab'Zulu gave to me the day I sat on the throne.

Me: "Dad".

He shakes his head.

Mageba: Use your mouth sweetheart.

I look at him confused, he smiles shaking his head.

Mageba: Go home Zulu.

Me: "But Zipho and Nolu took everything, even mom turned her back on me".

Mageba: But I will never turn my back on you that's all that matters, go home, they will accompany you.

He says looking behind me.

Mageba: I love you.

Me: "I love you too dad I wish you would come back".

Mageba: That is not possible but when you need me you can go to these people and ask them to help you communicate with me I will be there waiting.

I nod.

Me: "Thank you".

Mageba: Believe in yourself.

He bows.

Mageba: Ndabezitha, Zulu kaMageba.

He slowly fades away, Sbonga put me under his arm I cry on his chest, I wish dad didn't die.

Letlotlo look at me.

Letlotlo: We have to go.

Me: "Will I be safe?"

He smile.

Letlotlo: Your father trusted me with his life and he trust me with your life as well, he trust us.

He says looking at Ntsoaki, Kayise and RJ.

Letlotlo: I am the best traditional healers there is.

Ntsoaki: Don't lie, your son Neo is the best brother.

He laughs

Letlotlo: Yeah right.

We get in different cars and drive to my father's Palace, I am scared but Sbonga is here and holding my hand every chance he gets, he wants me to see that he is really here for me.

We drive in the palace and RJ runs to our car and open the door for me, he bows his head I step out of the car it starts to drizzle.

I am scared standing there looking at the main entrance, I feel a hand on mine.

Sbonga: You can do this.

Letlotlo, Kayise and Ntsoaki walk in front of me I follow behind them RJ is on my left side and my husband is on my right. We stop by the door all the Zulu elders are here so is Zipho, Nolu and Mom, Luyanda is next to her, there is a man wearing a traditional healers regalia here as well, they all frown looking at me.

Nombuso: You never learn huh.

Nolu: Sbiya let's do this, I don't wanna wait any longer.

This Sbiya man kneels down and burn the incense he is calling our ancestors, I don't know but I feel like something is draining my energy as he keeps chanting and clapping his hands.

I look around the room Letlotlo kneels down and Kayise, Ntsoaki and RJ follows suit they do the chanting and clapping as well, I still feel like something is draining me but at the same time a force is trying to pull it back to my body.

Letlotlo: Come on give me your all Richie!

He is sweating looking at RJ who is also drenched in sweat, I feel like I am in a movie .

Letlotlo: Gumede I need you..

He says looking at Sbonga who nods and kneels next to them, they are now all holding hands, everyone is now kneeling I am the only one standing, Zipho and Nolu with their traditional healers are forming their own circle holding hands, I am starting to sweat as well, it's hot in here.

I walk towards the throne, Nolu get up and walk towards it as well, we stand in front of it.

Nolu: This is mine, move away.

She push me so hard I almost fall but hands hold me it's my husband.

Sbonga: Are you okay?

I nod and look at the throne Nolu is now sitting on it, I look at Letlotlo he is standing one on one with this Sbiya guy like they want to fight.

Me: "Move away from my father's throne.

Nolu: Make me..

I step closer to him and grab her but she feels hot I quickly remove my hand from her.

RJ: She took your energy, the powers you possess to sit on that throne.

Me: "So there is nothing I can do?"

RJ: I will help you but it will take a lot from you.

Sbonga: What do you mean by a lot Rich?

RJ: She..she might lose one of the twins.

Sbonga: No..

RJ: We also need their energy to fight this so..

Sbonga shakes his head.

RJ: I will try to protect them Uncle Boh.

Sbonga look at me like he is pleading with me.

Me: "What do you need me to do?"

Sbonga: Niko..

I look at RJ.

RJ: Please give me your hand.

I slowly give him my hand, he close his eyes and start chanting the Zulu clan names and praises, I tremble when I feel strong energy coming in me it's overwhelming, it's like flames all over my body, I am now sweating I look at Sbonga he has his hands on top of his head staring at me, RJ is not stopping.

Sbonga: Sniko...

Tears fill his eyes I move my eyes to look down where he is looking, there is blood where I am standing, Sbonga storms out.

RJ finally stops I just collapse on the floor, I wake up and look around Sbonga is sitting next to me with his head on my bed, looks like I am at the hospital, I touch Sbonga's hand he look at me, eyes are red and puffy.

Me: "Hi, how long have I been out?"

Sbonga: The whole night.

I blink, that long?

Me: "Are my babies okay?"

Sbonga: I don't know, I didn't allow them to do a scan, I'm scared, that blood scared me.

I touch my tummy.

Sbonga: The throne at the expense of my kids Sniko.

Me: "It wasn't like that Boh".

Sbonga: But RJ said it Tinyiko, he said one of them might not survive but you went on with it.

Me: "You said you support me Sbonga".

Sbonga: Yeah I did, right?

The doctor walk in and greet us, I ask they do a scan but Sbonga walk out before the doctor starts.

He does the scan I'm scared of the outcome. He keeps moving the wand all over my tummy.

Doctor: You said it's twin pregnancy?

I nod.

Doctor: But there is only one heartbeat.

I shake my head.

He continues to move the wand again and again but he shakes his head.

Doctor: Only one heartbeat ma'am.

I completely lose it, I remove his stupid wand and get up, I flip the whole bed upside down, my head is spinning but I want to destroy

everything like life has been doing to me all these years.

I trash the whole place, the doctor is standing in the corner clearly scared, Sbonga walk in looking around, I walk past him and rush out, I look for taxi to Durban then go home, I pack my clothes and go to a hotel.

I start booking a flight to Cape Town and remove my simcard from my phone so Sbonga won't track me, I don't even know if that thing worked but it doesn't matter I lost one of my kids and it's my fault, Sbonga probably hates me now, I have done nothing but putting our kids life in danger, I did it before and lost our baby and I did it again, I am a useless wife, he deserves better.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 29

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SBONGA

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I am on my way home after helping the doctor clean up his office after Niko trashed it, I called Kayise asking if Niko went back to the palace she said no and they are on their way to Durban so I think she went home.

I drive inside the yard and Letlotlo's car drive in behind me, we step out.

Letlotlo: Prince how is she?

I shrug my shoulders.

Me: She stormed out after having a breakdown in the doctors office.

He sighs.

Letlotlo: And the babies?

Me: I don't know I didn't want to be in the room when the doctor delivers the bad news but judging from what she did I think maybe she lost one baby or maybe two of them.

I say looking down, he touch my shoulder.

Me: Uhm is everything okay now?

Letlotlo: RJ did help Niko now she is the only one who can sit on that throne, they can all try but it won't be possible.

I nod.

Me: At least she will get what she wants, thank you for helping her.

He bows and they all walk in, I go to my room thinking I will find my wife but she is not here, I take my phone and send her a text.

Me: "Niko where are you?".

I wait for a delivery report but it doesn't come through, I try to call but it takes me straight to voicemail, now I am really worried. I go to the

closet to look for my jacket, I notice that a lot of her clothes are gone.

Me: No..

I look around and her bags are not here, I rush to my computer and try to find where she last used her phone, I find that she was at a hotel, I take my car keys and run out driving to a hotel.

I find a receptionist at the front desk I greet her.

Receptionist: Wow Uhm hi Prince.

She is busy giggling and I don't have time for that.

Me: I am looking for my wife she checked in here not so long ago.

Receptionist: You mean princess Tinyiko?

I don't know why she is asking the obvious.

Me: Yes.

Receptionist: She signed out about 15 minutes ago.

I huff in defeat, she doesn't want to be found that is why she changed the hotel she knew I would try to find her.

Me: Thank you miss.

Receptionist: Uhm can I...can I take a photo with you please.

She says running around the desk coming to take a "selfie" with me I am just forcing a smile there, I really need to see Sniko.

Me: I have to go.

I rush out of the hotel and sit in my car, her phone is off so there is nothing I can do now.

I go to Kayise's house and find RJ with his father.

Me: Hello.

Richard: Boh you good?

I nod.

Me: Can I talk to Richie?

He nods.

Richard: Let me give you some space.

He walk away I sit down looking at RJ he look down playing with his hands.

RJ: I'm sorry uncle I was trying to help her I didn't mean for her to lose the baby.

My heart aches so she did lose one of my babies, that really hurts.

Me: It's okay I am not blaming you, but I need your help.

He shakes his head and look at me, he is crying.

RJ: I can't i'm scared of using my gift, I killed your son.

Me: it was beyond your control RJ, this isn't your fault.

RJ: I'm not using it ever again.

Me: But your Aunt is missing please help me find her, she might hurt herself out there please.

RJ: I'm scared..

I sigh.

Me: Ok Uhm... it's okay.

I get up and walk out, he runs after me I turn to look at him.

RJ: I will help you.

Me: No it's okay I understand really.

He hold my hand and close his eyes tight, he starts sweating immediately I quickly pull my hand away from him, he is just a child and I can see that his gift is coming out strong overwhelming him in the process.

Me: Stop, I will find her.

RJ: I couldn't sense her, she doesn't want to be found.

Me: What do you mean?

RJ: She left on her free will so I can't locate her but if she wasn't herself or someone took her I was gonna be able to find her.

Me: So I must stop looking?

RJ: No I didn't say that I was just telling you why I can't locate her.

I nod and get in my car driving out. I get home and go to my computer trying to find everything she did on her phone before she switched it off, I notice a plane ticket to Cape Town that is leaving 3 hours from now, I decide to go wait for her at the airport, I park my car and wait.

I keep checking the time and looking around for two hours straight, I finally see her stepping out of a cab, I step out of my car and rush to her, she is shocked to see me.

Me: You are leaving me?

She look down I pull her chin up.

Me: Please don't leave Sniko, I know we lost one baby and it's okay I don't blame you just, please don't go.

She shakes her head crying.

Me: Please..uyazi ukuthi Ngiyakuthanda(you know I love you) and we will go through this together, please stay.

She put down her bags.

Niko: "I don't want to be here anymore".

Me: You don't want to be with me?

She doesn't answer.

Me: So you don't love me anymore?

Niko: "I love you".

Me: Then don't go.

Niko: "I have to go".

Me: Please Sniko.

She take her bags and walk away, I turn her around.

Me: So you are leaving me after all this pain Sniko, you want to add on that?

She put her bags down again.

Niko: "That is why I am leaving you are blaming me".

Me: "I didn't say I am blaming you Sniko, I never said that, don't play with me".

Niko: "I know you blame me Boh you don't have to say it, now leave me alone".

I blink a couple of times as she walk away again, I pull her back again.

Me: So what about our marriage, our son and unborn baby?

She doesn't answer.

Me: What about our son Sniko?

She cries and literally run inside the airport leaving me standing there.

I go back home and take my son to our room, he is sleeping and I know when he wakes up he will want his mom. I take my laptop and Skype Shaka.

Shaka: Prince..

Me: Hey King are you good?

Shaka: Yeah I'm okay, where is Sniko is she okay?

I look down.

Me: She left me.

Shaka: Left you?

I nod.

Me: She went to Cape Town.

Shaka: Where is Mengezi she left with him?

Me: No she left him here.

Shaka: What? And you let her go? She is going to be lonely there Boh and she might harm herself, how can you let her go?

Me: This is what she wanted I can't stop her, I can't force her to stay with me.

He rubs his face.

Shaka: What if she kills herself?

Me: She was not going to leave she was going to do it here.

Shaka: I think I should just come back Richard and Ray are busy I have to come back.

Me: There isn't much you can do Cape Town is a big city and I can't track her.

He sighs.

Shaka: Yhoo.

He exclaims.

I sit in bed and look at my ring, maybe we got married too soon, maybe I should have fooled around with different ladies before I say I do because maybe then I would have experienced a little heartbreak to prepare me for this one, it hurts so bad because Tinyiko is the only girl I have had my eyes on all my life.

Waking up in the morning my son is not next to me I look around the room, he is trying to open the bathroom door calling for his mama.

Me: Mengezi...

He look at me.

Mengezi: mama.

Me: She is not here baba.

He bangs the bathroom door so hard like he is trying to knock I can see he is getting upset and angry he bangs on it and let out a scream, I go to him and pick him up wiping his tears then hug him.

Me: Mama will come back soon don't cry.

I sit with him in bed.

Me: Big boys don't cry come on..

I give him my fist, he giggles and give me his little fist, we fist bump.

Me: Mom will come back don't worry.

He nods he is two years old so he is still blank but a child knows when he or she wants his mom no matter how little they are.

I spend the whole day with him trying to make him forget about wanting his mom but later he starts all over again I walk out with him and find my brothers in the lounge.

Sbani: Hayi Boh why is he crying like that?

Me: He wants his mother.

Sbani takes him from me and hush him.

Letho: Where is she anyway? You left her at the palace?

I shake my head.

Me: She left for Cape Town.

They look at me confused.

Me: She left me I don't even know why I am still wearing this stupid ring!

I say taking it off and throw it across the room.

Letho: Boh..

I hold my head shaking it, how can she do this to me.

I am angry, so angry I can hear them calling my name but I am shutting them out until a hand grab me forcing me to stand up, it's Nadia, they are now all looking at me with pity.

Nadia: What is going on?

I just look at her.

Letho: He said Sniko left him.

Nadia: Sbongakonke.

Me: "I don't want to talk right now Nadia".

I look for my keys then walk out, I get in my car and look for Nina's number on Facebook she once sent them to me but I never called, I call her.

Nina: hello.

Me: Hi it's Sbonga.

Nina: Oh uhm.. wow..I...what can I do for my prince.

Looks like I caught her off guard.

Me: Are you busy?

Nina: No I just passed your house coming from work I am going to my place right now.

Me: Can we talk.

Nina:. yeah Uhm sure I will send my address it's fairly close.

She sends it and I drive there, she opens the door for me, I kiss her as soon as I step inside her flat, she push me away a bit.

Nina: Boh..

I kiss her again picking her up, I lay her on the couch and continue to kiss her taking off her dress then take off my t-shirt we are all over each other until a picture of Sniko pop up in my head I quickly move away from Nina, she is still on her bra and panty and I am still wearing my pants, I take my t-shirt on the floor wearing it, she sit up and take her dress.

Me: I'm sorry, I'm so sorry I don't know what came over me I shouldn't have done that.

She nods looking down.

Nina: Where is Tinyiko?

I don't answer.

Nina: You were trying to use me?

Me: No..no Ngiyaxolisa Nina(I'm sorry Nina) I didn't mean to do this I was just...

Nina: It's okay..

Me: I'm so sorry.

Now I am scared I have never done anything like this, I feel like Niko will come back only to leave again when she finds out about this.

Me: I have to go.

I take my keys and walk out, the way i'm so scared my hands are shaking I am failing to even press the button to unlock my car.

Nina: Sbonga..

I jump turning to look at her.

Nina: You left your phone on the floor.

I take it and get in my car driving home.

I pace around my room, how can I cheat on my wife!

I search her name on Facebook but it's not there she deactivated her account I guess she wants nothing to do with me. I notice that she transferred a lot of money to some account I don't know and I can't check who it belongs to, Niko is trying to block everything that

might help me find her I guess she really doesn't want me anymore.

-I am miserable as 8 long months flew by without her, I even took Mengezi to grandma in the rural areas because he kept asking for his mother. I am drinking like a fish but never cheated ever again I am still scared of what I did with Nina, Ntsika and Nadia tried talking to me but I cussed at them everyone was shocked I'm not one to use profanity but that day I did, I wanted them to leave me to drown in my sorrows.

It's just another sad day for me today, I just woke up and looked at the pictures on my phone which are mostly hers and my son's, I always wake up sad then start drinking I feel better, I toss the phone next to me and go to the bathroom, I bath then wear my pants only. I take my vodka and my phone going around the back and sit there, I start drinking it like it's water, Landi sit next to me.

Nadia: Morning.

I just carry on drinking.

Nadia: Mom said you promised Mengezi you are going to fetch him today, are you still going?

I shake my head.

Nadia: Why not?

Me: Because I don't have his mother that he keeps asking me about Nadia!

Nadia: We are talking Boh there is no need for you to raise your voice.

Me: Sorry.

Nadia: At least we know she is still alive since she did another money transfer a month ago.

Me: I really don't care at this point Landile, 8 months and she doesn't even call to ask about our son, I know I mean shit to her but our son is innocent, he just needs his mother.

My phone rings I don't know the number but I answer anyway.

Me: Yeah.

Voice: Hello Prince Sbongakonke.

Me: Who is this?

Voice: It's Precious, I am at the airport I was sent by Princess Tinyiko, can we meet there now.

I get up and rush inside bumping into Lethu.

Lethu: Hey watch it!

Me: Hello I'm on my way.

Precious: Ok.

I look for my car keys but I can't find it anywhere.

Lethu: What are you looking for?

Me: My car keys.

Lethu: Let me drive you, you have been drinking.

I nod and we walk out, I think alcohol is leaving my system now because I am wondering what is it that this Precious has for me.

I tell Lethu where we are going, he drives there, I call the number and she directs me to the car, we stop on our tracks when Precious step out of the car, thee Precious Lethu's baby mama.

Lethu: Precious?

Precious: Hello.

She bows a little.

Me: You are the one who called me?

She nods.

Me: Where did you meet with Niko and where is she?

Precious: We have been in contact for the past few months and I am the one who was looking after her.

Me: Lookin.. Looking after her? Is she okay?

She sighs and open her car, a young boy is asleep then another baby, an infant is in a car seat.

Lethu: Is that..is that my son?

Precious look at him and nod.

Lethu smiles a little.

Lethu: Uhm is it okay if I hold him please?

Precious wakes the boy up and take him giving Lethu who hold him to his shoulder hugging him.

Precious then take the baby and give her to me, she is wearing pink clothes.

Precious: She is your daughter, Tinyiko gave birth last week.

Me: Where is she? Is she okay? Why didn't she come here?

She sighs.

Precious: She is at the mental institution, she hasn't been okay ever since she asked me to come back from PE because she said she needed me, I tried my best to help her until last week when she started cutting herself on the wrists and stabbing her thighs, she went to labour and they forced me to admit her

because she is a danger to herself and the baby.

Me: What?

It comes out as a whisper.

Me: She was alone..but why didn't you call earlier.

Precious: She made me promise I won't call any of you, she threatened to kill herself, she was getting worse by each day Prince, she cried for her father everyday.

She is now crying, I am blinking to stop my own tears from falling.

Precious: I think she hasn't healed from losing her father, the Prenatal depression and the loss of one twins, it was all too much for her.

I bite my lower lip looking down at my baby girl.

Me: I failed her didn't I?

Precious: I already sent her transfer letter but she doesn't know, she is coming this side tomorrow.

Me: Thank you for being there for her, and for bringing my daughter home.

She nods wiping her tears, I look at Lethu he is still holding her son but his eyes are on Precious.

Me: Uhm can we all go home you must be tired.

Precious: Uhm no, I will book into a hotel.

Lethu: Can you do it after you guys have well rested please..

She slowly nods and I put the baby back in the car seat.

Lethu: Can I ride with you?

Precious: Yeah it's fine.

I drive his car home and Precious is behind me, I get home and stay in the car for a while wiping my eyes then slowly step out of my car

going to take my baby from Precious. I am a failure, I was supposed to stop her from leaving, I knew she was going to be all alone out there but I didn't try hard enough to find her, useless man I am.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 30

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SBONGA

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I am looking at my daughter as she cries in bed, she looks like a doll very cute and so little,

I love her already, I feel a hand on my shoulder, it's Landile.

Nadia: Why are you just staring at her while she is crying?

I take her.

Me: She is just beautiful even when she cries.

Landi laughs at me.

Nadia: You want me to come with you?

Me: No I'm fine, Precious will come with.

She nods, I am going to see Niko, they landed an hour ago and was admitted to a nearby Mental institution, I don't even know what I will say to her.

There is a light knock on the door, it's Precious holding her son, she slept here mom begged her to stay because they wanted to bond with their grandchild, he is a good boy.

Precious: Morning, I'm ready to go.

I nod and give my daughter to Landile then walk out, I find Lethu talking to Precious outside.

Lethu: You can leave him with me.

Precious quickly shakes her head, Lethu nods looking disappointed.

Precious: I will come get my bags later.

Lethu: Ok.

We get in my car and I drive to the hospital.

Me: Uhm Miss Zindela..

She is sitting behind me with her son.

Precious: Yes.

Me: You are still scared of Lethu huh?

She is silent for a while then clears her throat.

Precious: No I'm not.

Me: He has changed.

Precious: Oh..

I chuckle.

Me: You don't care?

Precious: Not really, no.

We laugh a little, I stop the car and huff. We step out of the car and walk inside, Precious ask for her room, we walk in there, I stop by the door, she is cuffed.

Me: Are the cuffs necessary?

Nurse: She was fighting us so we had to.

Me: Please remove them ma'am.

She nods and they remove them. She slowly turns looking at us, she has dark circles around her eyes, tears roll down the corner of her eyes.

Me: Hey.

She is sniffing, I sit next to her.

Precious: I will be outside.

I nod.

Me: Do you want me to help you sit up?

She nods, I help her.

Me: Why didn't you tell me how you felt Sniko?

She cries covering her eyes, she finally stops crying and wipe her tears.

Me: Why would you leave me and our son only to be alone far from home, why?

Niko: "I kept hurting you".

Me: But I told you it wasn't your fault.

Niko: " But it is my fault Boh".

I sigh.

Niko: "You are not wearing your ring anymore".

Me: Uhm..I ...I lost it.

She nods.

Niko: "How is he?"

Me: I took him to grandma, you can't keep failing these kids Niko, they need you.

Niko: "I'm sorry".

Me: You are always sorry but you keep failing them, I don't get why you would leave your son just like that.

She starts crying again.

Me: I have tried so hard for you to see that I am always there to support you but you just left me without even thinking twice, I married you knowing you have some mental health issues you didn't have to run away from me like I don't know.

I am getting angry.

Me: I have been with you from day one but what did you do? You left my son, that was so selfish of you Sniko, you are selfish.

Niko: "Get out".

Me: Why? For telling you the truth? Well someone has to say it, you need to hear it!

Niko: "Get the fuck out!"

Me: I hate the day I fell in love with a selfish person like you.

Niko: "Then leave me alone Sbonga".

Me: I am leaving you alone, I should have chosen someone else not you!

She look at me with eyes full of sadness but i'm too angry to care.

Me: From now on you are on your own, that's what you want right?

Her hands are shaking, I walk out and lean on the wall breathing heavily.

Precious: Are you okay?

I nod and sit down wiping my face, Precious sit next to me.

Precious: You shouted at her..

I look down.

Precious: She needs help not to be blamed or shouted at.

Me: She needs help how when she just left all of us here?

Precious: That's the first sign of depression Prince Sbonga, isolating yourself from

everyone, some people can't control their emotions that is why most people end up taking anti-depressants to be able to deal with all those emotions that sometimes come all at once overwhelming her.

She sighs.

Precious: She will be living on medication from now on and she needs support more than anything.

I nod.

I go back inside after a few minutes and find her looking at her hands.

Me: Hey..

I wave at her, she look my way.

Niko: "I know you don't really believe in divorce so I was thinking of seperation".

Me: Why?

Niko: "It's over Sbonga".

Me: Oh.

She nods.

Me: Ok.

She look at me.

Niko: " I'm sorry".

Me: It's okay.

I get up and go back home with Precious so she can take her car and bags, I say goodbye to her and go to my room, I take my booze and start drinking.

I have been drinking the whole week I only stop when I fall asleep, I am just a mess even my room is full of different bottles of alcohol.

I just finished bathing I have a glass in my hand sipping what's inside, Grandma walk in and her eyes move around my room.

Me: Hello ma'am.

I smile and try to hug her but she push me away.

Ziyanda: What is this Sbongakonke?

I look around.

Me: A room..

She slap me I brush my cheek.

Ziyanda: Why are you neglecting your son for alcohol?

Me: I'm not neglecting anyone maLukhele I just need time to myself.

She slap me again I move away from her sitting in my bed, she snatch the glass from my hand.

Ziyanda: Grow the hell up man, you are a father for fucks sake! Your kids need you.

Me: No they don't, I can't even please a woman..maybe I should have tried Nina.

She chuckles and walk out, she comes back with a stick and start beating me up until she gets tired I am just covering my face, my body is red.

Me: Ngishawelani manje? (Why am I being beaten?)

Ziyanda: Go back to work Sbongakonke find something to keep you busy!

Me: I'm tired grandma.

Ziyanda: Sniko is coming back today.

Me: Coming back to where?

She stares at me.

Ziyanda: You are not cute..

I smile.

Me: Yet I look a lot like you granny.

She smiles and sit next to me.

Ziyanda: Alcohol doesn't solve anything if anything it makes things worse you will turn into an alcoholic.

I look down.

Ziyanda: She needs help Sbonga don't give up on her.

Me: She is the one who gave up on us first.

Ziyanda: So what are you going to do?

Me: Nothing, she suggested seperation and I'm going with it.

Ziyanda: Are you sure?

Me: Yes.

She nods and get up.

Ziyanda: Clean up this mess would you.

Me: Can you help me?

Ziyanda: Were you drinking with me?

I laugh as she walk out, I start cleaning then sit in bed, my door opens and Niko walk in.

Niko: "Hi"

I nod, she is so skinny.

Niko: "I came to get my clothes I will use a guestroom".

Me: Ok.

She take her clothes and walk out, I miss her so much I want to hold her in my arms and tell her how much I love her and that everything is going to be okay but things are just tense between us.

At the dinner table she is just looking down on her plate but she's not eating, our son was so happy to see her, she was so emotional when

she hugged him I realised how much she loves him it's just that she can't control her mental state hopefully the anti-depressants will help, I want her to be genuinely happy one day with or without me because I don't know where we stand right now.

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LETHU

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Seeing my son again at that airport and holding him in my arms felt surreal, I never thought I would get that chance again but I did and I would like to have a relationship with him even if it's just a little visit once in two months I would really appreciate it.

Precious still avoids me when she comes to check on Tinyiko and she sometimes leave my son behind, I know she is still afraid of me and that I might harm our son and I don't blame her.

I am sitting at the veranda, she step out of her car with our handsome boy I guess his nanny is off today because she'd rather leave him with her than coming here with him.

They walk towards me, I get up and smile looking at them.

Precious: Hi.

She says avoiding my eyes.

Me: Niyaphila? (Are you good?)

Precious: Yes we are okay.

I nod.

Me: Hi Phelo.

Phelo: Hello.

Handsome little boy.

Me: Uhm Tinyiko is inside.

She nods and they walk inside, I sit down and sigh. Minutes later Phelo comes back and stand next to me.

Me: Uhm..do you need something?

He nods.

Phelo: Pee...

Me: You need a bathroom?

He nods, I pick him up and take him to my bathroom, I help him pee then he ask to wash his hands, I laugh, he is very clever, I pick him up so he can be able to wash his tiny hands. I hear Precious calling out his name, I walk out with him and I find her crying my mother is trying to calm her down.

Phelo: Mommy..

She turns and run to me taking him from me.

Precious: Don't ever take my son again! You hear me!

She is shouting while still crying.

Me: I'm sorry he asked for the bathroom.

She rush out with him, I follow her, she is buckling him up.

Me: Precious.

She keeps wiping her tears.

Me: I didn't mean to scare you, Ngiyaxolisa (I'm sorry).

She ignores me.

Me: I have changed I learnt my lesson, please give me a chance to be his father.

Precious: No! Stay away from us I will do the same, I am never coming here again.

Me: No..please, Sniko needs you I..I will leave whenever you are coming I..

She get in her car and drive out, I scratch my head, I don't know what I have to do for her to see that I have changed.

A week pass without her coming in, I go to Niko's room and sit down, she is sitting in bed with a blanket over her shoulders she looks cold but it's very hot today.

Me: Hey are you okay?

She shakes her head.

Niko: " I think I am coming down with flu".

Me: Sorry.

I look at her.

Me: Does Sbonga know that you are sick?

Niko: "No, we don't talk, he is fed up with me".

Me: That is not true he loves you.

Niko: "Used to love me before I started being crazy again".

She look at her phone.

Me: Waiting for a call?

Niko: "Precious isn't answering my texts messages, I haven't seen her for a while".

Me: It's because of me.

Niko: "How?"

I explain to her what happened the last time Presh was here.

Niko: "Oh I'm sorry".

Me: Can I have her number please I want to apologize.

She gives me the number, I call her.

Precious: Hello.

Me: Hi it's Lethu.

Silence.

Me: You don't have to ignore Sniko because of me, you can call me anytime and ask me to leave if you want to come see her I won't mind.

She drops the call I walk out and sit outside with Sbonga.

Me: Brother.

He nods, he looks sad.

Me: You miss her don't you?

Silence.

Me: Talk to her and fix things.

Sbonga: There is nothing to fix.

I look at the gate as Precious's car drive in then she step out she looks like a goddess I stare at her until Sbonga hit me with an elbow.

Precious: Hello.

We greet back then she walk inside.

Sbonga: What is going on with you? I have never seen that!

Mev: Seen what?

Sbonga: You looking at a woman like that.

Me: I don't know what you're talking about.

He chuckles, Sbonga leaves me outside and Precious comes out.

Me: Hey you look beautiful.

She look at me shocked.

Precious: Thank you.

Me: Is the boy okay?

Precious: Yes.

Me: He is with his nanny?

Precious: No, his father..

I swallow spit.

Me: Uhm...ok greet him for me.

She walk away but I lightly grab her arm, she turns looking at me.

Me: He is the only kid that I have maZindela please let me be in his life.

She blinks rapidly.

Me: Please.

She sighs.

Precious: But I have to talk and introduce you to my fiance first.

My eyes quickly move to her left hand and I don't believe I missed that huge ass stone on her finger the fiance must be loaded.

Me: Oh that's fine.

Precious: You can drive behind me.

I drive behind her all the way to her house then we walk in. Phelo is laughing out loud and there is a man who is tickling him they seem happy.

Precious: Hey baby.

She kiss the man's cheek, they all look at me as I am standing like a statue.

Precious: Uhm Lizwi this is Uhm Phelo's father.

Lizwi: O..k

Precious: He wants to be in his life, I came to talk to you because you have been raising him.

He chuckles.

Lizwi: I have been raising him then why is he here?

Precious: Just to know him baby.

Me: I just need a little time with him even if it's just a few minutes.

He chuckles again then get up walking away.

Me: I think I should go, seems like he doesn't like the idea.

I walk out.

Phelo: Hey!

He shouts behind me I turn to look at him, he runs to me with his hands up I pick him up, I think our blood is connecting, Precious is standing by the door looking at us.

Me: Bye boy.

I put him down and look at Precious.

Me: So Uhm it's not happening huh?

She shrug her shoulders, I nod and get in my car driving back home.

I send a text to Precious.

Me: "Can we meet tomorrow morning for coffee please".

I am shocked when she replies with "Name the time and place" I wasn't expecting that but I send it anyway then go to bed.

Today I am waiting for her at the restaurant I keep looking at my watch, maybe she stood me up, I huff looking at the entrance I see her cat walking towards my table, this woman is beautiful, I get up and hug her briefly then open a chair for her, she sit down.

Precious: Hello Prince.

Me: Hi, thank you for coming I thought you stood me up I was just about to leave.

Precious: I didn't have breakfast.

I call the waiter, we order and sit in silence for a while.

Precious: So you asked me here to stare at me? You are making me uncomfortable.

Me: I'm sorry I didn't mean to..

She nods and sip her coffee.

Me: Did you guys talk yesterday?

She nods.

Me: Are you going to give me a chance?

She sighs.

Precious: How do I know you won't hurt him?

Me: I give you my word, I was told that I won't ever have kids again so I wouldn't, i haven't even forgave myself for killing my girls.

Precious: I will give you a chance to be in his life though my fiance didn't like the idea.

Me: Thank you so much.

We eat then walk out, I open her car for her she put her bags first.

Me: Is it okay to hug someone's fiance?

She giggles and shake her head.

Me: Just this once can I break that rule?

She laughs and it's the first time I hear her laugh, it gives me goosebumps, I hug her she step back but my hands are still on her waist, we are staring at each other I feel something, I don't know what it is but it's strong, I kiss her, she is kissing me back but stops and push me away from her.

Precious: I...I have to go.

She get in her car and drive away leaving me standing there I am still wondering what is happening with me there is this foreign feeling and it's scary because I mean I have never felt it before.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 31

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LETHU

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I have been thinking about Precious the whole night, the kiss we shared together I know it probably meant nothing to her but I felt something I still haven't figured out what it is yet, I haven't been able to get her off my mind ever since she came back.

I wake up and decide to go to gym it's been a while. I workout for almost two hours then walk out, I go to my room taking a shower, I still have burn marks on my lower body but not much because my dermatologist did some lazer on them, the most painful shit ever, it's completely healed though, but I always wear

long pants. My phone beeps I look at it, I'm shocked to see Precious's name.

Precious: "Hi Lethu can I leave Phelo with you I have an interview to attend".

What!?! I call her immediately.

Precious: Hey Uhm I will understand if you can't it's...

Me: I would love to look after him you didn't have to ask, he is my son.

Precious: Ok I am driving there now.

Me: Ok.

I drop the call, I feel like dancing, if I could I would because this is the happiest day of my life, Precious trusts me to look after our son!

I buzz her in and walk out, she step out with our boy who runs to me I bow a little.

Me: Prince Phelo..

He looks confused, I squat in front of him, we hug, I look at his Mom she has his bag in her hand.

Me: Hi.

Precious: Hello Uhm these are his clothes just incase he gets dirty.

I nod.

Me: So you are moving this side permanently?

Precious: If they hire me, I remember someone once threatened to end my career.

I look down in shame.

Precious: That was meant to be a joke Prince.

Me: It's not a joke because I feel bad for that Precious.

Precious: Sorry then, Phelo come give mommy a hug.

They hug and she walk to her car I pick my boy up.

Me: Precious..

She turns looking at me.

Me: Good luck.

Precious: Thank you.

We walk in and I make him some food and go to my room. She is pretending like nothing happened between us but I did say maybe the kiss meant nothing to her.

My son spend the whole day playing and he falls asleep here and there, I am happy he is here. Sniko walk in and smile looking at us.

Niko: "Look at you! Father and son"..

Me: I have you to thank for that, if you didn't bring Precious back here I wouldn't have this chance.

She nods and join us on the floor, that medication makes her sick so she has lost weight, she look sick and maybe the tension between him and Sbonga.

Niko: "So she forgave you huh"?

Me: I think she is trying and I am grateful.

Niko: "I will never get over how much he looks like Mengezi".

I smile looking at him then sigh.

Niko: "What's wrong?"

Me: He calls me uncle and her mother's fiance is daddy.

Niko: "You guys never explained anything to him that's why".

Me: I don't think Precious will want him to know I am his father.

We play with him and a door opens Sbonga walk in and stand by the door looking at us.

Sbonga: Sorry I will come back some other time.

He walk out, Niko look down I can see tears falling on the floor I touch her hand.

Niko: "He doesn't even want to be in the same room as him, he hates me".

I hug her trying to comfort her, the door opens again it's Precious this time I let go of Niko.

Precious: Uhm hi..I...

Niko wipe her tears and get up walking out, Precious stand there looking at me.

Me: You came to fetch him?

Precious:. Uhm I came to check if he didn't give you any problem.

Me: No he didn't we have been playing.

She nods.

Me: How was your interview?

Precious: I don't know, I just have to hope they call.

I nod.

Precious: You mind keeping him for the night?

Me: Uhm you have plans? A special night?

She lightly nods I feel a pang in my heart.

Me: Oh.

Precious: Phelo come here boy.

He goes to her.

Precious: Are you okay with staying with uncle Lethu?

I clear my throat, Phelo nods.

Precious: Ok daddy and I will fetch you tomorrow morning, is that okay?

Phelo: Yes.

She kiss his cheek I am just looking down.

Precious: Uhm bye, please call me if he gives you trouble.

Me: Ok, enjoy.

She look at me then walk out.

Me: Fuck!

Phelo: Fuck..

I widen my eyes looking at him he laughs covering his face I pull him to me.

Me: Don't ever say that again!

He laughs I tickle him.

Me: Ok?

Phelo: Ok!

I laugh and we continue playing, I feel the room getting hot I get up and bow a little, I'm scared maybe I did something wrong.

Me: Mkhulu..

He is looking at Phelo who looks scared staring back at grandpa.

Mkhulu: Nkosana..(Prince)

My boy is really scared.

Me: It's okay this is our grandpa, uMkhulu.

He nods, grandpa gives him his hand he hold it.

Me: Did I do something wrong Mkhulu?

He chuckles.

Mkhulu: Cha, bengizobingelela inkosana.(no, I came to greet the prince)

I nod.

Me: Kodwa uMkhulu bezomubingelela nini ngoba nathi angimlahle namanje Ibiza enye indoda ngobaba. (but when was Mkhulu going to greet him because you said I must send him away even now he is calling another man father)

Mkhulu: Lethukuthula!

Me: Angiqondile ukudelela ngiyabuza nje (I mean no disrespect I'm just asking)

Mkhulu: Ngizokulimaza mfana wami. (I will hurt you my boy)

Me: Ngiyaxolisa Phakathwayo. (I'm sorry Phakathwayo)

He look at Phelo who seems fascinated by grandpa now, he finally leaves I bath my son and we go eat dinner then go to bed.

In the morning I am shocked to see Precious shaking me, I sit up wiping my face, my boy is still sleeping.

Me: What time is it?

Precious: 6:30

Me: The fuck...then why the hell are you waking me up?

She stares at me.

Precious: Engabe ngenzanjani? (what am I supposed to do?)

Me: I don't know, get in bed or something.

She chuckles, I go to the bathroom wash my face then brush my teeth, I go back to the room.

Me: Why are you here so early, is your bed cold?

She frowns looking at me.

Me: Yini?(What?)

Precious: I came to get my son.

Me: Ok your bed is definitely cold, what happened to the "special night"?

She doesn't answer but wake Phelo up who just burst into a loud cry.

Me: What's wrong?

Precious: He doesn't like to be woken up.

Me: Then why are you doing it?

Precious: I want to go.

Me:: Ubhoreka Kabi Precious. (You are bored).

I look at her as she packs his clothes, she is wearing tracksuits and the pants show off her

hips and ass just the perfect size I'm drooling
the woman is hot but many eyes get distracted
by that rock in her left finger.

Precious: Are you going to help me with taking
him to the car.

I wear my pants and pick the mini me up taking
him to the car, I buckle him up he still look
sleepy, Precious and I stand next to the car.

Me: Thank you for trusting me with him.

She nods.

Me: So I am uncle huh?

Precious: I can't just change everything
overnight Lethu that will confuse him.

Me: Ok.

Precious: Bye..

She tries to open her door I push it.

Precious: What are you doing?

I kiss her but she doesn't respond.

Me: Come on..

I whisper squeezing her waist a bit, she wrap her arms around my neck, we kiss so passionate I am aroused, she move away.

Precious: I want to go.

Me: You don't have to.

She shakes her head.

Precious: The last time you used me to get what you want Lethu so stop doing this.

Me: Then why do you keep kissing me back?

Precious: It's a mistake...

Me: Ok.

She get in her car and drive out, I walk inside and find Sbonga in my room.

QMe: I really want to finish my beauty sleep..

He chuckles.

Sbonga: Did Precious sleep here?

I stare at him.

Me: Why would she sleep here?

He laughs, I get in bed and look at him.

Me: And why are you in my room so early?

Sbonga: Uhm is Sniko okay?

I raise my eyebrow.

Me: You are asking me if your wife is okay

Sbonga?

Sbonga: I just want to know.

Me: Why don't you ask her yourself?

Sbonga: Lethu..

Me: She is not okay, the medication she is taking have some side effects.

Sbonga: Oh..

Me: Talk to her Boh.

Sbonga: And say what?

Me: Ask all these questions you are asking me.

Sbonga: I can't.

Me: Guilt, what did you do?

Sbonga: What?

Me: You look like me so I know your guilty face.

He wipe his face.

Sbonga: When Niko left I went to Nina's place and we kissed, it was just a kiss nothing else happened.

He is even stuttering.

Me: So this is why you have been ignoring your wife Sbonga? She cried yesterday saying you don't want to be in the same room with her.

Sbonga: What should I do?

Me: We both know you will be like this until you tell her so just do it sooner before things get worse for her, this tension is eating her up.

Sbonga: She will hate me.

Me: You don't know that.

Sbonga: What was I thinking!?

Me: You are not perfect Boh we all make mistakes, Niko will understand.

Sbonga: She won't Lethu..she won't.

He walk out, I know my brother can't keep a secret this is why he is so scared but I know they will be good.

It's a new day and I feel like going out, I haven't been doing much of that. I make myself look and smell good then drive to town, I get a haircut then buy a few clothes for my son hoping I get his sizes right then call Precious, it rings till it sends me to voicemail, I try again.

Precious: Hello.

Me: Hey are you around?

Precious: I'm in town.

Me: Me too, can we meet?

She tell me where she's at and I find her eating at the restaurant.

Me: That's a lot of food are you pregnant?

She gasp dramatically then frowns looks like she is thinking.

Me: I was joking.

I sit opposite her but she is not okay.

Me: Are you okay?

She take her phone and scroll down, she finally stops and breathe out loud.

Precious: Thank God..

I look at her.

Me: Uhm you don't want to get pregnant with your fiance's child?

Precious: That's personal!

I raise my hands up.

Me: Sorry.

Precious: Well if you must know I tied my tubes so no more babies for me.

Me: But you panicked a second ago.

Precious: I don't know why..

Me: Awuyithandi lendoda yakho. (you don't love this man of yours)

Precious: I do, I am marrying him.

Me: Mmmh.

I nod.

Me: I bought some clothes for Phelo.

Precious: Ok thank you.

We walk out and I take the clothes from my car and give it to her.

Precious: Thank you.

Me: Uhm can I give it to him myself?

She nods and I drive behind her to her house, he is with his nanny but she leaves as soon as we walk in, Phelo is happy to get new clothes, and his happiness is rubbing off on me, seeing my son happy warms my heart. I take him to his room and put him to bed.

Me: Goodnight Gumedede.

I walk out and find Precious in her kitchen looks like she is cooking.

Me: Uhm I am leaving now.

Precious: I am making lasagne it's quick you can stay a little.

Me: Oh.

I sit on the barstool watching her cook, that ring makes me uncomfortable.

Me: Uhm so do you guys share this house with your husband to be?

Precious: No this is my house, he has his own house.

I nod.

Me: Will he be okay with me eating dinner here?

Precious: You can go if you want I was just trying to be polite.

Me: I was just asking don't be so defensive wena.

She finish cooking and dish up for us, we start eating.

Me: You should invite me everyday this is good.

Precious: Thanks.

She wash dishes after we are done eating, I stand behind her and move her hair to the side

and kiss her neck, my hands go down to her hips, she moan, my dick already excited it's been a minute, I turn her around picking her up we are kissing roughly, we hear the front door closing, she jumps down and rush out of the kitchen, I can hear her talking to someone, I fix my pants hiding my boner then walk out, she is talking to this Lizwi, he gives me an intense look then look at Precious.

Precious: Uhm he..he Uhm he came to give Phelo the clothes he bought for him.

Lizwi: I don't buy enough clothes for him then huh?

I put my hand in my pocket.

Precious: You do..

Lizwi: So he will come and go as the pleases here in the name of "getting to know his son"?

Precious: No, it was the last time he comes here.

I chuckle.

Lizwi: You have something to say boy?

Arrogant motherfucker! I smile shaking my head.

Me: No sir, bye Precious.

She nods, I walk past them and go to my car, I drive home, I won't be given rules by another man regarding my son that's never gonna happen, not in this lifetime.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 32

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SBONGA

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I am standing outside Sniko's room, I am scared of walking in after avoiding her ever since she came back, guilt is eating me up. I step back as her door opens, she is startled.

Me: "Hi".

She nods a little.

Me: Uhm how are you doing?

She blinks a couple of times then hold on the door frame she looks dizzy, I help her get in bed then close the door.

I sit next to her, her forehead is sweaty, I go to the bathroom and wet the towel then go back to the room putting it on her forehead.

Me: Is it the medication?

She nods.

Niko: "I'm cold, I feel like a junkie".

I get her another blanket. who has been taking care of her all this time because I neglected her? this person is sick.

Me: Sniko..

I sigh.

Me: I overreacted with this whole thing, you left because you were overwhelmed by the emotions I should have understood and stood by you.

Niko: "I'm the one who was wrong, I left you and our son for months and not even once did I contact you I'm sorry".

Me: I have to tell you something.

My heart is beating fast.

Niko: "What is it?"

I clear my throat about four times.

Me: When you left me I was hurt, I was going crazy and I did something I am not proud of.

She blinks waiting for me to continue.

Me: I..I was angry that you left our son so...

I am stuttering.

Me: I....

I breathe.

Me: I went to Nina's place and...we...we kissed
I...

Niko: "Nina?"

Me: It didn't mean anything Sniko I swear...

Niko: "Nina Sbondakonke".

Me: Niko I promise I stopped when I thought
of you, I didn't mean to do it.

Niko: "But you went to her place Sbondaga".

Me: It was a mistake.

Niko: "A mistake?"

Me: "I'm sorry".

Niko: "That is why you can't stand me, you
love Nina now, she is perfect, she won't go
crazy and leave you".

Me: No, you are still the only woman I love
Tinyiko.

Niko: "Did you sleep with her?"

I shake my head.

Me: " I couldn't do it, I love you".

She move her knees up and bury her head on her thighs rocking herself back and forth, I try to touch her but she push my hand away.

Me: I'm sorry, this has been eating me up since the day I did it, I didn't do it to hurt you I was just angry.

She is crying.

Me: Baby..

She look at me.

Niko: "I want to be left alone Sbonga".

I shake my head, she is clearly hurt I can't leave her alone.

Me: No.

Niko: "I wasn't here so it's my fault".

She wipe her eyes.

Niko: "So it's okay you can carry on with her I have nothing to offer you than heartbreak anyway, I keep hurting you it's not fair".

Me: No I only want you.

She cover her head with a blanket her body is shaking from all the crying, I really feel like shit.

I sit there not knowing what to do with myself, I think she has fallen asleep I go to my room and sit in bed playing with my knuckles.

Later the door opens it's her, she is very skinny.

Me: Hey.

Niko: "I need your help".

Me: Ok.

Niko: "I want to buy a house".

Me: Oh Uhm you want us to move out?

Niko: "There is no us anymore Boh".

Me: Sniko no please I made a mistake.

Niko: "I understand that so I am freeing you from the guilt, you can now do it openly because I don't understand how you rejected Nina all these years only to entertain her now".

Me: You left me!

Niko: "I am leaving you again so go back to her and this time fuck her".

Me: Ngicela ungixolele Mageba.(Please forgive me Mageba)

Niko: "I forgive you but you are attracted to Nina, go be with her she probably will love you better".

I kneel in front of her.

Me: It was a mistake baby believe me it will never happen again.

She walk out but collapse right at my door, I pick her up and take her to the hospital, she has been taken in and a doctor is running some tests I am sitting next to her, she look pale now and has an oxygen mask on, I am scared I neglected my wife while she is sick just because of guilt of something I could have avoided, there was really no need for me to go to Nina's place.

The doctor walk in with a file in her hand, I get up.

Me: Doctor is she going to be okay? What's wrong with her?

She reads the file then look at me.

Doctor: Your wife has anemia, Aplastic Anemia to be precise, rare but life threatening, her body doesn't produce enough red blood cells.

I look at her confused.

Me: Anemia? What may be the cause?

Doctor: it can be different things really, a viral infection, pregnancy or drugs it can be antibiotics or any medication..

Me: She gave birth to our daughter not so long ago and she is taking antidepressants.

She nods.

Doctor: That might be the cause.

Me: Is she going to be okay?

Doctor: She needs blood transfusion for now .

Me: I will do it.

Doctor: We need to test if you're a match first an..

Me: I know I am, I have given her my blood before when we were still kids.

She nods and we go to her lab, she draws my blood in two blood banks then I go back to Niko's ward as they put an IV on her arm.

I am really scared what if I lose her, this doctor just told me this is life threatening, what would I be without her, what about my kids.

My phone rings I take it out, it's Shaka calling.

Me: King.

Shaka: Prince is everything okay there? I dreamt of my sister is she back home?

Me: She came back three weeks back but she...

Shaka:: She what?

Me: She is at the hospital, they say she has anemia but I just donated blood right now I hope she will be fine.

Shaka: What!?! Uhm ok I am going to look for available flights back home..

He drops the call, I sigh, she never catch a break not even a little, and i feel like this is my fault.

Precious walk in after she called Niko and I answered telling her she is admitted.

Precious: Hey I came as fast as I can, what's wrong with her?

I tell her what the doctor said.

Precious: Oh no is she going to be okay?

Me: I donated some blood, they are still running more tests to see if she won't need any transplants or something, I am glad I am her blood type I am willing to do anything so she can be okay.

Precious: She will be okay.

Lethu and Letho walk in and stand on the opposite side of Niko's bed, Precious is next to me looking shy all of a sudden and Lethu isn't

making things easy because he is staring right at her.

Letho: Is she going to be okay?

I tell them what I know.

Letho: I will donate blood as well if she needs more.

Me: Thank you brother.

When we were kids Letho and I were the ones who donated blood to Niko whenever she hurt herself and lost a lot of blood so I am not worried about finding a donor for her, I am here.

She is sleeping so peacefully I want to cry, why are all these things happening to her, I am not one to question God but this is too much I am really questioning him, why is my wife going through so much! Why!?

We are sitting quietly still the four of us.

Lethu: wePrecious..

I want to laugh at how dramatic he called her,
Precious slowly lift her eyes.

Lethu: Awungitshele Kahle ungiblockeleni?
(Tell me, why did you block me?)

I knew he wanted to say something the way
he has been staring at her.

Lethu: Ngenzeni? (what did I do?)

Precious: Lethu not here please.

Lethu: Kuphi ke?(Where then?)

Letho is laughing.

Precious: I didn't come here to he questioned
by you! You are nothing to me!

Lethu: Too bad I will be all over you until you
tell me why the hell did you block me, what did
I do? Or you changed your mind about me
having a relationship with my son? Why didn't
you just tell me straight up not block me!

He shouts in frustration clearly broken and this
is shocking.

We all look at Niko as she removes the oxygen mask opening her eyes I quickly get up.

Me: Baby...thank God you're awake..

She smiles looking around the room.

Niko: "Can I guess who was shouting causing me to wake up just now between you three?".

We all stare at her confused.

Niko: "It was Lethu right?"

Me: Uhm Sniko are you okay?

Letho: Yeah are you? You were asleep how did you tell someone is shouting, you are deaf baby..

I give him an intense look but he is putting a straight face on looking at Niko clearly avoiding me that's my brother the craziest from all of us at least Niko knows him well she never take offence in anything that comes out of his mouth.

Niko: "I can hear you but it's too much you are shouting".

Now I am worried.

Me: Sniko..Uhm Lethu please call a doctor.

Niko: "I'm not crazy I can hear you, and you are talking too loud it's hurting me!"

I look at my brothers, they look just as worried as I am.

A doctor walk in I explain to him that my wife is deaf and now she is saying she can hear us I ask if this sickness can cause delusion and he said no so I don't know what's happening.

Niko: "I'm not crazy Sbongakonke, I heard everything you said to that doctor even though you had your back on me".

I look at her.

Niko: "You think I'm delusional?"

We all widen our eyes.

Letho: No way!

Niko: "Stop shouting, you are hurting my ears!".

She is frustrated.

Letho: She really can hear me, wow!

She starts crying.

Me: "Can you guys give us space".

They walk out, I believe her now.

Me: "Sniko".

I am using sign language because she said we are loud and we are hurting her.

Me: "I'm sorry, I believe you now".

Niko: "I thought I was dreaming when my ears were hurting and I can tell someone was talking because I start picturing the letters in my head so I could make up on what he was saying".

Me: "I'm happy for you, this means you will hear our kids cry, you can hear the sound of the voices".

She is emotional, I am as well.

Me: "Please forgive me baby, I don't want to live without you again when you left I was a mess please forgive me".

Niko: "it's unfair of me to be angry at you I left you so I understand why you wanted to move on, I am unstable being with me must be exhausting".

Me: "It's not I love you just the way you are".

She nods and look at the IV in her arm.

Niko: "What's wrong with me?"

Me: Anemia but I gave you my blood and I will continue to give you for as long as it takes for you to be okay.

She cover her ears I hold her hand.

Me: "I'm sorry".

She nods.

Niko: "Am I going to be okay?"

Me: "You want to be okay?"

She nods.

Niko: "For our kids"

Me: "And for me?"

Niko: "And for you".

Me: "Then I will do anything to make sure you get better".

Niko: "Thank you Sbonga if it was someone else he would have gave up on me along time ago".

Me: "I'm glad I am not someone else".

We smile looking at each other.

Niko: "Can I be honest?"

I nod.

Niko: "Now that you told me about Nina I can't help but feel insecure, look at me".

She says looking at her arms.

Niko: "I look like death and Nina is beautiful".

Me: "You are the only woman I see Sniko, you are perfect to me because I know you beyond this and it's not about the looks, I love you just the way you are even if we wake up tomorrow and you have one eye I will still love you, no woman will ever be more attractive to me than you".

She cries all over again I sit in bed and hug her.

Me: I love you.

I whisper she smiles and stay in my arms again.

Letho and I have been taking turns in donating the blood for Sniko the whole week I can see the difference, she is getting better and Precious asked the institution to change her medication.

She is home now everyone is happy to see her back and they understand that she doesn't like loud voices, we celebrated her getting her sense of hearing, Shaka came back as well.

She just came back from the bathroom I get water and her medication giving it to her, she drink up, I take out her warm sleepwears then help her get under covers, I want to make sure she gets enough rest.

I have learnt that being with someone who is suffering from mental illness is not for the faint hearted, you need to be patient and more understanding, giving them love is the number

priority, show empathy and support them, don't crowd their space but make it known to them that should they need you, you will be there every step of the way, they need assurance you are with them hundred percent.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 33

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LETHU

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So when I left Precious's house that day I tried calling her when I got home and she had blocked me, I brushed it off thinking maybe

she was doing it for her fiance but days passed lutho ukungiunblock(still didn't unblock me), she didn't even come to see Niko those days so when I saw her at the hospital I just had to ask, she literally ran away from me after we checked on Niko.

I woke up early today and I decided to drive to her house.

I knock on her front door but no one opens, I open it and shake my head, why the hell is the door not locked, I start at Phelo's room, he is still asleep.

I walk in Precious room and shake her, she opens her eyes and jump up covering her body, she is naked.

Precious: What the fuck are you doing here!
Why are you here Lethu!!

I look around I can see the plastics of condoms on the floor.

Precious: Get the hell out!

Me: Why are you shouting?

She grab her gown still covering her body then wear her gown stepping out of the bed, she look down on the floor then look at me puzzled, she is looking at the condoms, I chuckle.

Me: You are the one who used them, do they scare you now?

Precious: Please go.

Me: No, just clean up I will be right here.

I sit down crossing my legs, she slowly pick up their nasty things on the floor and start cleaning.

Me: What arrangements do you have with this "fiance" of yours I feel like you are a side chick here because if not you would be cuddling right now but all I see is used condoms, where did he go to early?

She stares at me.

Precious: What?

Me: You really want me to repeat that long ass sentence , maZindela?

She clicks her tongue.

Precious: You are just a sad soul who is lonely so you want to drag me into your lonely world well hard luck I'm no side chick!

She looks so angry I find her very attractive.

Me: Sit down we need to talk.3

She sit down.

Me: You are Very cheeky aren't you now.

She clicks her tongue again.

Me: So tell me, what did I do to deserve this pain of being blocked by a mother of my child?

Precious: I just don't like you.

Me: Oh, and you only realised that after we exchanged spit huh?

She tries to slap me but I move back laughing.

Me: You are a Psychologist but you have anger issues I can tell.

Precious: Ungijwayela amasimba.(You are full of shit)

I smile.

Me: Umuhle uyazi.(You are beautiful you know".

She look away.

Me: Look maZindela I'm sorry if I did something to upset you I didn't mean it, I really need a chance to raise my son.

She sighs.

Precious: I will unblock you, now can you leave.

Me: I'm hungry mama and you are not working can't you make breakfast.

Precious: Do I look like your wife?

Me: Yes, take off that ring and you'll see how much you look like my wife.

Precious: Where is that self centred Lethu I met before?

Me: Oh he is there baby just resting.

She chuckles and go to the bathroom, I go check on my son again, I bath him then we go to Precious in the kitchen, he kiss his mom's cheek and I do the same.

Me: Yabona sikuthanda kangakanani? (do you see how much we love you?)

Precious: Mxm..

I am watching her move around the kitchen, I don't know that prick she calls Lizwi but he doesn't deserve her.

We eat breakfast then she wash the dishes, I am sitting in the barstool.

Me: So can I take him to my father's daycare so he can learn sign language early then we will try a mainstream school.

Precious: Uhm why?

Me: That is like our first language at home, it has been going on from generation to generation.

Precious: oh Lizwi and I haven't talked about taking him to daycare.

I squint my eyes looking at her.

Me: So you really want that bastard to have a say in my child's life more than me?

Precious: You are in no position to complain Lethu considering how Phelo was conceived.

Me: So you are going to use my past against me every time we don't see eye to eye?

Precious: No, I'm sorry.

Me: It's cool, I'm leaving.

Precious: You are angry?

Me: No, I am in no position to get angry, i'm Lethu the villain right.

I get up and say goodbye to my boy then walk to the door but it opens before I can even touch the handle, Precious's man walk in already looking angry!

Precious: Lizwi..

Lizwi: Really Precious? Again!?

He shouts causing her to jump in fright.

Me: So you think she won't here you if you use an inside voice?

He grabs me by my shirt and pin me on the wall, the man is taller than me and older.

Precious: Lizwi stop!

Lizwi: You may be a Prince but don't use that on me I am not your friend.

Me: Let go of me.

Lizwi: Or what?

I remove his hands from me and push him away!

Me: You don't put your hands on me..

Lizwi: But I just did what are you going to do?

Me: I don't have time to entertain your bullshit, Precious I am taking my son so you can deal with your ugly ass boyfriend.

He grabs me and punch me on my jaw I think I felt it cracking, he knee my stomach I groan that was so fast I wasn't ready for it.

Precious: Lizwi stop..

He clicks his tongue and walk out banging the door, I wipe my mouth there is blood in my hand, I sit down wiping it, Precious sit next to me and touch my cheek.

Me: Ouch..

Precious: Sorry..

She rush away and come back with ice cubes, she take one and massage my jaw with it.

Precious: I'm sorry.

She finally stops, I feel better.

Me: I hope you are not in an abusive relationship Precious because if you are I will beat you up myself.

Precious: Lizwi would never hurt me.

Me: I hope so.

Precious: You are so arrogant yet you didn't even try to fight back, are you a coward?

I chuckle.

Me: Don't fuck with me Wena, he caught me off guard and I don't like fighting but I used to like fighting with my brothers.

She laughs.

Precious: You are weird.

Me: I know that's what makes me attractive.

Precious: You are not all that..

Me: Just give yourself time and look at me you'll see.

She giggles, I look at her with a serious face on.

Me: That man is a ticking time bomb waiting to explode, it's only a matter of time he raise his hand on you.

Precious: That won't happen, I know him.

I nod and get up.

Precious: You are leaving?

Me: Of course I am before that man send his gangster friends on me.

I get home and go to Sbani's room I find them together drinking I join them then go to bed. In the morning I video call Precious just to see her pretty face.

She shows up, her eyes are puffy like she has been crying.

Me: maZindela have you been crying?

Precious: No.

Me: Precious..

She sobs and the line cut, I take a quick shower then drive to her place. I walk in and find Phelo with the nanny I greet and go to Precious in her room, she is still in bed.

Me: Hey.

She sniffs and nod, I take off my shoes and get in next to her, I pull her to my chest, she starts sobbing again.

Me: Tell me what's wrong mama..

She continues to cry, when she feels better I wipe her tears.

Me: Talk to me.

Precious: I hate this day.

I nod as a sign that I'm listening.

Precious: My parents died in a car accident three years ago, I can't forget this day in a way that even my emotions can tell it's that day, every year I go through this pain on this day.

Me: I'm sorry..

She huffs.

Me: Where were they buried?

She tells me it's a cemetery not far from here.

Me: Have you ever visited their graves?

She shakes her head.

Me: Whenever I feel that strong sadness missing my kids I visit their graves and talk to them, I can come with you if you want me to.

She nods and go take a shower.

We just got to the cemetery she is kneeling between two tombstones, tears are streaming

down her cheeks I am just standing a few feet away from her.

Precious: Mom and Dad I miss you so much especially today, the day you both left me, you left an orphan I am all alone, no brother or a sister that we can share the same pain with.

She giggles.

Precious: I am a psychologist just like you dad, you wanted me to follow your footsteps and I did, I know you're proud of me, I am proud of myself as well, rest in peace mom and dad.

I walk up to her and give her my hand, she hold it and cry on my chest I hold her tight then hold her shoulders looking at her.

Me: How are you feeling now?

Precious: I feel better thank you.

I take her back to her house and we find a lot of men making noise looks like they are watching soccer, they all turn to look at us Lizwi is amongst them. He get up and walk up to us.

Lizwi: What is he doing here Precious again?

Precious: What are you doing here Lizwi and who are these people?

Lizwi: These are my friends and I wanted to introduce you to them.

Precious: Oh.

My boy comes to us I pick him up gaining a nasty stare from Lizwi.

Lizwi: We have been here for almost 30 minutes I thought you will make snacks and get to know my friends.

Precious: Uhm I will do it now.

I walk out Precious follow me

Me: I am leaving with my son Precious, you really want to stay?

Precious: You can go with him, thank you for today.

I look at her she drop her eyes.

Me: Ok.

She walk away I turn to look at her, she is also looking at me then she walk inside.

Me: Let's go see granny boy.

We get home eat dinner and go to bed,
Precious call me in the middle of the night, I sit up.

Me: Ja mama.

Precious: Hey is Phelo okay?

Me: Yeah he is fine, he slept with mom and Landile.

Precious: Ok.

Me: Are you okay?

Precious: Yes.

Me: Who are you with there?

Precious: I'm alone.

Me: Can you unlock the front door and go back to bed I will be there soon.

Precious: No you don't have to c...

Me: Just do as I say please.

I wear my clothes and drive to her place, I find the front door unlocked, I walk in and lock then go to her room, I take off my clothes and get in next to her, I pull her close.

Me: Why are you alone?

Precious: I woke up and I was alone in bed I don't even know when he left.

Me: Do you love him?

Precious: We are getting married soon Lethu.

Me: Ok.

We stay in silence, I move her away from my chest then slowly kiss her lips, I take off her nightdress and my shorts, we are naked her legs are wrapped around my waist, I hold her left hand and take off her ring and toss it on the floor, I look into her eyes as I slid my dick in, she run her nails on my back making me groan, we make slow passionate love, I love the sound of her voice when she moans my name, we finally cum, I sleep next to her cuddling her tight, she falls asleep.

In the morning we wake up to a knock on her front door and a voice of a man calling her name, she is nervous.

Precious: That's Lizwi! oh my God what did I do!

She wears her gown and pace around the room, she take my clothes and throws them at me, I wear them, I follow her out, she open the front door and the man is livid he is turning grey! Looks like he ran out of words to say.

Precious: I'm...we..

A woman walk in pushing Lizwi away.

Her: So you are the bitch that has been sleeping with my husband!?

Lizwi: Phindile! What are you doing here?

Her: I followed you Lizwi! I wanted to see the woman who is breaking my marriage!.

I look at Precious, I said it, I knew there was something about this Lizwi person.

Precious: You are married?

He doesn't answer, his wife is quick she is in front of Precious slapping her, I pull her to me holding her.

Me: Take this hood rat of a wife and get the fuck out.

Lizwi: Are you talking to me like that?

Me: Damn right I am.

He step closer to me I push Precious behind me, oh today I will show him flames I tell you.

We start fighting his wife is screaming so loud, a man pulls us apart I don't know where he came from, maybe he is a neighbour, Lizwi spit blood on the floor in anger.

Lizwi: This isn't over.

Me: Oh no it's not.

He grabs his wife and walk out, I look at Precious she is sitting on the couch with hands on her face, I just have to make her see that I am the man for her now.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 34

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LETHU

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Precious and I are in the same room but she is ignoring me, I have been calling out her name but she still has her face buried in her hands.

Me: Come on mama talk to me.

She finally look at me with eyes full of tears, I sit next to her.

Precious: I should have known Lethu, all the signs were out there, waking up alone was one of them, you were right I was the side chick all

along! I dated him before I went to PE and we were happy, he loved me with my baby bump.

She wipe her tears.

Precious: Men are nothing but trash and you, you are one of them!

She walk away, I wait for her to calm down then go to her room I find her in bed, I get in bed holding her from behind.

Me: I know I did you wrong and nothing I say will ever make it okay.

I sigh.

Me: But..now I have been feeling something deep for you I can't explain it.

Precious: You treated Sniko like trash Lethu why would I believe you.

Me: Because Niko wasn't for me to begin with but I strongly believe you are.

I turn her around.

Me: Let me show you I can be a better man please.

Precious: I can't.

Me: Why? Look, I am far from perfect I have a nasty past but I need a chance please.

She shakes her head, I kiss her taking off her gown.

Me: Please mama.

I take off my clothes and get on top of her I push a tip in she digs her nails on my back then move her waist I pull out.

Precious: Lethu..

She whispers so melodically I grab her hip and thrust once then pull out, I love the sexual frustration face she keeps making.

Me: Say it mama..

Precious: Lethu please..

The desperation makes my dick twitch I grab her hip even harder.

Me: Say you want me..

Precious: I want you... please..

That's all that I needed to hear, I make love to her in every position possible then we keep trading places, she shows me flames on top of me I end up speaking in tongues. We are catching our breath after that long session now she is sleeping on my chest slowly moving her hand up and down my abs.

Me: mama..

She look at me, her eyes are sparkle.

Me: I won't ever hurt you again please give me a chance baby.

Precious: Ok.

Me: You mean that?

She nods.

Me: Thank you, I won't hurt you I promise.

I make love to her once again I don't think I will ever get tired of the way she calls my name.

She fall asleep I wake up when my phone rings.

Me: Hello Landi.

Nadia: We went out with Phelo can you ask Precious if he can spend another night with us?

Me: ok I will.

Nadia: Where are you anyway?

Me: Akubuzwana.(Don't ask)

Nadia: Don't bring another Buhle here the girl wasn't even pretty!

I laugh.

Me: Go to hell Landi..

She laughs dropping the call, oh I won't be bringing any Buhle home just the mother of my boy. I go to her kitchen and warm the food I found in her fridge I'm hungry after that long workout.

While I'm eating I see her walking out of her room wiping her eyes.

Me: Hey.

She widens her eyes I go to her holding her to my chest.

Me: Why are you crying?

Precious: I thought you left.

Me: No I was just hungry, I won't do what that Mazwi did.

Precious:: it's Lizwi.

Me: I really don't care.

She giggles.

Precious: What did you eat?

Me: Food I got from the fridge.

Precious: Well it had love portion so here's to loving me forever.

She says and burst in laughter.

Me: I don't mind really.

The way her eyes turns small when she laughs,
God is creative man.

The front door opens.

Lizwi: Precious! Precious! Where are you!?

He is shouting like a mad man, I can feel him standing behind me Precious gasp and raise her hands up.

Me: He has a gun huh?

She quickly nods, I chuckle.

Lizwi: Turn the fuck around!

Me: Is he talking to me?

I feel the mouth of a gun at the back of my head.

Me: Make sure you shoot to kill because if not Mmmm..

Precious: Please put the gun down Lizwi.

I get up and go to Precious, I kiss her cheek..

Me: Relax baby.

Lizwi: Entlek Wena you have been two timing me with this boy Precious!?

Precious: No, but I didn't know you are married! You lied to me!

He cocks his gun, Precious scream, I laugh.

Me: You want me to borrow you some bullets?

He stares at me I nod.

Me: Empty!

I laugh so hard.

Me: Why would you try to scare me with an empty gun do you even know who I am?

He looks angry still pointing at us.

Me: The minute you cocked that gun I could tell that no bullet moved up, I had experience with guns from when I was 12 don't scare me with that shit!

He pulls the trigger it makes noise but no bullet comes out like I predicted, Precious scream I hold her.

Me: You're okay baby open your eyes.

She open her eyes and hold me tight.

Me: It's okay.

I kiss her trying to make her relax, We hear the front door closing.

Me: Landile asked if they can keep Phelo I am thinking you should also come with me.

Precious: No.

Me: Baby you are not safe here.

Precious: He is just angry he won't hurt me.

Me: Are you one of those naive types? You screamed not so long ago and the man had a real gun pointed at you, what if he gets the bullets and come back.

Precious: I don't th...

Me: Don't make me slap you back to the real world please.

She sulk.

Me: You look pretty by the way.

She blush.

Precious: Uhm can I book a hotel instead?

Me: Why?

Precious: I don't want to go to your house.

Me: Why not?

Precious: You don't think Sniko will have a problem with this?

Me: Why would she?

Precious: We are friends and she was with you and..

Me: Niko is happy with my brother, I don't think she even remember being with me baby.

Precious: But still we are friends I have to respect her.

Me: Ok how about we go home I will explain everything to them but we will sleep in seperate rooms if you don't want them to know about us.

I chuckle.

Me: Uzofihla ke ukuthi unami kulungile. (you will hide that you are with me it's okay)

She look down.

Me: Go and pack maZindela.

She nod and walk to her room, I wash the dishes I used then go back to her room.

We get home and step out of the car, when we walk in everyone is here chatting up a storm but they stop as soon as we step in.

Me: Ay niyamubuka umuntu shame.(You really can stare at a person shame)

Letho laughs.

Ntsika: Nkosazana unghahlala phansi. (princess you can have a seat)

Precious sit looking down I sit on the armrest next to her.

Niko: "Did you lose your engagement ring?"

She says doing hand gestures for Precious to understand, she look at her hands then look at me.

Precious: Uhm yeah..yeah I lost it.

I chuckle looking down.

Me: Oh Uhm king can Precious stay here for a while she has some gangster snob threatening her life.

She stares at me I shrug my shoulders.

Ntsika: That's okay, do you know the guy Lethu so we can deal with him, our grandchild have to be safe there.

Me: Oh he is just a small fish, my brothers and I will handle him if he becomes a problem for now he ain't shit.

He nods, I show Precious her room, she sit in bed.

Precious: I have to tell my uncles I am not home they usually come to check on me when it's the weekends.

I nod.

Me: So I won't get to sleep with you tonight?

Precious: No.

Me: Ok, can I take you out tomorrow?

Precious: Uhm you want to be seen in public with me?

Me: Why not?

Precious: I'm not really in your league.

Me: And what's my league can you balance me there?

Precious: A princess.

Me: You can be my very own princess phela and my ex wife was not a princess.

Precious: But she has PhD in law and from a wealthy family.

Me: Ngizokushiya ukhulume wedwa mina.(I will leave you talking alone)

She look down.

Me: You are a smart woman Precious so don't compare yourself with anyone, you are not in any competition, ngingowakho wedwa.(I'm yours alone)

She laughs.

Precious: I never thought you had this side in you.

Me: Mxm, they will be eating lunch soon so let's go join everyone.

We go join everyone at the table, my boy is sitting on my lap.

Miyah: So Presh you are getting married soon huh?

I chuckle and continue feeding Phelo.

Precious: Uhm..no..not soon.

I laugh and everyone stares at me.

Me: I'm sorry I was just thinking about something.

Miyah: Ok Uhm let me know, I am bored so I would love to help you if that's ok.

Precious: Ok.

Oh my poor baby mama.

The next day we use separate cars to go on our date, she really wants to hide me lomntwana.(This child)

We eat our lunch people are giving us stares but they can only guess who I am between my brothers.

We go back home and chill with Niko, Sbonga, Letho and Sbani.

Niko: "Precious when am I meeting Lizwi?"

She ask smiling looking at Precious, Sbonga translate to her.

Precious: I..I don't kno, soon.

Niko nods.

Niko: "I am feeling drowsy I'm going to bed."

Precious: Let me come with you.

They walk away leaving me with my brothers.

Letho: Yewena! (Hey you)

Me: Ngikusakaze ngempama.(I will slap you)

Letho: No you won't, so what's happening?

Me: With what?

Sbonga: Sibadala Lethu (we are old Lethu) not younger like you claimed when we were kids.

I laugh.

Me: What are you talking about?

Sbonga: You and Precious!

Me: There is me and Precious?

They stare at me.

Me: Nothing is going on, uyashada lomuntu.(
She is getting married)

Sbonga: Mmmm.

Me: Yeah..

Later I go to Precious's room.

Me: Hi..

Precious: I think Sniko is suspicious of you and
me.

Me: Why is that?

Precious: She was asking me questions about
you, if you have been good to me and not
abusive a lot of things.

Me: Oh.

Precious: You don't love her anymore?

Me: I do.

She blinks fast then nod.

Me: We grew up together, i'm sure if you ask Letho and Sbani the same question they will also tell you they love Sniko, I am not in love with her but I love her as a sister and a friend, sisuka kude before I became a monster to her(we go way back), so no I don't love her the way you think I do.

She nods.

Precious: Ok.

Me: Look maZindela to me you won't be in a competition like I said earlier, you won't be a replacement and definitely not a side chick.

She frowns I smile.

Me: You won't..

Niko open the door and sit next to Precious who seems nervous.

Niko: "What is going on between you two".

I look at Precious.

Precious: Nothing.

Niko: "We are friends Precious don't lie to me".

Precious: I'm sorry Uhm we..I will stop.

Niko: "Stop what?".

I want to laugh at the way she is panicking.

Niko: "You think I would have problem if you date Lethu".

She slowly nods.

Niko: "You know what would be my problem?"

Precious: No.

Niko: "If you stay with him while he doesn't treat you right, and be verbally and physically abusive that would be my problem".

Precious: He is not like that.

Niko: "Then I don't have a problem".

Precious: I'm sorry for not telling you, I thought maybe you won't like that".

Niko: "I don't even like the guy he is ugly".

Me: Really Niko?

She laughs.

Niko: "Just because he didn't treat me right doesn't mean he will do the same to you, people act differently when they are with the right person I was not the one for him but for my handsome husband".

She smile and hug Precious.

Niko: "Just promise me you will get out should he hurt you in any way, I still need you as my Psychologist not crazy like me".

Me: Sniko I will never hurt her, I learnt my..

Niko: "Angikhulumi nawe".(I'm not talking to you)

I look down, she get up and stand in front of me smiling.

Niko: "Give me a hug big head)

Me: I hate you right now.

Niko: "I love you too".

I hug her laughing then hold her hands.

Me: You are an amazing person you know.

She nods smiling then walk out, I sit next to Precious she rest her head on my chest I wrap my arms around her, maybe Sbonga should pray for me so I don't mess this up.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 35

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I have been fighting this Anemia for a month now, I have blood transfusion once a week now, when it started it was three times in a week, I am grateful for my husband and Letho who keeps taking turns in donating blood for me. I have such a loving and supportive man ever and I am happy that now I can actually

hear him say he loves me, the sound of his voice makes everything seem better.

Precious walk in my room still wearing her pyjamas, she has been here for a week now looks like Lethu doesn't want her to go he keeps changing dates of when she should leave, I love having her here, she has a good heart and has been a great friend, she didn't hesitate to come back from PE when I told her I am struggling emotionally so I saw how much she cares.

She get in next to me I don't know where Sbonga went.

Precious: Morning.

I nod.

Me: "Why are you here so early? Where is Lethu?"

She smile looking down, she has learnt a bit of sign language, she is a fast learner this one.

Me: "Are you blushing?"

Precious: No.

She is giggling none stop.

Me: "Girl, you are in love".

Precious: He told me he love me this morning, it was the first time and he said it like he means it.

Me: "He does, I know those four guys like the back of my hand".

She sighs.

Precious: But yesterday I overheard him talking on the phone, he asked the person to find Buhle.

Me: "But he doesn't love her maybe he wants to divorce her or something".

She looks worried.

We might have fallen asleep because loud voices startle me I open my eyes sitting up.

Me: "You should learn to shut up Lethokuhle you are loud man".

He laughs.

Lethu: Why is my wife sleeping with you Tinyiko?

Me: "Do you see Buhle here?"

His mouth hung open they all laugh at him causing Precious to wake up.

Lethu: You are rude Sniko!

Precious: Why are you guys shouting?

They start speaking all at once I laugh, bad habits from when we were young.

We stay together for a while.

Precious: I am going back to my house tomorrow.

Lethu: Uh why?

Precious: Because it's my house.

Lethu: Why do I sense attitude in that sentence?

Precious: Oh you do?

Lethu: Ngiyalingwa! (i am being tested)why are you talking to me like that?

She ignores him.

Lethu: Ngenzeni ke? (what did I do?) Why are you angry maZindela?

Precious: You are looking for your wife that's why! so I don't know why you are keeping me here!

All his brothers look at him.

Lethu: So you sneak up on me when i'm on the phone?

Sbonga stares at him shaking his head,
Precious storms out.

Sbonga: Don't do that..

Lethu: What did I do?

Sbonga: If she tells you she heard something upsetting from you, you explain not question her.

Lethu: Oh..Uhm so I was wrong?

Sbonga: Yes.

He quickly walk out leaving me smiling,
Sbonga sit next to me.

Me: "As long as he have you he won't mess this up, I love them together, I think she brings out the best in him".

Sbonga: Yeah but he has a lot to learn, he talks lot just like Letho.

Letho: Haybo!

We laugh at him, Lethu walk in and look at me.

Lethu: Niko can you talk to her please she doesn't want to listen to me.

Me: "Why are you looking for Buhle?"

Lethu: I want a divorce and also to know where she is so she doesn't hurt Precious and my son, I want to watch her every move.

I nod and walk out, I find Precious throwing her clothes in her bag, I sit in bed looking at her she is really upset, her eyes are glassy.

Me: "He wants to make sure you and Phelo are safe from Buhle so he will be keeping tabs on her there is no telling what that woman can do".

She sit down.

Precious: So I am overreacting?

Me: "No, he should have told you, i would go crazy too if my man is looking for his ex with no explanation".

Lethu walk in and look down.

Lethu: I'm sorry mama the reason why I am looking for Buhle is because I ...

Precious: It's okay Niko already explained everything to me and I am happy you want to make sure me and Phelo are safe.

Lethu: Thank you, so you are no longer leaving right.

Precious: Lethu I have to go back to my house at some point.

Lethu: One of the reasons I should look for Buhle ay..

I smile.

Precious: What do you mean?

Me: "So slow".

She look at us confused.

I go back to my husband and fall asleep on his chest.

"Sniko kaMageba"

My dad is speaking I look around he is standing at the corner looking at the same direction, I look where he is looking and gasp when I see the throne is flames, I rush to take the bucket of water and throw it on the throne but the fire becomes worse I watch as our throne turns into ashes, I look at dad.

Me: "Dad what is going on?"

"They are destroying everything, go home Sniko kaMageba".

He walk out I try to run after him but something is holding me tight.

Sbonga: Niko..

I open my eyes, I am by the door and Sbonga is holding me.

Sbonga: You are sleep walking.

I sit down.

Me: "The throne is on fire".

Sbonga: Huh?

Me: "A dream I had, dad told me they are destroying everything".

He nods.

Sbonga: We will leave in the morning I will call RJ and Letlotlo.

Me: I'm scared last time I went there I lost the baby.

He sighs.

Sbonga: I know but this time we will call on oGumede to be with us as well in this journey.

I nod.

We go back to bed, in the morning he gives me breakfast in bed then my medication. He kneels on the floor and burn the incense.

Sbonga: Gumede, boMnguni kaYeyeye ibani nomfazi wami kulendlela azoyihamba

nimuvikele.(Be with my wife in this journey she is about to embark on, protect her)

The door opens and three cheetahs walk in followed by King Phiwo then three more behind him, I bow my head he does the same.

Phiwo: I am told that they will be leaving with you to the palace.

Me: "Who?"

He look at the cheetahs.

Me: "Thank you".

Sbonga get up and shoulder hug Phiwo, Letlotlo and RJ walk in and bow.

Letlotlo: We are ready to go Princess.

I nod and they walk out first Sbonga hold my hand and start praying, a very powerful prayer then hug me.

Sbonga: Asihambi sisodwa. (we are not alone) God and our ancestors are with us.

We walk out of the house, Phiwo kneels in front of the six cheetahs like he is talking to

them then they start running out they are out of sight in a second, I get in my husband's car and he drives out Letlotlo and RJ are driving behind us.

When we get home at the palace the cheetahs are already here moving up and down the gate, I can see my father's cars outside.

I see three young girls walking in with the guards, I step out of the car and the minute my foot touch the ground I shiver something is going on here.

Letlotlo run to me and kneel.

Letlotlo: Princess..use your voice today, its been long overdue!

Me: "I don't understand".

He get up and walk in front of me Sbonga and I follow behind him then RJ behind us.

When we step on the doorstep I cringe at the sight of blood on the floor, the guards drag one girl on the floor she looks lifeless and a trail of blood where they are dragging her.

I feel like something is moving on my throat I scream so loud involuntarily everyone stares at me, the time I stop I feel so tired.

Nombuso: She never learns!

Sbiya: Bring the last girl this needs to be done we don't have enough time!

They drag another girl and the old man stab her straight in her heart everything is happening so fast it's like I am watching a horror movie.

Blood is on the floor I am shaking.

Zipho: You told us we don't have to sacrifice more girls if we get Sniko! She is here now let's do it we need to sit on that throne!

Nolu: Guards take her!

Two guards walk up to me but the cheetahs stand in line in front of me, they step closer the cheetahs snap and jumps on them, they are lifeless on the floor in a second, blood everywhere.

I hold Sbonga's hand tight.

More guards try but the cheetahs kill every last one of them into pieces this is scary for me.

Now Sbiya, Zipho, Nolu and Nombuso are looking at us scared.

Nombuso: We should go these animals will kill us!

Nolu: No this is our legacy!

One cheetah jumps on her I close my eyes as it tears her skin Zipho screams her name but it's over, the girl is dead. They all run out my stomach turns from all this blood I run out and throw up, Sbonga brush my back, I sit down tired.

I hear loud noises from afar it sounds like chanting, cars drive in my yard in speed, some even trashing the gate. Then people from the community walk in they have weapons in their hands and they look ready to kill, they start throwing stones while cussing me out, Sbonga quickly pull me up and run inside with me.

Me: "What is going on?"

Bab'Zulu run in holding his stomach he is bleeding.

Me: "Baba".

He falls on his knees.

Zulu: It's over Princess, kuphelile ngobukhosi bakaZulu (It's over with the Zulu royalty").

I kneel in front of him.

Zulu: They will kill every last one of us because many girls have gone missing and the community thinks we are sacrificing those girls for power and wealth, they are fed up.

Me: "But we don't know anything about that".

They start throwing stones the windows shatter, Sbonga cover me as more stones are thrown inside.

Letlotlo kneels and start grunting the cheetahs surround him, it's like he is communicating with them then they run out.

Letlotlo: Talk to your people princess.

I slowly get up, Sbonga does the same but Letlotlo stops him.

Letlotlo: She can do this.

Sbonga: You can't expect her to go out there by herself those people are angry what if they hurt her!

Letlotlo: She is the Queen of this land when she speaks her people will listen.

I slowly walk out scared as hell, people are still livid, the cheetahs run circling them causing dust to rise up then they stop, everyone is wiping their eyes some are coughing.

Me: Sizwe sakwaZulu oNdabezitha. (nation of Zulu, Ndabezitha)

The voice that comes out of my house is so loud I want to actually cover my own ears but this is not the time to be weak.

Me: Imina inkosazana yenu uSniko ka Mageba. (it's me your princess Sniko kaMageba)

I see one of them going on one knee and bows his head, they all follow doing the same thing.

Me: I am here to hear your grievances I am here to listen to your cries, talk to me.

One of them stands up and bow a little..

Him: Sniko kaMageba it's been months of constant fear for us, our female children went missing ever since we heard you took over your father's throne and one of us saw the guards taking the girls inside this palace but they never came out, ever since you took over we had 40 reported cases of missing girls and it all points out to this palace, they have been dying here!

He is angry.

Me: I'm sorry to hear that but I can assure you I have nothing to do with what is happening here the day I took over my father's throne I was carrying twins but I lost one of them so I left only to return today, I found a man and the

girls my father raised and his wife slaughtering girls in this same house.

They exclaim.

Me: Nolu most of you know her, she is dead because they wanted to do the same to me, they wanted power! they wanted the throne!

They all get up.

Him: How do we know you are not in this! How did you even get your voice , isn't it that it's the reason you used those girls.

They all agree with each other.

But a smoke fills the entire yard RJ is kneeling calling oMageba and dad shows up they all looking at him in shock then they slowly go back on their knees.

Mageba: I have let this kingdom from when I was 21 years old I knew nothing then some of you gave me advices that made me who I am today.

His voice is echoing.

Mageba: My daughter won't be carrying the crimes she knows nothing of, she is here to bring peace, to bring unity not to answer things she has no knowledge off so please hear her out.

He bows his head a little.

Me: I know nothing I say will change what happened to your children but we can learn to live with it and hope that one day God will heal our wounds.

"Ndabezitha"

They all chant.

"Sthuli sikaNdaba".

I look at my dad and bow with tears in my eyes.

Mageba: You will bury bab'Zulu with dignity my princess and be strong I know you can do this.

I rush inside and find Bab'Zulu on the floor, he is dead, I groan shaking my head.

RJ: it's God's plan my princess don't cry
everything is going to be okay.

I sob, other elders walk in, they give me the
spear and one of them hold my hand taking
me to the throne, I sit down tears still
streaming down my face, I look at everyone as
they sing the praises some ululating then look
at my father he is smiling slowly fading away,
he bows one last time.

Me: I will make you proud Mageba..

I whisper wiping my tears.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 36

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I am in my room alone, Sbonga and the adults are helping take out the dead bodies to the mortuary the community told me I will have to bury the three young girls who died in this house and help search the other missing girls. I couldn't stand the smell of the blood in the lounge.

I fell asleep and now I just woke up and it's dark outside, Sbonga is not next to me. He walk in looking dirty like he has been digging some graves, he is even sweating.

Me: "What's going on?"

He wipe his sweat with an elbow.

Sbonga: There were shallow graves on the backyard where the other girls were buried so we were digging them out.

Me: "The backyard?"

He nods.

Sbonga: I need to shower.

I nod, he go to the bathroom, I take out his clothes then go to the kitchen to look for something to cook, they must be hungry.

I cook some meat and pap, he walk in looking clean and kiss my cheek.

Once i'm done cooking we eat with RJ and Letlotlo they will stay with me until all this is settled, the community is still pretty much angry and some of them do believe I have a hand in these killings I don't even know how to convince them.

Tomorrow I will have to choose my council that will help me with decision making in this kingdom, I'm still young I will need advices of adults.

I open my eyes and Sbonga is smiling looking down at me.

Me: "Why are you staring at me?"

He kiss my lips.

Sbonga: You are beautiful.

Me: "Thank you".

Sbonga: Can you tell me you love me with your voice..

He has this big smile on his face.

Me: "But I still don't know how to control it yesterday I felt like my eardrums are gonna bust I was too loud".

Sbonga: Please baby.

Me: I love you..

He pulls me to him holding me too tight.

Sbonga: Thank you.

We wake up and go to a meeting just in my yard, the people of the community are here and so is my extended family oZulu, Shaka is here as well.

We sit down I am sitting on the throne.

Zulu: Sniko kaMageba we are here so you can choose your council people who will help you in taking decisions for kingdom, choose wisely my Princess.

I look around and get up, I choose him he is Bab'Zulu's younger brother then I choose Richard though he is always away then Shaka and lastly Letlotlo, I need his wisdom and protection because RJ is still a child.

One of the members of the community clears his throat I allow him to speak.

Him: My Queen we wanted to know if you are going to bury those girls that were found in your backyard and if you are going to compensate the families for their pain and suffering losing their kids in such a brutal manner.

I look at Letlotlo then Zulu.

Letlotlo: Though the Queen had nothing to do with the murder of these girls but she will help burying your children however you can't demand compensation from her it should come from the heart.

"we demand compensation or we are going to burn this house down with her in it!".shouts one of the guys at the back.

Me: So you want me to pay for your kids? How much is a human life worth?

They start talking amongst themselves.

Me: I had nothing to do with all of this.

They are all talking at once looking angry, Sbonga holding my hand.

Sbonga: I will pay them, let's give them what they want for peace.

Me: We don't even know how much they want Boh.

Sbonga: We will negotiate.

I tell them that I want another meeting with those who lost their children but some tell me they only need me to help bury their kids not money only 5 families demand twenty thousand each, Sbonga agrees to pay them he

just needs to sort things out with the bank, I am glad that part is settled.

I am sleeping at night with my husband but I hear voices all around the house I step out of bed and I feel like my feet are in water it's cold, I look down there is blood everywhere I scream in fear, I feel hands wrapped around my shoulder it's Sbonga and we are still in bed. Letlotlo knock and walk in.

Letlotlo: My Queen..

Me: Yes.

Letlotlo: Their souls are not resting in peace.

Me: What should I do?

Letlotlo: Burn this house down..

Me: What!?! This is my father's home!

Letlotlo: That is better off being a cemetery because you will never find peace here again.

Me: But..but my father's grave is here.

Letlotlo: But he is living in you my Queen.

I sigh in defeat.

Me:: So I am losing yet another home.

Letlotlo: We will rebuild where the ancestors will see fit.

I nod and start packing my husband's clothes and mine, he hold me from behind.

Sbonga: It's okay, take it as a new start.

I wipe the tears.

Me: The first day me and dad came here, as tall as I was he carried me inside because of the rain.

Sbonga: And all those memories lives in here Niko not in these walls.

He says touching my chest where my heart beats.

Sbonga: This is a lesson "Let go of the past and look forward to a clean slate, a great future ahead".

I turn around and kiss him, I thank God for giving me a wise husband who always sees light in darkness no matter how small it is.

We are standing outside the yard as Shaka and Letlotlo pours petrol all around the house then they run out after throwing the matches inside the fire erupt, I look down as I remember the day dad died the flames the gunshot but Shaka and I rebuilt it only for it to be taken away from us now this again, it's too much.

Sbonga: It's ok baby.

He says holding me, I nod I hope everything will be alright because I am tired now.

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LETHU

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It's been over a month since Precious and I decided to try things out and see where it takes us, I have made a lot of mistakes but whenever I do I run to Sbonga he seems to be handling his marriage with Tinyiko really good so I take notes from him and he always help me out, I appreciate him.

It's a cold winter morning and I am cuddling with my woman, our son is at home, he loves Landile and Pamela so much, we have sat down with him and explained to him that I am his dad he was confused at first and kept calling me Uncle until one day he woke up and called me daddy which was the most emotional day of my life, my son calling me daddy for the first time, that was a milestone.

Me: Babe..

Precious: Mmmm.

I'm playing with her hair while her head is on my shoulder.

Me: We are staying in today right?

Precious: I have an appointment with my hairstylist.

Me: Why?

Precious: What do you mean why? To do my hair of course.

Me: But you look amazing right now.

Precious: No I don't.

I sigh.

Me: How much do you need?

Precious: R5000.

Me: A what now?

She giggles.

Precious: But you asked baby.

Me: I didn't say leave me broke MaZindela.

She laughs getting out of bed naked, she picks up her gown on the floor.

Me: Mmmm that ass.

Precious: You like it?

Me: Love it.

Precious: Then come and get it..

She giggles walking in a shower, lord have mercy, I follow her and we take a very long naughty shower then step out.

Precious: Now I'm tired.

Me: You can just cancel everything baby it's cold anyway.

Precious: No I want to look pretty.

Me: But you do.

She wears her jeans and my jacket.

Precious: You are giving me your card or transferring it.

I smile, I always feel good when she uses my money for herself makes me feel like a man. I give her my card.

Precious: I'm leaving.

Me: Ok I'll be in bed the whole day waiting for you.

She kiss my lips.

Precious: Thanks for the card baby, I'll be back soon.

She kiss me again and walk out leaving me smiling to myself, I didn't know that I Prince Lethu would be capable of loving someone so bad.

Hours later I take my phone and just scroll down because i'm bored, my throat dries as I see Precious put on her status a man and captioned it " Thank you for lunch" with a lot of hearts I go crazy literally like how can she do this to me, how!!

I sit in the lounge waiting for her, I keep drinking some water to calm myself down, she walk in and smile trying to kiss me but I move back, she frowns.

Precious: Was I gone for too long?

Me: No Uhm I have to go.

I had a whole speech prepared in my head on what I want to say to her but now that she is here it's all gone I'm just heartbroken but this is the same way I found her she was somebody else's fiance.

Precious: But I bought some food and we had a movie night, remember?

I shake my head and walk out, she calls out my name but I ignore her and get in my car driving home.

I am sitting in my bed tapping my foot on the floor, I'm angry.

My phone rings but I don't even look at it, it keeps ringing I want to smash it on the wall but it finally stops ringing.

I lock my room then go to bed angry as hell.

In the morning someone knock on my door, I go unlock, Precious walk in.

Me: What are you doing here?

Precious: Uhm to...to give you your card.

She gives it to me.

Me: Thanks.

She nods.

Precious: Uhm ok I will take Phelo.

Me: Don't wake my son up Precious.

Precious: Ok.

She doesn't move just looking down.

Me: Is there anything more you want to say?

She shakes her head.

Precious: No.

She walk away, I slam the door and go back to bed, I won't be cheated on!

During the day my brother is calling.

Me: Boh..

Sbonga: Switch on your laptop we need to talk.

I do as he says then his call comes through, he shows up on the screen with Niko.

Me: Hi.

Niko: "What is wrong with you?"

Me: In regards to what?

They stare at me.

Me: Hayi I can't read minds, why are you calling me?

Niko: "We are not friends Lethu and I don't like you".

Me: I don't like you too Niko What's your point?

She chuckles.

Niko: If I was close I was gonna punch your face.

I laugh.

Me: So what did I do wrong this time?

Sbonga: Precious called.

Me: Mmmm.

Sbonga: Really?

Me: Ufuna ngithini? (what do you want me to say?)

Sbonga: You want to lose her?

I don't say anything.

Sbonga: if you continue being a bastard she will leave you, she is successful and

independent so angaphuma nje kuwena Kahle futhi.(She can move on from you smoothly)

Me: Anginendaba. (I don't care)

He chuckles.

Sbonga: You don't?

I don't answer.

Niko: "Let's leave this fool to die alone baby".

They end the call, my phone indicates a message I take it. "Have guts like you did before after you were done using me, say it like a man you claim to be don't be a pussy about it" it's from Precious, I wear my shoes and grab my car keys driving to her house, I open the door and find her sitting on the couch but she get up as soon as she sees me.

Me: Can you repeat that for me please..

Precious: Tell me I am naive and that it was easy fucking me, tell me what you want from me then blackmail me! Do it!

She is so angry.

Precious: Say it!

Me: You're the one who should tell me it's over not play me for a fool!

Precious: What was I thinking? Falling in love with a narcissist who only cares about only his feelings and feeding his ego, get the fuck out of my house!

I turn to walk away but she sobs, I look at her and slowly walk up to her and hug her..

Me: I'm sorry..

She continues to cry then push me away from her wiping the tears.

Precious: It's okay if you don't want to be with me Prince but you can just say it I will be fine.

I sit down.

Me: Who is that man Precious?

Precious: What man?

I take my phone and show her the screenshot I did.

Precious: That's one of my uncles the last born, he comes after my Mom.

Me: That's your uncle?

She take her phone then sit next to me, she shows me a picture of three gentlemen they look alike I can see the man she was with and I remember the two who came to my house when they told us she is pregnant.

Me: I thought you are cheating on me.

Precious: I understand why, that is the same way you got me I cheated on Lizwi with you so you think I would do the same.

Me: No it's just...I love you too much but I can't shake off this fear that I am gonna mess up and you'll leave.

Precious: I love you too and I am not leaving you if you promise that next time you see something upsetting you will ask me about it not just jump into conclusion.

Me: I will, I'm sorry baby.

She nods.

A knock comes through she open the door and comes back with a box, my phone rings it's a PI I hired to look for Buhle.

I answer while Precious tries to open the box.

Me: Hello.

PI: Prince I spotted your wife at Musgrave road not so long ago..

I stand on my feet.

Me: Where is she now?

PI: I lost her but she is around, I will find where she stays.

I drop my phone as Precious scream I rush to her, she is looking at the pictures of our son they have blood on them.

Me: What the fuck!

I hold Precious as she is shaking, I dial Landile's number.

Nadia: My Prince.

Me: Landi, Buhle is back.

Nadia: Where is she?

Me: She just sent some disturbing pictures to Precious, my PI is still trying to find out where she stays, he suspects that it's close.

Nadia: Ok, make sure Precious is safe Phelo is alright here.

Me: Ok I'm coming home with her.

I pack Precious's clothes since she still look traumatized.

When we get to the front door Buhle walk in with three men behind her.

Buhle: Well well well who do we have here.

Me: Nobuhle.

Buhle: The one and only baby, I am back and I want my husband back.

Me: You have jokes.

Buhle: I'm not joking, you want to see how much I want you back?

Three more men come behind us, I look at Precious, my baby is so close to fainting.

Me: Breathe baby I'm here alright?

Buhle: Oh so sweet, how come you were never like this with me? I have been watching you Lethu, you go on dates now? You buy flowers now? You drive through the night now to be with a woman something you have never done for me!

She nods and two men grab Precious and one of them is pointing a gun on her head she has her eyes tightly closed.

Buhle: I hate all these bitches who keeps popping up babies for my husband.

Precious: I will leave.

I look at her she is crying.

Precious: I will take my son and leave.

Buhle: No you won't you just want me to let you go so you can continue fucking my husband.

Precious: I won't, he is not worth it.

She look at me with a straight face tears still falling.

Precious: You are not worth it.

Me: maZindela.

Buhle burst in laughter.

Buhle: maZindela huh? Do you even remember my surname Lethu?

I am still looking at Precious I don't see that girl that loves me anymore.

Me: Baby..

She shakes her head.

Buhle: You know what let me take you up on that offer of you leaving but it will be on my terms.

Precious: you don't have to I was already planning on leaving him I can't be with someone like him, I bought a ticket last night.

Me: Precious..

Precious: I don't love you, I never did I wanted revenge for hurting me.

I stare at her, she pull her arms from the guys and wipe her teare then look straight in my eyes, she is cold.

Buhle: This is interesting..

She says smiling.

Precious: It's over, I want nothing to do with you so I am leaving your son behind.

Me: maZindela.

She take her bag that I packed then go back to her room, I feel stuck where I am standing, she comes back holding a file and more bags.

Me: Baby...I thought you loved me.

She looks at me for some time not blinking I am so confused.

Precious: You thought wrong.

She walk to the door and stand there for a while then open the door walking out, I turn to Buhle and grab her neck, her "bodyguards"

pull me back and start punching and kicking me, I am on the floor groaning, my mind is not on the physical pain but emotional, I have never felt anything like this before, how can she leave me.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 37

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LETHU

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Ever been so heartbroken that you just want to end your life? That is me right now no one prepared me for such heart ache when I

decide to go after Precious, that woman changed the way I see life, I was ready to do anything to make her happy but she just left.

I am still at her house where Buhle's goons left me badly injured, it's the third day locking myself up in this room I don't even have time to answer my calls I have close to a hundred missed calls.

It rings again I groan sitting up, my ribs hurt, it's Sbonga calling.

Me: What do you want?

Sbonga: Brother what is going on, Landi said you haven't been home for three days now is everything okay.

Me: Everything is fine Boh.

Sbonga: Ok..so Where is Precious we tried her phone earlier and it was on voicemail.

Me: I don't know, she left.

Sbonga: To Where?

Me: Ngizoyazelaphi mina leyonto? (How do I know that?)

Sbonga: What is going on?

Me: She left me okay! She said she was only with me for revenge! She left!

Sbonga: But..how... Precious loves you Lethu.

Me: She would be here if she did!

He sighs..

Me: How come you never told me it hurts like this when they break your heart and leave you? You should have told me.

Sbonga: Look go home and..

Me: I will go.

I drop the call and take my keys, I open the front door but these puppets are here with their master.

Me: What do you want Buhle?

Buhle: A baby.

Me: From who?

Buhle:. You.

Me: I'm infertile.

Buhle: Don't lie to me.

Me: You know everything, how did you miss that?

She has her eyes popped out.

Buhle: But why Lethu I loved you but you kept making babies with Niko and that hoe now I want one you tell me shit.

Me: Yep, try one with these puppets you are with and leave me the fuck alone.

I walk to the door and grab the gun on the waist of one guy and shoot the two of them now it's just Buhle and me, I have a gun pointed at her.

Me: You are really a pain in the ass you know that?

She laughs so hard clapping her hands.

Buhle: I organise everything Lethu, I kinda calculated your every move, you take the gun

and shoot my two guys, so I made sure that each gun only have two bullets, don't underestimate me baby.

She take out her gun and it goes off I groan going on my knee, she Just shot my shoulder.

Buhle: I will be back and I will make you pay for all the shit you put me through!

She walk out I am losing a lot of blood.

I take out my phone and call Landi.

Nadia: Lethu.

Me: Buhle shot me I am at Precious's house.

Nadia: What! I'm on my way now.

I sleep on the floor holding my shoulder.

Me: Shit..

The cops and an ambulance comes, I go to the hospital, they take out the bullet and stitch me up.

I drank the pills so now I feel drowsy I can hardly keep my eyes opened.

I wake up and look around, I just dreamt of Precious, she was walking away from me, I sigh, I think I am crazy.

Nadia and Letho walk in I am just looking up.

Nadia: Hey the doctor is keeping you here for the night.

Me: Why? I feel fine.

Nadia: Check if there are no risks of infections.

Me: Mxm..

Letho: Why are you angry?

Me: Awungiyeke Wena.(Leave me alone)

Letho: To be honest I don't care I was just asking because Nadia said you are my brother.

Me: Wena bungakwazi lokho konje Udom(you didn't know that because you are dumb)

He punch right where I was shot I groan.

Nadia: Letho! Uyahlanya Yini?(are you crazy)

Letho: He is being unnecessary rude I am teaching him a lesson.

Me: Get out!

Letho: Angiyi ndawo.(I'm not going anywhere)

He says sitting next to me, he is my brother but he can be very annoying sometimes, he gets too playful even in serious situations.

Nadia leaves, leaving her big headed son here.

Me; Why aren't you leaving with Landi?

Letho: I want to stay with you.

Me: For what?

Letho: We are brothers I am looking after you.

I click my tongue.

I take my phone and try calling Precious's number but it's still on voicemail.

Letho: She loves you Lethu.

Me; Why everyone keep saying that!! I don't see it!

Letho: Because you have been blind, the day she came home pregnant, the way she looked

at you, she was scared of you yes but there was also a glimpse of love there.

Me: That is not true she wouldn't have loved me that time I was a lunatic.

Letho: She probably saw beyond that just like me, I knew that one day you will come back to your senses and be a good man and a good father to that little boy.

I look at him, he does speak sense every once in a while because he likes joking too much.

Me: Then why did she leave me if she loves me, I don't understand..

Letho: She will tell you one day.

I sigh and take my phone I leave a voice message.

Me: MaZindela..baby I just need to hear that you're fine wherever you are, it's okay if you don't love me anymore I just want to hear your voice please call me or at least send a text please sthandwa Sam.(my love)

I sigh closing my eyes, I hope she calls.

Later at night a call comes through I answer.

Me: Hello.

Silence.

Me: Hello.

Someone is just breathing, I quickly sit up hurting myself in the process.

Me: Aah..shit..

Precious: Lethu..

Everything stops, even the pain on my shoulder don't matter now.

Me: MaZindela..

She sniffs.

Me: Baby where are you?

Precious: I am at my uncle's house, Lethu I miss you.

She is crying.

Me: Send the address now baby please I will be there now..please mama.

Precious: Ok.

She sends a text and I remember I didn't come with my car and they might not allow me to go it's at night and I hurt myself in a way that a patch has blood on it, I am bleeding.

I limp out and tell the securities that it's a matter of life and death, I ask one of them to take me to my house at a price of course.

When I get to her house I run to my car and drive to her uncle's place, it's not that far. I knock on the door and it slowly opens, she jumps into my arms I groan holding her tight.

Precious: I love you.

Me: I love you too baby, I love you.

She finally let go.

Precious: Oh my God!

She cover her mouth I look at myself I have blood on my t-shirt.

Precious: You are bleeding.

Me: Yeah Uhm Buhle shot me, the time you called I was at the hospital.

Precious: No! come in.

I look around.

Me: No I can't baby, what would your uncle say..

Precious: He won't mind Lethu you are bleeding.

She pulls my hand inside and make me sit on the couch, then she walk away and come back with a first aid kit, she sit in front of me and slowly take off my t-shirt she is biting her lower lip, she clean up my wound I am getting horny, the way she touches me, her hand moves to my abs I hold it.

Me: What are you doing?

I whisper.

Precious: Nothing..

She bites her lips and start kissing me with her tongue.

Me: Mmmmm..

We stop when we hear footsteps her uncle is staring at us in anger, Precious jumps in fright.

Precious: Malume Uhm I..we..

Uncle: Wenza amanyala emzini wami Precious?
(you are doing disgusting things in my house
Precious)

Precious: No I'm sorry he...

He grabs me and punch me once, I might as well die from that bullet wound then because I keep getting hurt there and it's still fresh.

Precious: Uncle stop you are hurting him.

Uncle: Isn't this the same Prince who broke your heart and left you pregnant Precious.

Precious: He didn't leave me! I left.

I slowly get up.

Uncle: Get out of my house.

I look at Precious.

Precious: I am leaving as well.

Uncle: Precious.

Precious: I want to see Phelo Malume.

He shakes his head.

Precious: I think I should take you back to the hospital.

I nod, the pain is too much now, she takes her bag and we walk out, she drives me back to the hospital they stitch me up again and give me something for the pain and some IV because I am feeling weak.

I wake up in the morning and Precious is sitting on the chair with her head buried next to me.

Me: Baby..

She yawns.

Precious: Hey how are you feeling?

Me: I feel better now that I see you are really here and I wasn't dreaming.

She smiles a little.

Me: I thought you left me mama.

Precious: I wanted to save myself and you so I had to pretend I didn't care.

Me: But you do care about me right?

Precious: I always did...when we slept together for the first time, I know it was just a game to you but to me it was more than just casual sex I was into it, I loved it.

Me: I'm sorry.

She nods, I hold her hand.

Me: Please don't leave me again baby.

Precious: I won't, I missed you and Phelo so much.

Me: And you are a good actor man I really thought you wanted nothing to do with me.

Precious: I want everything to do with you, my uncle was such a cock blocker last night I was so frustrated.

I laugh.

Me: You are beautiful Precious.

She blush.

Precious: You always say that.

Me: It's true and I want to wake up next to you everyday.

She giggles and i realise that this is what I want to hear for the rest of my life, I take my phone and call Nadia.

Nadia: Boy..

Me: Landi can you talk to my PI I need to divorce Buhle as soon as possible.

Nadia: Consider it done.

Me: And Hlano must start drafting the papers fast.

Nadia: Cool i'll talk to him.

Me: Thanks.

I call Letho to bring me and my woman some food he walk in and kiss Precious's cheek.

Letho: I never get tired of your beauty Miss Presh you should have dated me i'm the hottest from the three.

Precious laughs.

Precious: I can see that..

We eat some food listening to Lethokuhle's lame stories.

Later Nadia walk in smiling I asked her to come and take Precious home she has been here the whole day, she looks tired.

Nadia has some papers on her hand.

Me: Why do you look happy?

Nadia: Because you my friend are a free man.

I look at him confused.

Nadia: Buhle is in jail.

Me: She is?

Nadia: Yes but her parents are in town so she might get bail but I will make sure she stays away.

Me: Thanks.

Nadia: Now there is this..

She gives me the papers I look at them.

Me: What! How did you get her to sign?

Nadia: A few slaps and a punch here and there, I got to her before the cops did.

Me: Wow!

These are divorce papers and Buhle signed I am a single man!

Nadia leaves with Precious and I will stay another night here.

Two weeks have passed and my divorce is finalized I am happy because that means I get to do what's right for my son and that is having a stable home with mom and dad.

I just bought a ring to ask Precious to marry me but I'm so nervous about it so I start talking to my dads and Landi.

Ntsika: Lethukuthula you called this meeting so talk boy.

Me: I want to ask Precious to marry me.

He smiles.

Ntsika: I'm glad you are finally growing up and making right decisions there is nothing more

beautiful than a man who marries the mother of his child.

I smile nodding.

Ntsika: I don't see anything wrong with that..

He says looking at his siblings they nod in agreement.

Me: Thank you.

Ntsika: But from when they came here the first day you can tell they are traditional people so if she agrees to marry you we will have to do things the traditional way.

Me: Ok.

I huff

Me: I hope she will say yes.

I drive to her house and find her cleaning wearing only my t-shirt that she took at home, I hold her from behind kissing her neck.

Precious: Hey baby.

Me: Hey you look sexy in just my t-shirt.

Precious: Really?

Me: Yeah but I think you would look even sexier with nothing on.

Precious: You think so?

Me: Yeah..

She turns looking at me then she take off the t-shirt leaving only a panty on, she slowly pull it down.

Me: Mmmh shit...

She gives the panty to me and walk away, I groan holding my hard dick then follow her I find her in bed rubbing her clit she is moaning I don't ask anything I just take off all my damn clothes I start licking her pussy first then give her deep fast strokes she is screaming so loud.

Me: I love you mama..

She bite her lower lip shaking, I cum holding her waist tight. We catch our breath.

Precious: That was great.

Me: Your pussy is hot.

Precious: I know.

She laughs and get on top of me she gives me another round of total bliss.

We take a shower then she wears the t-shirt I was wearing and go to the kitchen, I take my pants and take out the ring, I breathe and go to the kitchen I find her swinging her hips to the side dancing to the beat only she can hear because even her head is moving, she seems happy.

Me: maZindela.

She turns and scream in shock as soon as she sees me on my knee holding a ring.

Precious: Lethu..

Me: Baby..I know I have done some pretty bad things to you before but we are here now I want to be a better man and I want you to teach me how, I want to wake up next to you everyday, I want to show you off to the whole world I believe you were made for me because

I have never felt like this for any woman, will you marry me, please..

She has both hands covering her mouth and she is crying.

Me: Please I will never hurt you again I promise, please say yes.

She walk past me going to the room I look down in defeat I guess that's a no.

Precious: Yes.

She says behind me but I don't turn.

Precious: Yes I will marry you Lethu.

I get up and look at her, she jumps on me wrapping her legs around my waist.

Precious: I will marry you.

Me: Thank you so much.

I put her down and put on her ring.

Precious: It's beautiful baby and it's a real diamond.

I laugh.

Me: Why would I buy fake for a Queen?

She giggles and hug me again.

Me: So Uhm we need to send a letter to ask for negotiations to your uncles.

Precious: Yeah they are the only people I have left, my father's side of the family doesn't care.

Me: I'm sorry.

Precious: It's okay.

I go home with her to tell everyone the good news, Ntsika writes a letter immediately to ask for a date from Precious's uncles.

It's been two days we haven't heard anything from Precious's family but she drives in she was called by her uncle's this morning, she has a letter in her hand.

Me: Hey baby.

She bows before Ntsika then give him the letter saying it's from the uncles, she seems nervous sitting next to me.

Ntsika sighs looking at me.

Me: Is everything okay?

Ntsika: It's a letter from her uncles.

Me: I already know that dad.

Ntsika: They declined.

I look at Precious she just look down.

Me: Why, what is the reason?

Ntsika: They said they are waiting for the Thabethe family which are coming to negotiate for Precious this coming weekend.

Me: What does that mean MaZindela?

Someone else is coming to negotiate for you?

What does that mean Precious?

Precious: It's Lizwi..

Me: Ngiyalingwa straight Abantu abazi. (I am being tested, people don't know)

Precious: My uncles said they already accepted as gave them the date.

Me: And Wena wathini? (and what did you say)

Precious: I told them I am not with Lizwi anymore.

Me: Did you?

Precious: Of course I did!

Me: Why didn't you tell me you still want to marry that man?

Precious: Ungangibhedeli Lethu! I am wearing your ring here! (Don't annoy me)

Me: Then what is that!.

Ntsika: Hey! Stop it you two! Stop.

Me: But she ...

Ntsika: Just shut the hell up.

I look down but inside I am boiling, Precious is mine.

Ntsika: You have to make things clear to them Precious on who you want to marry.

I go to my room and just sleep in bed, Precious walk in.

Me: Why didn't you tell your uncles that Lizwi is married?

Precious: I did but apparently he divorced his wife just like you.

I chuckle.

Me: I bet now you want to go back to him.

Precious: I'm not crazy.

Me: Then tell your uncles that it's me you want to marry maZindela.

Precious: I did but they didn't wanna hear it.

Me: Oh Uhm so that's it?

Precious: I won't be marrying Lizwi, if they accept Lobola from him then they will marry him themselves.

I sigh, she get in next to me and kiss my cheek. So her family doesn't like me, but I don't blame them the family doesn't really forgive easily when you have hurt their daughter even when she forgives you.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 38

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LETHU

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We are at Precious's house with our son, things are tense it's around 6 in the morning and her uncles have been calling asking her to go home because Lizwi's uncles are on their way. I don't want to talk because my mouth has a mind of its own I might say something I would regret, I feel like she does want to leave.

I go to the bathroom, then wash my face, when I go back to the room she is wearing her tracksuits I chuckle shaking my head.

Precious: Lethu...

I shake my head stopping her from talking.

Precious: It's..it's not what you think I want to put a stop to this believe me.

I wear my clothes and take my car keys and my phone.

Me: I am leaving with Phelo.

She nods I walk to the door.

Precious: Gumede...

First time she calls me like that it does something to my heart, I turn looking at her she step closer and wrap her arms around me.

Precious: I love you.

I look at her trying to see if what she is saying is true.

Me: I love you too.

I push her a little then walk out, I take my son going to the car with him then drive home.

I get in bed and fall asleep immediately because the whole night I couldn't sleep thinking about Precious.

I wake up and look at my phone but there is no missed call from Precious I try calling her but she is not answering any of my calls I am getting worried what if she decided to go through with marrying Lizwi instead of me, I take a shower then go sit at the lounge with the kids.

It's 8 o'clock at night and I have already lost all hope about Precious ever being mine, she didn't call or returned my calls the whole day.

I take off my clothes and get in bed disappointed and hurt.

In the morning I wake up and drive to her house, I unlock the door and walk in, I am shocked to see her naked in bed with bruises on her skin, I shake her she doesn't wake up, she looks unconscious.

Me: No..baby..

The pulse is there but very faint I run to look for her gown and cover her up then pick her up running to my car, driving to the hospital I keep looking at the backseat to check if she's waking up I am even shocked that I didn't get in any accident on the way because I lost focus on the road. I run inside with her in my arms, I am shouting like a crazy man for help, they take her in, I don't know what to do I want to be in there so I can know if she's alive or not, I take my phone and call Sbonga.

Sbonga: Brother...

Me: What am I going to do if she dies Boh?
Why didn't I check on her yesterday?

Sbonga: Calm down, breathe and tell me what is going on.

I try to breathe.

Me: I found Precious unconscious and she was naked with bruises, I don't understand what is going on, she is...she was not breathing..

Sbonga: What!?! Uhm who are you with there?

Me: I'm alone I...

Sbonga: Look I'm calling Sbani now to come there, I will see you soon okay.

Me: Yeah okay..ok.

I sit down and cover my face, what happened to her? Who did that to her?

Sbani walk in after a few minutes and sit next to me.

Sbani: Sbonga called and told me to come be with you here, what is going on?

Me: Precious is in there I don't know what is happening, no one has come out of that room..

I get up and pace up and down the passage.

After almost three hours a doctor walk and so are the cops.

Doctor: You are the man who brought in the lady in there?

Me: Yes.

Doctor: Come this way sir.

I follow him and the cops are behind me I am too tired to ask anything. I sit down.

Doctor: So I called the cops here because we believe the lady you brought in was assaulted physically and almost sexually but it looks like she was fighting back, she had some serious internal bleeding.

"I am detective Khoza we need to take you in for questioning" I look at him.

Me: Really, you want to do that right now? Can I see her?

Doctor: Sir I think it's better if you cooperate with the cops.

Me: Is she going to be okay?

One cop grab me and put handcuffs on me.

Me: What the hell man, what are you doing?

He push me out and as soon as I get to the passage nurses have their phones taking pictures, Sbani rush to us.

Sbani: What is happening? Why are you cuffed?

Me: I don't know..

Detective: Hey we are working here, let's go!

They keep pushing me like a fool I am getting really angry.

Sbani: I am calling Nadia now okay I am coming.

He says running to his car with a phone in his ear.

I am in an interrogation room for thirty minutes alone the a Detective walk in looking at me with a smirk on his face.

Khoza: Well well well, Prince Lethukuthula Gumede, I was so happy to hear that you are my guy they have been trying to protect you for too long but not this time my friend.

Me: Why am I here detective?

He switch on the tape recorder and put it in front of me.

Me: Are you accusing me of something?

He chuckles and sit in front of me.

Khoza: What relationship do you have with miss Precious Zindela.

Me: She is the mother of my child and we are engaged.

Khoza: Interesting because we have a guy here, her husband who just paid Lobola for her today and what I want to know is how are you engaged to someone's wife.

Me: Precious is no one's wife but she will be mine soon.

He nods still smirking.

Khoza: I see.

Nadia walk followed by Sbonga, Letho and Sbani.

Nadia: Khoza are you questioning my son without a lawyer?

Letho: Why is he questioning him in the first place?

Khoza: Just doing my job Gumede, isn't that what we are paid to do?

Nadia: I heard you put cuffs on him are you charging him? If yes on what grounds?

Khoza: I took him in for questioning if he has nothing to hide surely there is no harm in that.

Nadia: What is it you want to know?

Khoza: With all due respect this is my case Gumede let me handle it the way you taught me okay.

Nadia: Lethu get up! Let's go home.

I get up.

Khoza: Maybe I should get the Hawks on this case.

Nadia look at him.

Nadia: You want to do that?

Khoza: Yes, you think I don't see what is going on here? You control the media even the law, there were rumours that he killed his kids but you were quick to shut those rumours down and not even once was he here to answer to that.

Nadia: So we work with rumours now?

Khoza: No but no one is above the law even you Landile Gumede and it's only a matter of time I expose you and your pathetic family with all the things you have been covering up for them.

Nadia: Mmm you have confidence I like that, go on do what you gotta do man, and good luck in "exposing me".

She says patting him on the shoulder.

Nadia: Let's go.

We walk out, we all get in the same car and Nadia drive home

Sbonga: You are quiet.

Me: Just thinking about Precious I have to go see her.

Sbonga: We will all go later the doctor said she is still in a bad state and we can't see her now.

I nod and go to my room, later I am sitting at the lounge waiting for Sbonga, they all come in and sit down.

Ntsika: Lethukuthula.

Me: Baba..

Ntsika: What happened to Precious?

Me: I don't know, I found her unconscious with bruises in her house.

Ntsika: And you had nothing to do with it?

Nadia: Bhuti uthini manje? (brother what are you saying now?)

Ntsika: I just want to know that he has nothing to do with this Landile so we can protect him if he didn't, I don't want to protect him while he is the one who did that, we've done it before.

I feel a lump in my throat.

Nadia: You didn't have to take it there Ntsika come on.

Ntsika: There is no harm in asking Landile and we have to stop tip toeing around these boys

if we want them to know the difference between right and wrong.

Me: I would never hurt her or any woman in my life again baba I learnt my lesson and it hurts me to hear that you think I have something to do with this.

He nods

Ntsika: I'm sorry I just wanted to get this out of the way.

Me: It's okay.

Ntsika: You want us to come with you.

I nod, I feel bad that I have done so many wrongs that even my family have to make sure I have nothing to do with it.

We walk in her ward and she is sleeping, her face is not bruised just her body but she is covered up with a sheet up to her shoulders.

She moves a little I stand next to her.

Precious: Le..Lethu.

She still have her eyes closed.

Me: Baby I'm right here, I'm here.

She slowly open her eyes then tears fall at the corner of her eyes.

Me: Baby I'm so sorry, I should have been there I'm sorry.

She moans in pain.

Ntsika: Let me call the doctor.

They walk out giving us some space I sit down.

Me: Lizwi did this?

She nods.

Precious: I told him I am marrying you, he dragged me to his car and drove to my place that's where he wanted to sleep with me we started fighting he took off all my clothes and strangled me, did he....did he?

Me: No you fought baby and I am proud of you ok.

Precious: I hate my uncles because I told them I don't want to get married to that piece of

shit but they went on and accepted the money from him, greedy bastards.

Me: I'm sorry but I will find him and when I do one of us will come out alive and it's not him.

She starts crying.

Me: Ngiyaxolisa sthandwa Sam(I'm sorry my love).

The doctor walk in and check on her while I go to my brothers.

Me: I have to meet with someone but I don't know his address.

Sbonga: Just tell me his name.

Me: Lizwi Thabethe.

He nods.

Sbonga: Meet me at home in fifteen minutes.

I nod and go back to Precious.

Me: Baby I have to go I will see you later ok.

Precious: Don't kill him.

Me: But..

Precious: I'm..I'm..

She sobs.

Precious: I'm two months and two weeks pregnant.

I stare at her.

Me: What?

Precious: The doctor just told me, I'm so sorry Lethu.

I sit down, we have been together for a month and maybe three weeks so it's definitely Lizwi's child and also I am infertile.

I don't even know how to react.

Precious: Please say something.

I have no words.

Precious: I don't know how it happened I thought I...

Me: So what is it you want to do maZindela? Go out there and tell him you are carrying his child then what? Get back together?

Precious: No..

I get up.

Precious: Are you leaving me?

Me: Angazi Precious Angazi mfethu Angazi
nokuthi simi kuphi sinawe. (I don't know
Precious I don't even know where we stand)

Precious: I love you.

I walk out I can hear her calling my name but I
just walk away. I get home and Sbonga tell me
Lizwi's address but what am I going to do with
it now? She asked me not to kill the father of
her child.

I look for something strong to drink then go sit
outside, a hot breeze hits me I just continue
drinking.

Mkhulu: Ungabi ivaka.(Don't be a coward)

I look at him.

Mkhulu: Uvume ukwehlulwa enye indoda?(You
allow another man to defeat you)

Me: Ingehlule ngani? Ngokumithisa umfazi wami?(Defeated me how? By impregnating my wife)

He laughs.

Mkhulu: Umfazi? (Your wife)

Me: Old man not today please.

He laughs again.

Mkhulu: Sizobe sisekhaya sikulindile ulethe umfazi wakho emagcekeni oGumede.(We will be at home waiting for you to bring a wife in Gumede's yard)

Me: I don't know what to do.

Mkhulu: Phakathwayo.

I look at him

Me: But I thought you'll tell me what I have to do muntu omdala.(old man)

Mkhulu: Every man for himself.

Me: What!?

He laughs even louder.

Mkhulu: Ngawufunda uForm one.(I did form one)

I laugh out loud, he bows.

Mkhulu: Nkosana (Prince)

He says and fades away I chuckle going to my room then go to bed I am trying to block everything out so I can get some sleep.

In the morning I don't know if I should go see Precious or what but I receive a call.

Me: Hello.

Precious: Prince..

Me: Hi.

Precious: Uhm I..I am doing an abortion.

Me: You what?

Precious: Please don't judge me but put yourself in my shoes, what would you do if you were told you are carrying a child of a man who beat you up and left you to die huh?

I keep quiet.

Precious: Answer me?

I don't know what she wants me to say, she drops the call, I sit there thinking then shake my head and take my keys running to my car.

I get to her ward and find the nurse helping her sit on a wheelchair.

Me: Hi can you give us some space please, just a minute.

Nurse: Ok but your appointment is in five minutes miss.

Precious nods, I kneel in front of her.

Me: Baby..

She wipe her tears.

Me: I still want you to be my wife.

She shakes her head.

Me: Don't do it, I will raise this child with you Please don't do an abortion, she will be our last born please.

Precious: I can't..

Me: Please maZindela wami omuhle.(My beautiful maZindela)

Precious: What if you change your mind Lethu, I can't keep this baby.

A nurse comes back.

Me: Ngiyakucela. (I am begging you)

Precious: What happens if we break up Lethu?

Me: iyodwa indlela yokuphuma la, ibhokisi mfana.(There's only one way out here, a coffin)

She smiles a little.

Me: Mowuthanda umuntu uthanda Yonke into ngaye noma kubi nomakuhle.(If you love someone you love everything about them whether good or bad) but we will learn to work on things as we grow together.

She sighs.

Me: I don't want to miss this chance of seeing your tummy grow because I won't ever have that again,I won't get to have another child

ever again so this is my chance to help you go through this pregnancy, she might not be mine but she is mine in my heart because I love you.

Precious: Lethu..

Me: I will be there every step of the way just let me in my love.

She nods.

Precious: Ok.

Me: Ok?

Precious: Ok

I kiss her and the nurse clears her throat annoyed as hell.

Me: Uhm miss you can cancel that appointment for us we are good.

She look at us in disgust then walk out, I help her back in bed then watch her fall asleep, maybe this is my ancestors giving me another chance to be a father again it doesn't matter that she is not mine but I will love her and I will raise her honouring my two babies in heaven.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 39

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LETHU

*

I am fetching my woman at the hospital today she looks better though she still feels pain here and there because of internal bleeding, so her body is green in other parts but the doctor said it's nothing to worry about she will heal eventually. I haven't told my family about her pregnancy I want to talk to her first about it before I can tell them.

I walk in her ward she is still wearing the hospital gown, I kiss her cheek.

Me: Hey baby, I got you some clothes and your cosmetics.

Precious: Thank you I was getting tired of bathing with a hospital soap it smells bad.

Me: You should have told me sooner my love.

Precious: I know..

She take her bag and go to the bathroom I wait for her while keeping myself busy with my phone, she comes back looking beautiful.

Me: You look good let me tie your hair.

She smiles and let me, I drive us to her house and I already cooked for her, I dish up for us we eat in silence she seems uncomfortable.

Me: maZindela.

She look at me.

Me: You don't want to be here?

She shakes her head with tears in her eyes.

Me: We can go home until you feel better.

Precious: No I'll be fine this is my house and I would like you to stay with me until I feel safer if you don't mind.

Me: You don't have to ask I want to be with you.

She nods, she go to bed while I clear up the kitchen then go join her, she is giving me her back I try to hold her but she removes my hand from her.

Me: Babe.

She pretends to be asleep I let her be.

In the morning I look at her as she goes to the bathroom wearing a gown which is something she doesn't do, one thing about her is that she loved walking around naked but I guess not anymore, she comes back from the bathroom now wearing my hoodie and a jean it's not even that cold.

I am watching her every move she looks different I don't know how.

Precious: I'm going to make breakfast for us.

Me: Ok.

She walk out, I go to the bathroom and take a shower then join her in the kitchen I hold her from behind but again she push my hands away I look at her but she continues dishing up, we sit down and start eating in silence until I can't take it.

Me: You still want to be with me?

She nods.

Me: Can't you talk?

Precious: Yes I still want to be with you.

I nod.

This pushing me away has been going on since she came from the hospital and it's day three now I am getting tired of it she doesn't want me any close to her.

Me: Precious.

Precious: Prince.

Me: Yini? (What is it?)

Precious: I don't understand that question.

Me: Awusangithandi? (You don't love me anymore?)

Precious: I do.

Me: Kwenzakalani Pho?(what is going on then?) You don't want me near you why don't I go home then?

Precious: you want to go?

She says with a shaky voice.

Me: I don't understand you these days, you want me here but you don't want me, Angazi(I don't know)

She close her eyes I touch her tummy I see her hand moving she wants to remove my hand.

Me: You prefer to be with Lizwi right?

She open her eyes.

Me: Because he is the father and I'm not so you prefer he touches you not me.

I don't wait for her to answer I get up.

Me: I will be sleeping in the other room.

I wear my flip flops and walk out, I get in bed I can't help but fear that she will leave me judging from her actions now.

In the morning we eat quietly, I let go of the folk.

Me: Uyangicasula kanjani nje. (The way you irritate me)

She stares at me.

Me: Ununtu uyamtshela if ungamfuni(you tell a person if you don't want them) don't string them along.

Precious: What?

Me: You heard me, I think you are just afraid of being alone otherwise I wouldn't be here and it hurts because..ngiyakuthanda and mina ngiyafuna ukuba nawe Kodwa Wena...(I love you and I want to be with you, but you..)

I sigh.

Me: I will find a secured apartment for you where no one can get in to hurt you it's clear you don't want me.

She is looking down tears falling on the table I get up and take my jacket.

Precious: Lethu..

Me: Ungizwisa ubuhlungu man (you are hurting me man) and I don't know what I did wrong.

I go to my car but stop there I don't want to leave only for her to get hurt again that Lizwi is still out there. I sit on the veranda for some time then open the door she screams holding a knife pointed at me then she let it go and run to my arms.

Me: It's just me baby calm down.

I wipe her tears and take her to bed making sure there is some space between us we are living like old couple who are already tired of each other.

Me: Precious.

Precious: Yes.

Me: khuluma iqiniso awusafuni ukuba nam
Neh(tell the truth, you don't want to be with
me anymore right).

Precious: I do.

Me: Then what is going on? What is happening
between us?

Precious: I feel like I betrayed you, I am
carrying another man's child and..I feel bad
Lethu I feel like I cheated on you, this feels so
wrong.

Me: Then what do I do to make you feel
better?

Precious: Allow me to do an abortion please.
I sigh.

Me: So you want to take this away from me?
This chance of being a father again?

She just cries.

Me: It's okay then, you can do it maZindela I
won't stop you if that's what you want.

I take my phone and call Sbonga.

Sbonga: Brother..

Me: Uh...

I sit up I want to vent out this pain I am feeling.

Sbonga: Lethu...

Me: Yeah..

Sbonga: I am at home.

Me: Ok.

I wear my clothes.

Me: Let's go home I need to talk to my brother and he will help me find a place for you.

She get out of bed, I drive home, she go to Niko's room while I stay with my brother outside.

Sbonga: What's wrong?

Me: It's Precious I think she doesn't want to be with me anymore.

Sbonga: Why are you saying that?

Me: She is pregnant..

Sbonga: Uhm..how?

Me: It's not mine but I asked her to keep the baby and that I will raise him or her but I don't think she wants that.

Sbonga: But you do want that?

Me: I do Boh this is my chance to be a dad again and give the love that I couldn't give to my kids, I want to see her grow which is something I took away from myself, seeing my baby girls grow, I killed them in cold blood.

I look down as tears stream down.

Sbonga: You want me to talk to her?

I huff wiping my eyes.

Me: Please maybe she will listen to you and Niko, I don't want to lose her and that baby.

He nods, we go inside and find her sleeping on Niko's lap crying I stand by the door leaning on the wall, Sbonga sit in front of them, my heart breaks as she sobs louder on Sbonga's chest.

Sbonga: It's Okay.

I keep my eyes down.

She finally stop crying Niko is brushing her back while she wipes her own tears, I am still standing.

Sbonga: How are you feeling?

Precious: I...I don't want this baby.

Sbonga: Why?

Precious: He is that man's child and I hate him.

Sbonga: You do know that he or she is your child as much as she is his right? It takes a man and a woman to make a baby so she is yours as well.

She wipe her tears.

Sbonga: You won't be punishing only that man but yourself as well if you abort this baby, and it might hurt you more than him.

I look at her she is so broken.

Sbonga: And any man can make a woman pregnant but not any man can be a father, you have someone who is willing to be a father to

this child it doesn't matter who made you pregnant.

He hold her hand.

Sbonga: Let me make an example with us and my three brothers, a sperm was used for us to be conceived, but we were raised by two women then Ntsika and his brothers became our father because it doesn't matter who the sperm donor was we don't need him just our family, those that are willing to be there matters more than who gave out the sperm, do you understand that?

She nods.

Sbonga: So take this pregnancy as if you did an In-vitro for that man who can't give you babies because of an unfortunate situation but willing to raise the baby with you and build a home with you.

She look at me I just look down.

Sbonga: You understand me now.

Precious: I do.

She giggles.

Precious: You would make a great psychologist.

They laugh, I walk out and go back outside sitting down.

Precious: Hi..

I look at her, she is standing next to me, her eyes are puffy.

Me: Hi.

Precious: Uhm..can I sit here?

I nod, she sit next to me.

Precious: I..Uhm...are you okay?

Me: Yeah, you?

Precious: I'm fine.

I nod looking down, she takes my hand and put it on her tummy, I look at her she has tears in her eyes.

Precious: I'm sorry for hurting you, for being ungrateful and selfish.

I nod.

Precious: I am keeping the baby.

Me: you are doing it for me?

Precious: For me and for myself I don't think I would forgive myself if I abort him.

Me: I think it's a girl.

Precious: But I want another boy.

Me: But Phelo needs a sister.

Precious: A brother.

I chuckle.

Me: Thank you for keeping her I promise I will always be there for my kids and for you.

I kiss her then take her to my room, she get in bed and sleep, I go to my fathers and greet.

Nkanyezi: Lethukuthula.

Me: Hi dad.

Langa: You want to talk?

I nod and clear my throat.

Me: Can you guys help me talk to Precious's uncles again please, they have to let me marry Precious.

Langa: Ok we will set out a meeting and let you know son.

Me: Thank you.

Sfiso laughs.

Sfiso:: Heee uwena Lo?(is this you) desperate like this to marry a woman! Bayakhula Abantu(people grow up)

I smile looking down.

They continue mocking me I leave them there laughing and go check on Precious, I find her sound asleep but she is sweating on her forehead, I sleep next to her and wipe the sweat then kiss her.

Me: I love you so much.

She moans and hold me tight I smile, she is all that I want.

Today we are waiting for the uncles we are meeting at their home but we only saw the helper, Two of them stays here but the younger uncle that Precious calls "Ncane" stays alone in his own house.

They all walk in all three of the and sit in front of us, I look at Ntsika he is squinting his eyes looking at them, I am sure he feels disrespected the man is not just a King but a King of all kings, a great man who hunted a lion on his own but these men just walked in and didn't acknowledge his presence at all, not even a little bow of the head, I know this is their house but man show some respect for the king! I don't like them already, Precious is here but with the helper in the kitchen.

The older uncle clears his throat.

Uncle1: Gumede what are you doing in my house? Do we owe you something?

Ntsika and his siblings chuckle I think they all feel disrespected I mean even if it's your house if you found someone already inside you greet

them as long as they are not trespassing I mean they knew that we are coming.

Nkanyezi: Vezi can we treat each other with respect please I already sense some hostility in you.

Vezi is their surname, so Precious's mother was a Vezi married to Zindela.

The younger uncle, the one I thought Precious is cheating on me with clears his throat and get up, he bows his head a little.

Ncane: Good morning King and your family, welcome.

Ntsika: Thank you, Uhm so we are here because of our children.

Uncle1: Who is "our" children?

Ntsika: Precious and Lethukuthula.

Uncle1: What about them?

Ntsika shakes his head he is getting angry.

Langa: Can you show maturity in this and stop acting like a child please sir we didn't come

here to see auditions because you clearly are acting out and it's not a good look for someone's your age.

Ncane: Bafo can we talk please.

The three of them walk out, I sigh wiping my face they won't let me marry her.

They come back and sit down.

Ncane: King I'm sorry for my brother's behaviour, we are ready to hear you out.

He nods.

Ntsika: We are here because my son wants to marry the mother of his child Precious.

Uncle1: I thought we agreed that the child is ours when he made Precious leave her home because she feared for her son's life because of YOUR SON.

Ntsika: So are we still gonna dwell on that even when they have found their way back to each other?

Uncle1: Yes! We know Lizwi here not this boy.

He says looking at me and my brothers I am sure he doesn't even know which one is "this boy" he is referring to.

Precious: I told you I am not marrying Lizwi, he beat me up and I ended up at the hospital.

Uncle2: Because you cheated on him Precious.

Precious: So..so you are saying it's okay that he..

Uncle1: Precious go back to the kitchen now.

She walk away crying I look down, I hate seeing her cry.

Uncle1: Gumede I'm sorry but she is already engaged to someone else and he already paid Lobola.

Me: How much did he pay? I will double it just please let me marry her.

Uncle1: No now if you'll excuse me I have things to do.

I look at Ntsika he sighs.

Ntsika: Then don't feel disrespected when they get married in court sir.

He get up.

Ntsika: Let's go home, we will find another way I can't sit here and beg this man, just know you can't force her to marry someone she doesn't love, you will lose her.

He walk out first then they all follow him, I remain seated.

Me: Sir I will do anything please.

Uncle1: I want you to stay away from my sister's child, or you think we don't know that you drove that princess into a mental institution, is that what you want to do with my niece.

Me: No, I have changed....

Uncle 1: Or you are just looking for another victim and I refuse to let her go through that.

Sbonga comes back and look at me.

Sbonga: Let's go home brother.

I get up and look at these men.

Me: Three million..

He chuckles.

Uncle 1: That's a small change compared to what Thabethe paid.

Me: Then tell me the amount he paid I will pay all of it.

Precious: No..

I look at her.

Precious: Let's go, you won't have to pay anything, I can see they don't care about me just like my father's side of the family, I hate all of you.

Ncane: Precious..

She walk out, I look at her younger uncle, he drop his eyes, I walk out following Sbonga, we drive home.

We are sitting at the lounge quietly just Precious's sniffs mom is brushing her back.

Mkhulu shows up.

Mkhulu: Ntsika..Nkanyezi, Langelihle nawe Sfiso.

Ntsika: Mkhulu.

Mkhulu: Labafana bathembele kunina..(These boys trust in you) don't let them down.

Ntsika: Yebo Mkhulu.

Mkhulu: Nenze izinto ngendlela Ntsikayekhaya.(Do things the right way)

Ntsika: Kanjani Kodwa bengafuni ukuthatha amalobolo?.(How when they don't want to negotiate Lobola?)

Mkhulu: Ngithemba kuzwakele Langelihle.(I hope you heard me Langelihle).

They nod as he fades away.

I go look for my woman and find her crying sitting in bed I grab a chair and sit in front of her.

Me: Please stop crying you gonna hurt our baby in here, we will fix this I promise stop stressing.

Precious: They don't care about me, no one cares!

Me: I think your uncle does care, the younger one.

Precious: But he was there they are all just the same they split the money that Lizwi paid it's all about the money.

Me: If they could just let me pay any amount they want.

Precious: You don't have to, we can just sign in court.

Me: That's the thing baby, we can't, we have to do things the right way, you have to be recognised by the ancestors as my wife and that starts with your uncles accepting Lobola and do things per tradition.

She sighs.

Me: Can you give me your Ncanes's number.

Precious: Oh uhm..why?

Me: Just trust me please.

She nods and give me the number, I walk out and give Ntsika the number so he can call him.

Ntsika: Hello Vezi you are talking to King Ntsika Gumede.

Ncane: Oh hello King.

Ntsika: Can we meet here in my home today please.

Ncane: Oh Uhm alone?

Ntsika: Yes please.

Ncane: Oh is it okay to come now? I am not far.

Ntsika: It's fine.

He walk in after fifteen minutes and sit down.

Ncane: King why am I here?

Ntsika: We want to do the right thing for the Kids' sake you understand that right.

Ncane: I want Precious to be happy which is something we haven't seen ever since the death of her parents, she was just living for her son now.

Ntsika: Then ask her if what would make her happy right at this moment.

We ask Phelo to go call his Mom, she comes in looking tired, my baby have been crying and I hate that. She sit next to me.

Ncane: Phelo..

Precious: Ncane.(Uncle)

So she called our son Phelo while she is the one called Phelo probably because she doesn't have a sister or a brother.

Ncane: Are you okay?

She nods.

Ncane: So it's true that Lizwi beat you up?

Precious: Yes.

He breathes out loud.

Ncane: Do you think he is different now? The things you told us when you asked us to help you keep you and the baby safe from him.

I look down, that will follow me for the rest of my life I guess.

Precious: He has changed and he really loves me, he makes me happy.

He sighs.

Ncane: I will talk to my brothers.

Ntsika: I was hoping you handle the lobola and leave them out it's clear they don't like this idea and have accepted a man who almost killed Precious, I don't think I want to deal with them again.

Ncane: You want me to go behind my brothers backs.

Ntsika: It's for your niece and Phelo they both deserve to be happy.

He huffs and look at Precious.

Ncane: I will do it.

Precious: You will Ncane?

Ncane: Yes.

He doesn't seem comfortable with this.

Precious: Thank you.

Ntsika: So we will come to your house?

He nods and ask to leave.

The weekend comes and my fathers are going to pay Lobola for my queen I hope everything goes well because I really need her to be my wife before her stomach shows so it won't raise any suspicions from that Lizwi guy, this child is mine and so is her mom.

I go check on her in our room I find her sleeping, she sleeps a lot I guess it comes with pregnancy.

Me: Baby..

She open one eye then close it again I laugh.

Me: Baby I have to take you to your uncle's house, come on.

Precious: Just give me a few minutes.

Me: You want my dads to get there before you?

Precious: I hate you.

She get out of bed and start getting dressed.

Me: Asigezi Dan?(I guess we are taking a bath)

She give me an eye.

Precious: It's cold Lethu I will bath when I get to my uncles house when the sun starts to rise.

I nod.

Me: Ok Mrs Gumede.

Precious: Maybe he told them and they will ruin everything.

Me: Have faith baby we are getting married soon believe that.

She nods, we walk out I drive her home it's still dark. When I get back home my fathers are ready to leave.

Ntsika: Get the incense they have to know we are going to the uncles house not her father's house.

I go to his room and get the incense, he burns it talking to the ancestors asking everything goes well and let them know where they are going and why, then they leave.

I keep trying Presh's number but it's not going through they should be back by now I am getting really worried.

My door opens and my baby falls happily in my arms.

Me: Babe..

She kiss me so hungrily taking off my t-shirt we get it on real rough careful not to hurt her and the baby, we catch our breathe.

Me: Whoa that was some work!

She giggles.

Precious: Thank you baby, everything went well at home though I had to cook two times because I fell asleep cooking and i burnt my pots but it went well my father's brother came as well Ncane begged him.

Me: Wow that's great I guess you are my wife now huh.

Precious: Yep I can't wait to wear the white dress and look pretty.

She look so excited which just warms my heart.

Precious: Do you think Tinyiko will agree to be my maid of honour? And your sisters Nkosazana and Qhawekazi I don't have any friends other than Niko so..

She is talking so fast.

Me: Uhm babe breathe okay my sisters will be honoured to be your bridesmaids.

She nods and take my phone then sleep on my chest she starts looking for wedding gowns.

Precious: Your mom can make this kind of dress right? Or maybe this one.

I kiss her, seeing her this excited about getting married to me makes me want to marry her tomorrow.

Precious: Uhm maybe I am too forward Uhm maybe you want to wait a bit and maybe get married in a few months or maybe next year that's okay..

Me: How about the end of this month it will give you time to plan your dream wedding because my moms are here they will help you.

She nods and look at me.

Me: What?

Precious: Thank you for loving me the right way, I always wished to be loved like this.

Me: Thank you for forgiving me and loving me back, for giving me kids I am grateful baby.

Her phone beeps she take it and look down at it her hands are shaking, I take the phone it's a a short clip on WhatsApp that shows three bullets and a text "one for you, the other one for Phelo and the last one for baby daddy, let me see you stand at the alter with that piece of shit I will blow your brains out, try me!".

I look at her she is really scared, I have to find Lizwi as soon as possible.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 40

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LETHU

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I have been searching high and low for that Lizwi guy and I can't find him anywhere, Sbonga gave me the correct address but he is never there even his wife is not in their house but I will find him even if it's the last thing I do, I can't have my wife living in fear because of him and his threats.

I just came home it's after twelve midnight, I found out that Lizwi is a gag member with the guys in the townships so I need a plan because if you kill one gang member they see you as a

threat and they all come for you and I don't want that for my family, my wife is pregnant she doesn't need any stress so I need to do this careful not to leave any evidence behind.

I walk in my room and find my wife sitting up looking at the laptop, I sit next to her and try to kiss her cheek she moves away I look at the screen she is staring at a wedding gown that mom has started working on for her.

Me: Hey mama.

She ignores me.

Me: MaZindela.

She look at me for a long time eyes are becoming teary.

Precious: Do you want this or I am getting excited for nothing?

Me: Huh...what?

Precious: The wedding Lethu, should I cancel?

Me: No..why would you do that?

Precious: You haven't asked anything about it, you are not interested I can see, we can cancel.

Me: Baby I...

Precious: I will tell your mom to stop with the dress.

Me: Aybo maZindela..

Precious: You make me sick!

She says stepping out of bed and go to the bathroom then I hear her gagging in there, oh wow! "So I make her sick literally".

She comes back after a while I take off my clothes.

Precious: Go sleep somewhere else Lethu.

I look at her confused.

Precious: Go.

I sigh and take my phone, I sleep in the guestroom.

In the middle of the night I feel her getting next to me and snuggle close.

Me: Baby..

Precious: Mmmm.

I close my eyes holding her.

In the morning I wake up to her sucking my dick so good.

Me: Fuck..

She go on until I cum in her mouth I am still shaking that was the best feeling ever, she doesn't stop there, she rides me until we both cum then she sleep on top of me, I remove hair from her face and kiss her forehead.

Me: Great way to start my day, thank you for that.

We stay in silence for a while.

Precious: You still want to get married to me Lethu?

Me: Yes baby I'm sorry for being absent in this planning I just can't help but worry about the text that Lizwi sent so I am looking for him.

Precious: You are going to kill him?

Me: He is a threat to my family so..yes.

Precious: What if you go to jail?

Me: At least I will know you guys are safe from him.

Precious: So you want to go to jail and leave me?

Me: No..but if I find him I won't let him get away.

She sighs.

Precious: I love you.

I look at her and I can't help but ask myself how God gave me this chance to be with this amazing woman after so many bad things I did.

Me: Thank you for being mine baby.

I am still nervous that maybe one day I will wake up and all this will be just a dream.

Precious: Lethu!!..

I blink.

Precious: You have been staring at me for a while, what is on your mind?

Me: You, how happy and confident you make me feel, never thought I would love like this in my life but here I am, ngiyakuthanda yezwa..(I love you, you hear me)

She gives me a very shy beautiful smile.

Precious: I love you too.

The next day she go out with Niko and my sisters to do "girly" stuff I am happy they all get along at least I don't have to witness the fights that would make me choose between them.

I stay the whole day with my brothers.

Letho: So who is your best man between us?

Sbani: Why are you asking the obvious?

Letho: Just checking if it's really not me.

Sbonga: Who is it Kanti?

They both stare at him, he look at me.

Sbonga: I am your best man?

Me: I didn't say that and..

Sbani: Oh cut it out would you, we know you two are more close to each other just like me and this moron.

Letho: Who are you calling a moron?

They start fighting playfully, sometimes I don't get how the almost "Mr Serious" Sbani always hang around with a loud mouth Letho, they have different personalities but get along so well maybe it's that way with me and Sbonga I don't know.

Sbonga: Can you quit it! You guys act like kids sometimes.

Sbani: Yeah I know, we are working out keeping the adrenaline pumping.

Sbonga: Yeah right.

Sbani: So Bhuti(brother) have you found that guy yet?

I shake my head.

Me: I don't know if he is hiding or maybe he is planning something that is why I hired someone to follow my wife discreetly to make sure she is safe.

Sbani: That's good but we need to find him I don't like having enemies roaming around.

Me: I will find him.

Sbani: Let us know if you need help.

Me: I will.

Weeks pass everyone is busy preparing for my wedding, which is in two days, I still haven't found Lizwi it's like he vanished from the face of the earth so we will have to do an indoor wedding with limited invited guests to be safe.

Precious walk in our room looking stressed.

Me: What's wrong mama?

Precious: Vicky isn't answering my calls babe and I need to know if the cake will be delivered on time..

Me: Didn't you talk to her this morning?

Precious: I did but...

She sighs dramatically.

Precious: I don't want delays, I don't want to cry on my wedding day ruining my make up and all.

I laugh as she throws herself in bed on her back, I brush her tummy it's still small but very hard and the dark line is starting to show that makes me excited because it means my baby girl is growing, I still strongly believe it's a girl. I don't know if her two uncles know about our wedding but maybe their brother told them because he has been in contact with Precious ever since the Lobola but they don't talk about the other two uncles.

Today it's the last day and tomorrow I will be a married man, Precious and the ladies stay at grandpa Kwanele's house to still keep that tradition that Presh and I shouldn't see each other before our wedding and also to make sure she is safe she gotta be close. I haven't seen the venue but I know it's a resort

somewhere in Umhlanga, the parents booked the whole place as a gift to their bride.

My wedding day! I am already dressed in my maroon tailored suit and a white shirt, no tie, my wife wanted it to be that way and anything to make her happy.

I look at the door smiling as my brothers look so identical in their navy-blue suits and white shirts, also no ties, they look good and matured, I guess it's the suits, we bump shoulders.

Sbonga: Are you ready to be a married man?

Letho: And leave the bachelor life to us?

I chuckle.

Me: Yeah I think I'm ready.

Nadia: You think?

She says walking in with her siblings, they are all wearing white shirts and black Chino pants, Ntsika with his lion skin over his shoulders.

Sbani: I thought we are the groomsmen why do you want to take our shine?

Manqoba: I guess you haven't seen us.

I laugh shaking my head as he walk in with his twin brother and Khosi wearing white shirts and maroon Chino pants.

Sbonga: Wait you guys planned this huh?

Letho: It's wrong no one should outshine the groomsmen except the groom himself!

We all laugh then a sound system starts pumping some music.

Langa: Now I am going to dance.

Sfiso: Langelihle let the kids shine now, you had yours when we were still young, we we older now.

Langa: I am never old for dancing let's go I want to see how beautiful my baby girls are that side.

He walk out dancing already everyone is laughing.

Sbonga: I'm proud of you big brother.

I smile.

Me: So you admit I am older.

Sbonga: Yeah to make you feel special just for today.

I laughs.

Sbonga: Let's do this..

He takes Sbani's hand and Letho's I join in and he says a very brief prayer basically he asking the presence of God in this place.

Me: Thank you Boh.

We walk in to what looks like a dream, it feels like a movie, there are diamond chandeliers from corner to corner it's beautiful in here, the touch of maroon white and navy I didn't even know the colours look so great together. I walk down the isle first with my brothers behind me, none of us is a dancer so we just walk in, the ladies walk in Tinyiko is in front looking amazing. I stand at the alter and

everyone stand on their feet as 'I found you' by Bebe and CeCe Winans starts playing an old school song with so much meaning to it, and I feel the lyrics is telling my story that when I found her, I found what every hearts dreams off, she stands at the entrance looking so beautiful she already have tears in her eyes I can't help but tear up as well trying so hard to stop them from falling, her younger uncle stand next to her and give her the arm, they walk down the isle so slow, she is looking into my eyes and so am I, this feels like a dream man.

She finally stands in front of me, Niko rush to wipe her tears careful not to ruin the whole make up.

The pastor starts with the prayer then a little summon about marriage as written in the word of God.

Now it's time for our vows I am looking at her as she takes the mic smiling.

Precious: I will keep it simple. I just want to say I don't regret the day I agreed to try things out with you, you are an amazing father, a caring and supportive partner, thank you Phakathwayo for seeing me worthy to walk this journey with you they say it's not easy but I am willing to walk on that bumpy road with you until death do us part.

I take the mic.

Me: Getting a second chance is rare so now that I was given another chance to love ngizokuthandisisa(I will love you wholeheartedly) not a single day will pass without me telling you how much I appreciate you, I will spend the rest of my life making you happy, MaZindela wami omuhle ngiyakuthanda kakhulu.(My beautiful maZindela I love you so much)

We say the vows after the pastor and we put our rings on, he then bless our union. I notice a man that is guarding outside going to mom

and whisper in her ear, she gives Phelo to Grandma and walk out.

Pastor: Beloved I present to you Mr Lethukuthula Gumede and Mrs Precious Gumede, you may kiss your bride..

I kiss her, though she is shy everyone is on their feet clapping hands but a gunshot outside makes the whole room go quite, everything stops, I let go of Precious and look at where mom was sitting she hasn't come back, I step down and run outside.

Me: No....

She is lifeless on the floor with blood coming out of her stomach and mouth, the guards are kneeling next to her, everyone is out now.

Nadia: Lethu what is going on?

I look at her, she moves her eyes to where mom is laying.

Nadia: Pamella!

She quickly push the guard aside and kneel next to her.

Nadia: Ella! Pamella! What..whaa....

Ntsika kneels next to her and touch mom's neck and her arm and her neck again then get up.

Me: Dad are you calling an ambulance? please call for help.

He look at me then my brothers who are now next to me.

Sbonga: Dad did you hear him?

He just stares at us not saying a word..

Me: Landile let's take her to the hospital..

Her white shirt is all bloody holding mom to her chest, she is silent but tears are running down her eyes.

Me: Landi..

Sbani walk away and get in his car driving out in speed.

Me: Sbonga..

He just squats shaking his head.

I don't know what is happening, maybe I am too slow but I really don't know what is going on here, feels like my mind has shut down completely.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 41

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SBONGA

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We are sitting inside the hotel where there was supposed to be a reception, we are sitting quietly it's just me, Lethu and Letho after

Ntsika told us to walk away I don't understand why he said that, I feel like my head is spinning. Lethu is looking down with his hands above his head while Letho is just looking up.

Letho: Sbonga..

Me: Mmmm.

Letho: She is dead right?

He says chuckling bitterly, I look down.

Letho: Mom is gone?

He get up and stand in front of Lethu.

Letho: It's your fault.

Lethu look at him, his eyes are red.

Letho: It's you! All the bad things you did are coming back and now all that falls on innocent people! You don't fucken deserve to be happy after everything you did so what made you think your wedding day was gonna be a smooth day with no one getting hurt!

Me: Lethokuhle..

Letho: Shut up!

His eyes becomes glassy.

Letho: Shut up!

Me: You can't blame Lethu for this..

Letho: I am blaming him and if mom is dead I will kill him.

Lethu wipes his tears. We get up and look at the door when Langa walk in supporting Landile who has blood all over her, they sit at the back I am even scared to get close.

Letho walk to them.

Letho: Where is Ella Landile?

She just stares at him, her eyes are red and there is no life in them.

Letho: Dad..

Langa: She..

He clears his throat.

Langa: She was taken by a hearse to the..

He doesn't wait for him to finish but quickly comes back to where we are standing and

grab Lethu, then starts throwing punches at him I am trying to pull him back but he is too angry, I look at Landile she is just staring in one direction, Langa rush to us and pull them apart then slap Letho, it echos in the room.

Langa: This is not the time! It's not! okay!

I sit down, one of my worst fears has come to life, losing my Mom, the woman loved us so much that she was scared having kids using her own eggs because she was afraid that she would maybe neglect us, she didn't want us to doubt her love for us, so this is hard I don't even know how Landile is feeling right now I am even afraid to be in the same room as her.

Letho is now sitting on the floor rocking himself back and forth, we always treated him like a younger brother from all of us because of his behaviour sometimes even mom treated him like a child.

I squat in front of him.

Me: Lethokuhle..

Letho: Pamela is dead Sbonga, mom is gone...
it's his fault.. it's Lethu's fault..

He is crying I feel my own tears coming.

Me: It's not his fault brother he...

Letho: I will never forgive him, I hate him.

I hug him as he sobs louder I keep wiping my
tears.

I am now sitting next to him, Lethu is on the
world of his own sitting a bit far from us, we
hear click sounds of heels but my head is too
heavy I don't want to turn and look who it is.

Ziyanda: Gumede..

We get up and look at her, she has been
crying, Landi and Langa are not here anymore.

Ziyanda: I'm so sorry..I'm sorry..

We go to her and group hug.

Ziyanda: It's gonna be okay.

We sit down and she remains standing.

Ziyanda: Sbani's phone is not going through, do you know where to find him?

Letho: I do.

Ziyanda: Please go find him and come straight home.

Lethu: I will go with you Letho..

Letho: No! I will find him myself!

Ziyanda: Go with him Lethu and you Sbonga.

He look at grandma then walk away, we follow him, he get in his own car and drive out, Lethu and I go to my car and follow him, he is taking the direction to the township, we get to where Landi once took us to meet her friends, it's a Shisanyama and a tavern at the same time.

We walk in and Sabza, Nadia's friend greets us.

Sabza: I have been trying to call Landile but her phone is off, I'm sorry I couldn't make it to your wedding man.

Lethu just nods.

Sabza: one of your brothers is in here but he is busy.

He says with a smirk, we just look at him.

Sabza: Uhm what is going on?

Me: We came to look for him.

Sabza: is everything okay?

Me: No, Pamella was shot and she..

He widens his eyes.

Sabza: What!?

He rush inside while we go look for Sbani we hear a woman moaning and someone groaning in one of the backrooms, they are obviously having sex.

I knock and the screaming stops, we wait for a while Sbani opens wearing only his pants.

Me: Grandma said we should fetch you.

He nods and close the door, I go wait in my car and Sabza knock on my door.

Sabza: I am driving to town, we will meet there..

I nod, we drive out Sbani is with Letho. We get home and Sabza is already here.

We walk in and my heart bleeds as I see the candle there, the couches are all out, Grandma is sitting next to Landile who has her knees up and her head buried on her thighs.

Ntsoaki: Letho...come here.

He cries on her shoulder I just walk away to my room, I find my wife there, I take off my clothes quietly and go take a shower I don't feel like talking at all.

Once I'm done I go to my room and get dressed with the clothes Niko took out for me.

Niko: "Boh".

I look at her, she still uses sign language because sometimes she struggles to get the words right, she stutters which frustrates her so she prefers the only language she mastered ever since she was young.

Niko: "I'm sorry baby"

I nod and walk out, we sit next to each other on the chairs as people come in and starts a song, I don't feel like saying anything so I just listen to them sing and pray then I go sit at the back, Letho and Sbani sit next to me.

Lethu: Boh and you Sbani, you also blame me like Letho?

I don't answer not that I blame him but this lump I have in my throat doesn't allow me to talk.

Lethu: Sbani..

Sbani: I really don't wanna talk right now.

He nods, I take his hand and hold it, he look at me, I just want him to see that I am not blaming him without saying it in words.

Lethu: Thank you.

We hear noise inside, we rush there.

Ziyanda: Hlala phansi Landile.(Sit down Landile)

She is holding two guns on both hands she keeps cocking it and move it down then up again, she is standing in the centre of the room looking at the candle. She turns and look our way, she points the gun at us, I am shocked and so are my brothers, Letho is not here it's just the three of us.

Ntsika: What are you doing Landile!? Put those guns down!!

She looks so angry, she cocks both his gun I can't help but hold both my brothers hands.

"Hheyi!" Lukhele's loud voice startle almost all of us but not Landile.

Luyolo: Landile!!

She lowers the guns and let go of them, grandpa walk up to her and hug her from behind, she literally breaks down and turn hugging grandpa sobbing on his chest.

Luyolo: I'm sorry...dad is here okay..I'm so sorry.

Lukhele comes to us and hug us at once, I am still in shock, so Nadia wanted to kill us.

We are sitting down Landile is back in sitting next to mom.

Me: Lethu where is Precious?

Lethu: In our room.

Me: Is she okay?

He shrug his shoulders.

Me: What does that mean?

Lethu: I haven't seen her ever since we came back, she was excited about this wedding but it didn't go as planned, she put her heart and soul in planning all of it but...

Me: She is pregnant and what happened might have shocked her, go check on her man.

He nods and walk away, in the passage he meets with Letho who stands on his way, I sigh and get up.

Me: Lethokuhle stop okay just stop I don't want to be the one to hurt you in a time like this so move the hell out of the way.

Letho: He..

Me: Move out of the way maarn! Acting like a bitch won't bring Pamela back! It won't so just do us all a favour and stop acting like a piece of crap okay! yes someone is to blame for our mother's death but that person is out there! The person who pulled a trigger, not Lethu, so stop! Ay man..nx.

I grab him out of the way and Lethu slowly walk away.

Me: Do that shit again uzozisola ngiyakutshela..(you will be sorry I'm telling you)

I walk away, I'm just drained emotionally and Physically I am sure my brothers feel the same.

Later I go to Landile's room I find her sitting in bed.

Me: Landi..

She doesn't even look at me.

Me: I want to say I'm ...

Nadia: I want to be alone.

Me: Ok..

I walk to the door then turn to look at her, I have never seen her like this, her whole body is trembling, I walk out going to my room, I find Niko already in bed, I take off my clothes and get in next to her but I face the other way.

Niko: Sbo..nga..

Me: Mmmm..

She touch my back,I turn to look at her.

Niko: "Lean on me when you're not strong i'll be your friend I'll help you carry on".

I used to sing that song to her and she would read my lips, it wasn't about the actual singing but the message in that song that is why she remembers it so well because she got the message without having to hear my voice then.

Niko: "Can you sing it for me now that I can hear the sound of your voice please".

Me: 'sometimes in our lives, we all have pain,
we all have sorrows,

But, if we are wise,

We know there's always tomorrow.

Lean on me, when you're not strong,

I'll be your friend I'll help you carry on,

For it won't be long till I'm gonna need

Somebody to lean on..!.

I sing it while holding her in my arms tears
streaming down the corner of my eyes.

Niko: Please let me be there for you like you
have always been there for me, please.

I huff and wipe my tears.

Niko: You will go through this baby and I will
be with you through it all.

I try to sleep but I keep tossing and turning the
whole night until I get out of bed and walk out

the back though I want to avoid that candle. I find Lethu sitting outside looking up the sky, I sit next to him.

Lethu: It didn't have to be like this...they didn't have to shoot my mother they should have asked for me instead, Pamella didn't do anything to anyone I should have died in her place..

Me: I want us to hunt them down, whoever was involved will pay.

Lethu: Letho hates me, our brother hates me and I don't blame him mom is gone because of me.

Me: Stop doing that to yourself Lethu, Lethokuhle is just going through a lot and he just wants someone to blame.

We walk back inside when it starts getting cold.

Today we are laying my mother to rest I still find it hard to believe she is gone. Grandma asked us to mourn and not think about

revenge before we can lay Ella to rest, and we respect that.

I am wearing my black suit sitting in bed holding the sun glasses in my hand, Niko walk in carrying our daughter.

Niko: Dad asked me to call you, it's time to view the body.

I shake my head.

Me: I don't want to see her in that coffin Niko.

Niko: But you have to for closure.

Me: I will find closure when I find the people who did this to her!

She sighs.

Niko: Let's go.

We walk out and I find Letho sobbing looking down at the opened coffin people are making those "Mmmm" sounds it's heart breaking, I stand next to him and look at our beautiful mother she looks so peaceful, it's like she will

wake up and smile calling us her babies as old as we are.

Letho: This is not fair, it's not.

I take him to his room so he can calm down, he get in bed fully dressed and cry. I leave him and go back to the lounge, Lethu and Sbani are also looking at her for the last time clenching their jaws, Niko go with our daughter while grandpa hold our son and show them their grandma.

Landile walk in with her head hanging down, hands in her pockets, Sfiso and her siblings are walking behind her, she looks lost even her haircut is a mess, the hair is not combed. They all stand in front of the coffin, Landile has her hand on top of it.

Nadia: Rest in peace my love, I will always love you, you left me too soon, our sons, what did I do to deserve this!?! Why is God punishing me this way!?! Why me!?! Why did he take you away from me!?!

I wipe my eyes.

Nadia: Why....why?

She keeps repeating that why"? While Ntsika talks to her telling her they are taking her to her final place of rest then they hold the coffin walking out, people are singing following behind them.

I go back to my room and search for the name of the guy precious was engaged to and look at his address then go to the backyard where we are laying mom to rest.

The pastor says a prayer and open a Bible verse consoling us as a family and tell us to trust in the Lord.

The coffin lowers and a heart wrenching scream from Miyah makes everyone tear up, Landile is just shaking her head vigorously Langa is holding her, I rush to my car and drive out in speed, I notice my brothers cars driving behind me in the same speed.

I get to the address and step out of my Catz I hit the buzzer none stop, the gate slides open I walk in my brothers are driving in. I kick the door opened causing a lady in there to scream, we all walk in looking at her.

Her: Who are you? What do you want?

Lethu: We are looking for your husband, call him and ask him Where he is now..

Her: But..

Letho cocks his gun and shoot her knee, she screams falling on her butt.

Lethu takes out his gun as well.

Lethu: Call him and put it on speaker.

He throws the phone at her pointing a gun straight to her head.

She dials the number her teeth are grazing each other like she is cold.

Her: Li..zwi..Lizwi ukuphi?(where are you?)

Lizwi: I am with my friends why?

Her: Ku..phi? (Where?)

There is noise wherever he is.

Lizwi: We are at KGs house at Umlazi.

Lethu drops the call.

Me: Do you know where that place is?

She nods and cry in pain.

Sbani: Good you will show us the way.

He grabs her and literally drags her to his car, we drive behind him all the way to the township, it's a big house and many guys are sitting outside it looks like a party and we will sure be outnumbered. Sbani steps out first catching their attention they all get up, he opens the passenger side and grab the wife again and throw her out.

Lizwi: What... Phindile..baby..

He tries to get close but we all points guns at him.

Lethu: We meet again coward...

They all take out their own guns pointing at us.

Lethu: You rather kill a woman because you can't fight me man to man.

He chuckles..

Lizwi: You think I'm scared of you boy? Well your mother died because someone has a score to settle but I can't say I am not happy she is dead, she gave birth to rats anyway useless trash!

Lethu's gun goes off, he shot his shoulder causing them to shoot back at us I pull Letho behind my car, Sbani is with Lethu, I see cars driving to our direction and it's definitely Manqoba's car in front, they step out already shooting at the guys.

Landile is not holding any gun just her hands on the pocket. The gunshots die down most guys are down groaning in pain, we were taught to shoot the target and don't miss so I am not shocked.

Nadia: Come here...

She says looking at Lizwi, he get up holding his shoulder.

Nadia: I said come here.

He stares at us in anger he keeps spitting on the floor.

Nadia: You killed my wife huh?

Lizwi: I wish I did she was a waste fucking another woman.

Landi nods.

Nadia: Who did?

Lizwi: You do upset a lot of people Landile
Nadia Gumede..

He says smirking, Landi nods again and slowly take out her gun on her waist.

Lizwi: You can shoot but the flames of the past will burn one by one starting from you Landile all the way down to Tinyiko the royal princess.

Me: What!?

He is smirking the whole time, Landi cocks her gun and empty all the bullets in him then go

back to her car driving away, I get in my car now that I heard my wife's name being mentioned like that I can't help but worry, what does it mean? The flames of the past will burn one by one? We get home and Landile is sitting outside we sit with her.

Landile: So it's my fault, Pamella died because of my line of work, I got her killed, I killed her.

She takes the plastic next to her and look at her police badges and everything that has to do with police work, she takes a petrol in a small bottle and a lighter, she light it all up staring at the flames.

In loving memory of PamellaK Zobuhle Gumedede, Rest in Peace.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 42

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NADIA

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Loosing my wife is a nightmare I can't seem to wake up from I feel stuck in a very dark hole with no way out, the pain I am feeling is describable, I feel like someone just ripped my heart out of my chest, it's too much. We layed her to her final place yesterday and I haven't been out of my room since we came back from the townships.

I slowly sit up, my head is pounding from crying the whole night, I don't understand why she had to die on our son's wedding who could be so cruel to do something so despicable.

I open the closet and look at her dresses, she only wore what she designed, my PamellaK, the love of my love. I take out the dress she designed recently she was laughing the whole time when she drew it because I asked to draw it for her first and it looked nothing like a dress so she was teaching me how to sketch which I still couldn't do.

I sit in bed looking at it in my hands.

Me: How I wish at least you can come back as a ghost like aunty Sunny, I wasn't ready for this Pamella, I never thought you would leave me, not like this.

I get up and take her sketch book, I page through it, she put her heart and soul whenever she was sketching, if I wanted something specific I would tell her and she would give me exactly that, we weren't perfect but she was perfect for me with all her imperfections, we went through trouble in our marriage just like everybody but our love

saved the vows we took in front of God and our family.

There's a knock on the door I want to shout "go away" but my voice is hoarse and cracking from all the crying I did. I get up and open the door, my boys are all standing there looking down, this reminds me on when they were still little boys, they would stand like that if they want to snitch on the one who did wrong then they would try to switch their names when you want to beat him.

Lethu: Hi Landi..

I nod.

Sbonga: May we come in please.

Me: For what?

They look down, I just leave the door opened and go sit in my bed, they sit on the couch and Lethu is sitting on the armrest because the couch is not big enough to accommodate the four of them, I am playing with my knuckles waiting for them to talk.

Sbani: You wanted to kill us when you pointed the guns at us?

This one has Langa's voice. I look at them and shake my head.

Letho: Then why did you point guns at them Landile?

Me: I wasn't thinking straight, I'm sorry.

They nod at once, I love my boys so much.

Sbonga: Landi..

I look at him.

Sbonga: We love you..

I smile looking at him, sometimes I feel like he can read minds.

Me: I love you guys too.

Sbonga: And we are here for each other, whenever one wants to talk and let all the pain out.

Me: Yeah I know, thank you.

They all get up from the couch and sit on my either sides in bed.

Sbonga: I'm sorry that you lost Ella, we miss her and it feels like she would walk in that door and shout at us for sitting in her bed.

I smile.

Letho: And they would go on and on arguing with Lethu.

Lethu look at him, they still weren't on speaking terms after he blamed him for Pamela's death.

Letho: I'm sorry Lethu for the way I treated you, I'm sorry brother, I just wanted to blame someone and I took out all my anger and pain on you it was wrong of me to do that.

Lethu: It's okay.

Me: I don't want any of you fighting, I am sure Pamela wouldn't like that either so please let's live to honour her, let's make her rest in peace by holding each other's hand and

support each other, that's what she would have liked.

Letho: Yeah we will do that and find justice for her I won't rest until I look at the man who killed her in the eye.

I huff and pull him to me as his voice changes like he wants to cry.

Me: It's okay I will find him soon.

Lethu and Sbonga get up but Letho and Sbani remain seated.

Sbonga: Have a Goodnight Landi, I love you.

I smile and nod, they walk out.

Letho: Can we sleep with you please.

Me: No, you are grown ass men, your brothers have wives so no!

Sbani: Weee..

He takes off his clothes and get in bed I laugh as Letho do the same, I get in as well, I watch them as they sleep next to me and smile to myself, they are the precious gifts that Pamella

gave to me, our pride and joy, our "fours" as she would call them.

In the morning I wake up first and walk to the gym, I start working out, my eyes are heavy I didn't sleep at all it feels strange without Pamela next to me.

After an hour or so I freshen up and go join everyone for breakfast.

Ziyanda: Hey baby...

Me: Hi mah.

Ziyanda: How did you sleep last night?

Me: Good..

She keeps her eyes on me, I look down.

Letho: She didn't Sleep..

I look at him he is looking at me as well.

Letho: She cried the whole night..

I blink looking up.

Luyolo: Landile..

I nod.

Luyolo: I know the pain is still fresh and I know it probably comes back hard when you go to bed without her next to you but take heart, find courage to carry on.

Me: I don't know how.

Luyolo: Start by forgiving yourself, I know you blame yourself for this but it was not your fault, it wasn't.

Me: It was my fault baba, she is dead because of my enemies, they wanted to get back at me and they used my wife they killed her.

We hear the buzzer and Qhawekazi buzz whoever it is in then a knock on the door, she opens and we hear a loud gasp, the Minister is standing by the door, he bows a little.

Minister: King, Princes and Princesses good morning.

Ntsika: Morning, you can have a sit sir.

He sit down and he only accept a cup of coffee not food, I am still shocked that he is at the table with us.

Minister: Gumedede..

I nod.

Minister: Condolences to you and your family I'm sorry I couldn't make it to the funeral, I was out of town.

Me: It's okay, thank you.

Minister: I came here personally to tell you that you can take as much time as you need.

Me: I don't need time, I quit..

He stares at me.

Me: This work took my wife's life so no I don't need time.

Minister: Landile all these stations need your skills, those people out there need you, ever since you came to work with the police the crime rates in your communities and surrounding areas dropped down to at least 20% and I know you can make it 0% because of your work, you are good at what you do, I have never seen a station commander who

works tirelessly as you, you get on the field which is something most of them don't do because they hide behind the desk in expensive suits and do nothing but you...

I shake my head

Me: I'm done with that.

He clears his throat.

Minister: I am retiring next month.

I smile a little.

Me: You're old go eat that pension man, thank you for believing in me.

Minister: I still believe in you.

He look at my father then me.

Minister: I was advocating for you to be up there in the cabinet as a police minister, I know you are not in politics but I believe in you so much that I want you to take those people on the best way you know how.

I stare at him in awe..

Luyolo: What?

He says looking at me.

Minister: They were impressed, I gave them his files, the work she has put in, we all need her and I feel like she is underrated, she deserves to be out there and a whole world to know her, she can even be the first female president..

Me: Now you are taking it too far, I am grateful and honoured that you believe in me so much but sir I can't do it, my kids life matters more, my family's protection is priority so if I do this I would be putting their lives in more danger than I already did, I can't.

Minister: At least please just think about it.

He get up and fix his suit then he bows.

Minister: Hope to see you soon Landile Nadia Gumedede.

He says smiling then walk out.

Luyolo: Wow...

He says looking at me then get up.

Luyolo: Come here...

I slowly go to him, he hugs me tight I always feel like a vulnerable little girl in his arms, I know I don't have to act all strong to him, I can cry all this pain away and he won't judge, so I just cry tears of pain.

Luyolo: I'm so proud of you...you really took after me, in the field I made sure I leave a mark that's exactly what you did.

He says wiping my tears and look at me his hands in the sides of my face.

Luyolo: I'm a proud father.

He hugs me again, mom get up and hug me as well.

Ziyanda: If all Ministers were chosen by looking at their hard work and determination like that and not political, this world would be a better place for the coming generation to live on.

Me: I can't do it mah, Pamela is gone because I thought I could protect everyone but look

where that got me, I failed to protect one most special thing in my life.

Ziyanda: You couldn't have known Landi, we hired securities there but...

Me: Securities?

I rush to my room and wear my hoodie jacket and put my guns in my waist and walk out.

Ziyanda: Manje uyaphi? (now where are you going?)

Me: I am looking for all those securities we assigned they will give me answers on how my wife was killed right in front of them!

Sfiso: I will come with you, I know them.

Nkanyezi: I am coming as well.

We all walk out and drive to Lukhele properties office and Sfiso starts searching for their names.

Sfiso: Two of them are in duty as we speak in two flats down town.

I walk out and drive there, they are behind me.

I step out of my car and walk in, I find them in their security house counting a lot of money looks like they want to divide it.

Me: Must be nice..

I say putting my hands in my pockets, they jump up in fright the money scatters on the floor.

Ganzo: Boss..Uhm we...

Me: I would quit my job if I would get that kind of money.

They keep stuttering I sigh and grab a seat, sitting down.

My brothers sit down as well.

Me: So gentlemen mind telling me how it happens that I hire you to keep everyone safe and next thing my wife is shot right in front of you, please explain to me how this happened?

Ganzo: Huh boss we uh..we went for a smoke and we heard gunshots and ran back only to find her on the ground.

Me: You did?

He nods.

Me: Naaah...

I shake my head.

Me: Give me something better I hate lies.

He keeps quiet I look at them then flip the table over then grab his throat.

Me: Are you going to talk?

Ganzo: I am telling the truth sir.

I take out my gun causing them to stand on their feet i can see the other one wants to take out his gun so I just shoot him on his knee, he groans going down.

Me: Try pulling out your gun on me again I will blow your brains out.

He keeps groaning.

Me: So...

Ganzo: I'm so sorry sir but her..her ex husband is back he said he wants you to pay and he said your kids are next.

Me: Mthethwa is out?

Ganzo: Someone from the inside is helping him sir.

Me: How much did he pay you to kill my wife?

Ganzo: He was there himself sir, he is the one who shot her.

Me: Yeah but you were there so how much?

Ganzo: We...we got R15 000 each.

I chuckle in disbelief.

Me: So my wife lost her life for a mere R15 000 not even half the money you get paid monthly? My wife's life for R15 000?

I get up laughing in disbelief as tears fill my eyes.

Me: Couldn't you ask for a raise or something, you sold my wife for shit!?

I am shouting I can literally feel my veins popping at the side of my head and it hurts.

Langa: Landile!

He is shouting holding my shoulders.

Langa: Calm down...calm down sis...

I want to cuss at him, calm down for what!?

I remove his hands from me and start shouting both of the securities, I am angry!

I walk out and sit at the pavement right outside the gate, so they put a price tag on a human's life huh! Give me R15 000 and I will let you kill someone on my watch? What has this world turned into, we are living with animals disguised as humans it's scary.

I finally get myself together and go home, I take a bath and get in bed, I just need one more time to talk to Pamela even if it's in my dream I would appreciate that a lot so that's why I am sleeping early I want to fall asleep maybe I will dream of her, but sleeping is a mission of its own.

I wake up in the morning and look around hoping I will see her wearing her favourite dress getting ready for work, she loved me unconditionally, she appreciated me openly and she was proud of me, so how can I be okay when I lost my other half, I don't know how I will through this.

My phone has been ringing but I don't wanna answer it, I don't want people feeling sorry for me, sending their useless condolences which won't bring my wife back.

It rings once again I take it and sigh when I see Minister Shandu's name, I drop the call, I don't want to lose more of my family because of work, politics are brutal.

Langa: Landile!

He shouts I look at him, he is standing by the door.

Langa: Your phone is ringing and I have been calling your name..

Me: What do you want?

Langa: Nadia..

Me: Yini?(what)

He sighs and sit next to me.

Langa: You know I am here for you right? As your best friend and your twin brother.

Me: Best friend? What gave you the impression that you are my best friend?

He laughs.

Langa: I just know..

Me: Mxm..

Langa: Pamella loved you and I know for a fact that she would have wanted you to be happy and ...

Me: Happy about what Langelihle?

Langa: That you got the chance to be loved unconditionally, cherish the moments you spent with her, she will always live in your heart no one can take that away from you.

I shake my head and get up.

Me: Don't come here and act like you know what I'm going through buddy because you don't Langa, Sfiso is alive so please brother leave me alone.

I wear my shoes and my t-shirt then walk to the door.

Langa: I'm sorry okay...

I look at him.

Langa: I know how much you fought for Pamella, how much she meant to you and you are right, I don't know how you feel right now but I can feel what you feel, you are my sister I feel every pain you feel, when your heart breaks mine does the same, and right now I can tell that you are angry, you are hurt and I don't blame you, just let me be there for you.

I look down as tears fill my eyes, I don't know how much of this pain I can take, I sit down and cover my face with my hands, he hugs me, I cry till I feel like I couldn't anymore, when will this pain go away.

It's in the middle of the night and I just woke up from a terrible dream, I felt like my house was burning down with my whole family in it and I couldn't save them, I walk out going to the kitchen, I do a lot of thinking while drinking some water, maybe I should take up this offer of being a police minister with some conditions of course.

First thing in the morning I call the Minister and ask if we could meet in my office, or rather what once was my office.

He walk in and take a seat opposite me.

Minister: Landile Nadia Gumede.

I chuckle, he never forgets how I used to introduce myself back then when they trusted me to take on the job that I was never trained to do, taking down the biggest drug lord in South Africa.

Minister: I take you have thought about what we talked about.

I nod.

Me: I did.

Minister: And? This position is yours Gumedede, you've earned it I just need you to accept it, that position is ready for you, I believe it was meant for you.

Me: I will take it.

Minister: You will?

Me: Yes but I have some demands.

He smiles.

Minister: of course you do, you made your own rules right from the beginning, so what is it?

I chuckle.

Me: I want to keep my family safe, someone is coming after me and it's putting my family in danger.

He nods.

Minister: That is easy, you will get to deploy anyone you trust out there.

Me: Even the military cops?

He squints his eyes, I nod.

Me: I know you can talk to whoever is in charge to do this for me..

He sighs.

Minister: I can try but the military is there for a reason.

Me: Yes and one of those reasons would be making sure my family is safe from any harm day and night.

He nods.

Me: And I want that as soon as possible even tomorrow morning I'd love to see men in a uniform all around my father's house.

Minister: But I have to arrange the meeting first.

Me: One thing I know is that no one is best to fill your shoes than me that is why you approached me, you trust and believe in me so I trust and believe you can do this one little favour for me.

He nod and get up.

Minister: We will talk soon Gumedede.

Me: Thank you.

He walk out and I sit there wondering if I am making the right choice about taking this position or I am putting all of them in more danger because one thing is for sure, politicians are ruthless everyone fights to be up there, I am scared for my family but I feel like this is the way to keep them safe.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 43

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Things haven't been the same since the passing of maPamellaK, Nadia looks like a walking cop, the boys are worse but trying so hard to act like they are fine, but I know all of them they are just putting on this brave face. Sbonga has been distant I don't even think he notices me anymore or maybe he is still mourning.

It's raining today I think I want to sleep in but I have to go meet with my council and community back home, we are rebuilding the homes of those people that lost their loved ones because of the Queen and the sisters, Zipho and Nolu, talking about the Queen, we have never heard of her ever since the day I found then slaughtering the girls in the palace.

I sit up in bed and look next to me, Sbonga is awake but just looking up the ceiling.

Me: Morning..

He look my way then nod.

Me: Uhm, you remember we have a meeting back home?

Sbonga: Yeah but I'm not leaving.

Me: Oh uh okay..

He look away, I get up and go to the bathroom.

I come back and look for something to wear , he is now playing with our kids.

Me: Should I leave with them?

Sbonga: No, I will stay with them.

I nod and wear my clothes then take my car keys, I am sad, he is always next to me so going alone doesn't feel right, but I have to understand he just lost a mother.

We start by joining the family for breakfast.

Nadia: Uhm everyone, starting from today there will be military cops guarding our house 24/7.

Ntsika: Why?

Nadia: What do you mean why Bhuti?we are not safe I just lost my wife so I am trying to keep everyone safe.

Ntsika: You didn't tell us anything Landile, you take decisions alone now?

Nadia: I had to act fast to protect my family is that wrong?

She raise her voice a bit.

Langa: Landile I don't like your tone.

Nadia: Oh I'm not here to nurse your feelings.

Ntsika: Landile!

She just get up and walk away, leaving her brothers looking down, I know deep down they wanna help her take the pain away but it's impossible.

I go back to my room to take my car keys then walk out.

Nadia: Are you going somewhere?

Me: "Yes I am going to a meeting back home".

She calls one of the soldiers who just drove into the yard in the convoy of big beautiful cars.

They introduce each other, he looks younger.

Nadia: So Dunga I want you to drive my son's wife to her destination and make sure no one touches her ok, keep her safe.

Dunga: I will do that sir.

Landile chuckles shaking her head, if you don't know her personally you'd really swear she is a man, doesn't help that her and Langa have grown to look exactly the same it's amazing.

I get in the back and Dunga takes the drivers seat and drive out, we are silent all the way to the palace, it still doesn't feel right to be here without my husband.

I drive in and the community is already waiting and so are my council members including Letlotlo.

They all bow as I step out of the car then go take a seat, I greet them and we find a way

forward by letting them voice out their opinion because my father taught me that a good leader listens to her people then make a decision that will make everyone comfortable. Letlotlo get up and clear his throat.

Letlotlo: Good day everyone.

They greet him back.

Letlotlo: I love the way you have respected the Queen by being patient the few weeks she was away because of some family matters, thank you for that.

They all nod.

Letlotlo: So in her absence we still had a meeting with some council members but she didn't know anything about that.

I look at him, I really didn't.

Letlotlo: So in those meetings we came up with an idea of building each and everyone of you houses that will be the same size and...

I gasp staring at him, is he crazy? I know we are not a very big community but a house is something big!

Letlotlo: Had meetings with some government officials and yes it's possible every one of you will get your own houses, the builders will start next week it will be modern RDP houses.

Oh! People are cheering clearly happy, we part ways.

Me: "Wow I never thought of what you said, that was a great idea".

Letlotlo: A community like this needs equality so there can be peace.

Me: 'I guess I didn't make any mistake choosing you to be here".

He smile and hug me.

Letlotlo: You are my little girl, your father wants us to be here for you and that's what I'm gonna do, always.

Me: Thank you.

I smile and go back to my car, Dunga opens the door for me, I step in then tell him to drive to a nearby mall so I can get my lunch. I walk in the restaurant and order, this Dunga is standing next to me like a robot with a gun in hand and it's attracting unnecessary attention, I snap my fingers at him, he look my way.

Me: I'm sorry but can you please sit down or wait for me outside I'm sure no one will hurt me in public.

He shakes his head.

Dunga: No can do ma'am my work is to keep you safe and leaving you here alone is not it.

I sigh, he has the serious face on, I don't even know if he can smile or laugh.

I eat my food then he drives me back home, I am shocked to see Nina's car in our gate, I step out and she is doing the same wearing jeans and a top that shows off her belly ring and some packs there she goes to gym that's for sure. She is shocked to see me, I look at her.

Nina: Hi Niko.

Me: "Hi Nina".

She moves her eyes around nervously.

Me: "Are you here to see anyone?"

Nina: Uhm...no..no I was just passing by to send my condolences to you and your family.

Me: Oh, thank you.

She nods.

Nina: You look good by the way.

Me: You too.

We have never been friends even in our teenage years she was just interested in Sbonga, so this is awkward. I get back in the car and Dunga drives in while Sbonga step out of the house, I watch him as he pass my car to the gate but it doesn't open, he is talking to Nina while he is inside.

I step out and look at them, Sbonga turn looking at me, I just walk inside and go take a bath then sit in bed.

My husband walk in and stand by the door.

Sbonga: How was the meeting?

Me: You would have been there if you cared but I guess you already had plans to meet with Nina.

Sbonga: Meet with Nina?

I look at him.

Sbonga: She called me just when you were driving in and I went to find out what did she want.

Me: Ok.

Sbonga: She was apologising for not making it to my mother's funeral.

Me: What is she to you?

He doesn't answer.

Me: Sbonga.

Sbonga: Ma..

Me: You have been talking to Nina?

Sbonga: No it was the first time she calls today, now Niko.

I nod, I know he is telling the truth but I just don't like it still, I feel like he didn't go with me just to be with Nina, it doesn't help that i haven't heard him telling me he loves me or even hug him, maybe I am just being needy when he is going through the most, I should understand.

I check on my kids, they are growing up so fast.

I get in bed, Sbonga's phone rings he is in the bathroom, I take it and I feel like someone is shifting my heart from it's original position, why is she calling my husband at night. Sbonga walk in drying his body.

Me: Your phone is ringing.

He takes it then look down at it and toss it in bed.

Me: I...why is she... calling you at this time?

I feel like I am breaking.

Sbonga: I don't know I will just block her number because I don't even know why she is calling now.

Me: You had agreed on time when she should call?

Sbonga: Of course not Niko.

I feel like I am losing him, this is not my Sbonga and it scares me it's even triggering so many emotions at once I get up and wear my gown and shoes then rush out, I don't know where I am going I just want to walk, I walk to the gate and the two gentlemen there stop me, this Dunga guy is one of them.

Dunga: Ma'am we can't allow you to leave the house, we found two cars that were parking not far from here and they were armed, please go back inside.

I nod and go back inside, I find Sbonga sitting in bed looking down, he is sniffing.

Me: Boh..

Silence.

I sit next to him, he wipes his face and continue to look down, I can't believe I am throwing tantrums while my husband is going through hell.

Me: I'm sorry.

He huffs.

Sbonga: I don't have energy to fight Niko, I didn't tell Nina to come here so I politely told her never to do that again, I don't have the energy to shout or cuss, if that's what you wanted to see me do to Nina then I'm sorry I just don't want to fight with anyone.

Me: I'm sorry, that's not what I want Boh, I just feel like you are sidelining me, you don't even want to share your pain with me your wife.

He look at me.

Me: Uhm I'm sorry, I know this is not about me and I should let you grieve in your own way.

I look down playing with my hands.

Me: Should I give you some space?

Silence, I look at him he is looking down with his hands above his head, I get up and go sleep with the kids in the next room. I know how it feels losing a parent the pain doesn't just go away so I will give him his space.

In the morning I wake up to him talking to our son, I sit up, he is bathing him.

Mengezi: we will go with Nana?

That's how he calls his little sister.

Sbonga: Nana will stay with mommy..

Me: Morning, niyakuphi? (Where are you going?"

Sbonga: Out.

Me: Just the two of you?

Sbonga: With my brothers and Phelo.

Me: Ok.

He doesn't even mind that I slept in the Kids' room.

Once he is done bathing Mengezi, he pick him up and walk to the door.

Me: You are leaving?

He nods and hold the handle.

Me: Did you perhaps find out I have a hand in your mother's death Sbonga? It seems like I irritate you.

He look at me with his eyes squinted.

Sbonga: What?

Me: Never mind, it's okay.

I fix my baby girl and I then we walk out, that Dunga guy rush to open the car again and I buckle up my daughter.

Dunga: I will drive you to wherever you are going ma'am.

Me: "Is this going to happen everytime I want to go out?"

He stares at me for a while then nod.

Me: "You understand sign language".

Dunga: I do.

Oh, I nod and get in the car, he drives me to the mall and I do some shopping, people probably think I am crazy being followed by a man with a big gun like this. Once I'm done we walk out, I feel someone grabbing me from behind I let go of the plastic bags and hold my baby to my chest I am scared already, before I turn I hear a loud gun going off, I look behind me a man is in a pool of blood there's a gun next to him, I am shaking.

Dunga: Give me the baby.

He buckle up my baby and help me get in the car, I'm still in shock, I don't want any guns around my kids after Lethu killed my babies with it, I hate guns.

When I get home everyone is outside, as soon as the car stops I can see them rushing towards us. Sbonga help me out of the car and give me a bone crushing hug then take our daughter, everyone hugs me I guess they already heard what happened at the mall.

Dunga: Are you okay ma'am?

I nod and go to my room, Sbonga walk in holding our daughter.

Sbonga: Are you okay?

I look at him.

Sbonga: I'm sorry about what happened to you.

Me: I'm fine.

He nods and lay our daughter to bed then walk to the door.

Me: I think I should go and stay at home.

Sbonga: Why?

Me: To wait until you decide to divorce me.

Sbonga: Divorce you?

Me: Yeah, I don't think you love me anymore.

Sbonga: Sniko..

Me: I will be fine.

I can't stop the tears from falling, he sit next to me. I don't know I think that me being this broken makes me feel like he is too good for

me which makes me nervous about him leaving me one day.

Sbonga: I'm sorry..

Me: What did I do to you Sbonga?

Sbonga: You didn't do anything, I just...(he huffs) losing mom is hard for me I am trying to keep it together for my family but I am failing, I don't want you to see me as a weak man.

Me: So you'd rather ignore me making me feel like you don't love me anymore?

Sbonga: No, I was wrong I'm sorry.

Me: it's okay if you don't want to confide in me, maybe you prefer Nina.

Sbonga: Don't do that Niko, I am not talking to Nina.

Me: "I want my Sbonga back, I know it hurts losing your mother so you don't have to hide your pain from me".

My phone rings it's Luyanda, I haven't seen him for a while maybe he is with his mother

wherever she is, I only know where Shaka is because I bought a house for him not far from here".

Sbonga: Who is that?

Me: Luyanda.

He frowns.

Sbonga: What does he want? He never contacted you after his mother treated you like trash.

I answer the call.

Me: Luh..

Luyanda: Hi Sniko, so it's true you can talk now, I'm happy for you.

Me: Thank you, though I still haven't gotten used to it that much.

Luyanda: You're doing good sis.

Silence.

Luyanda: I need your help sis.

Me: With what?

Luyanda: I need money, my account is empty and I know it's Shaka.

Me: it's not Shaka, your mother and Zipho demanded everything dad left so that meant your source of income is not there anymore.

Luyanda: What do you mean? How the hell did Shaka buy a house then?

Me: How do you know about that Luh? Are you stalking my brother?

Luyanda: No! It's all over the gossip blocks come on why would I stalk him Niko, he is my brother too.

Me: Oh..

Luyanda: So how come he managed to buy a house?

Me: I bought it for him.

Luyanda: Then you won't have a problem giving me the money, I just need a few thousands.

Me: Why are you saying it like I owe you?

Luyanda: Oh, so now Shaka is your only brother just because I am not Mageba's biological son, it's like that now Sniko?

Me: No, how much do you need?

Luyanda: Uhm I need 30 grand..

Me: What?

Luyanda: Please I just lost my job and we don't have a home I don't think Shaka would allow me to move in with him.

Me: So you want to rent?

Luyanda: Yes, I know you wouldn't buy a house for me, only Shaka matters to you.

Me: That is not true Luyanda but..why don't you ask your mother, they took everything from Shaka, you can go and stay at home.

Luyanda: That house is sold, it has new owners moving in soon.

I sigh.

Me: I will give you the money but I don't think it can be R30 000, that's a lot of money I have kids.

Luyanda: Come on sis, Sbonga have money and I am sure you are about to get millions after taking dad's throne.

Me: Bye Luh, I'll see what I can do.

I drop the call.

Sbonga: Are you considering giving him the money?

Me: What can I do? He is not working anymore.

Sbonga: Then he should tell his mother who tried to scam Shaka his inheritance while she has his own.

I look at him.

Sbonga: You didn't think your father left nothing for them didn't you?

I shake my head.

Me: Then why would they want more money.

Sbonga: Greed, your father left money for Luyanda and his mother as well.

Me: I didn't know.

Sbonga: He wants to use you don't allow it..

I nod, he walk out, I wish dad didn't die, his death messed everything up.

Today I am meeting with Letlotlo regarding the project of building houses for my community, he is so hands on I love it. I walk out I don't even know where Sbonga is, Dunga rush to my car while Nadia and the boys car drive in, they step out, Sbonga look at me then at this Dunga gentleman who is opening the door for me.

Sbonga: Uhm..Landile.

Nadia: Mmmm.

Sbonga: I noticed that this guy is always around my wife, why?

Me: I can answer that, he is keeping me safe, if it wasn't for him me and Nana would be dead by now.

He look at Nadia.

Sbonga: You assigned your people to be all over my wife Landile?

Nadia: He is all over your wife?

Sbonga: Why didn't you tell me about this?
How would you feel if I was to....

Nadia: To what!?

He stares at her.

Nadia: What were you going to say to me?

He look down.

I get in the car and Dunga close the door and rush to the driver's seat but Sbonga open it.

Sbonga: Get out I can take care of my wife.

Dunga does exactly that and Sbonga get in and start the car.

Me: You're jealous?

He ignores me.

Me: You should be because you've been acting out, I won't hesitate to replace you.

The car comes to a halt I bump my forehead in the seat in front of me, I don't have a seatbelt on.

Me: Aaah..

He turns looking at me, I have never seen him that angry, he step out of the car and bang the door close walking back inside the yard.

I sigh and get in the drivers seat driving back inside, I text uncle Lee to reschedule our meeting.

I walk in our room and find him pacing around the room then stop to look at me, he looks hurt.

Sbonga: How can you say that to me Niko?

Me: I was joking you didn't have to take it personal.

Sbonga: Take it personal! You told me you can replace me!

I cringe as he shouts, I think he realises that him shouting is scaring me because he takes quick steps and hold my shoulders.

Sbonga: I'm so sorry, I'm sorry I didn't mean to shout, Ngiyaxolisa (I'm sorry).

I nod and blink the tears away.

Sbonga: Yhoo..

He hold me in his arms.

Sbonga: Please forgive me my love.

I hold him tight, I missed being this close to him, I hope one day he will heal and we can go back to being happy again. I guess it's true that pain can change a person because this version of my husband is new to me.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 44

*

LETHOKUHLE

*

Loosing Pamela makes me feel like the world has turned it's back on me, I don't know whether I'm coming or going it's all a mess, I was close to her more than Landile so this is difficult for me to adjust.

I just woke up I need to get ready for school, I am teaching Grade 12, Life Sciences so we have a morning class since they are about to start their trial exams in two weeks, I have to do this to make up for the time lost when I was mourning my mother's death I took some time away because I wasn't coping but now I have to think of their futures.

I drive in the school premises and step out of my car, Sbani drive in and park next to me, we bump shoulders.

Sbani: We stay in the same house but I hardly see you these days, how are you holding up?

Me: I've been better.

He stares at me then nod.

Sbani: I believe in life after life brother, so Pamela is definately looking over us and I'm sure she wants us to live and be happy.

Me: But I prefer she stayed in this life man, she didn't have to die so soon.

Sbani: There is no soon about death Letho, it comes any day no matter what age, we just have to accept as painful as it is.

I nod.

Sbani: I love you okay.

Me: Yeah, I love you brother.

We walk in the staff room and find a new face, he is welcomed by a principal.

Principal: As we all know that Miss Sondzaba took a maternity leave, Mr Khoza here is standing in for her.

They welcome him a very young guy, he is light skinned, a lot of eyebrows and long lashes, I have never seen a man with such good facial features it's astonishing.

He shakes our hands then stare at Sbani and I for a while.

Me: Uhm, Mr Khoza is everything okay?

"You can call me IV my name is Irvin by the way, Uhm it's just that it's my first time seeing you guys face to face you look so much alike I don't think I would ever be able to tell you apart". He says speaking so fast with a hoarse voice, I guess he is one of those fast talkers.

I nod.

Me: We will call you Mr Khoza.

He nods, I go to my table and take my books then go to class. The day is so slow but I am doing what I love here which is giving our

youth education, what I love the most is when they challenge me by asking questions then we open a debate because well there are Christians then there are scientists there will always the clashes here and there because of personal beliefs but it's fun because we respect one another.

After school I go to my car and put my bag on the backseat and notice "IV" standing by the gate he is on the phone, I get in my car and drive out, I stop next to him.

Me: Want a lift?

He look at me then drop the call.

IV: I am going to town.

Me: Then I can drop you at the market.

He nods and get in on the passenger seat. I drive in silence all the way to the market.

IV: Uh you can drop me after the robot.

I nod, his phone rings.

IV: Bitch! I can see you don't go wait for me right there.

I frown looking at him, his tone completely changed he spoke like one of those dread queens. He look at me as I stop my car next to a beautiful lady.

IV: Thank you sir.

Me: Cool.

He step out, I am watching him as he screams hugging the girl, whoa he is now completely different from the way he was at school, now you can mistake him for a girl.

I drive home and the security is tight there military cops going up and down making sure everyone is safe.

Niko step out of the house, beautiful woman she is, she smiles and come to hug me.

Niko: Hey.

I greet her back.

Niko: "You look tired I was going out to eat and it's always awkward driving with these guys, can you come with me?"

I chuckle.

Me: "Yeah we can go".

I drive her car and two cops drive behind us. We sit down and order, she touch my hand I look at her.

Niko: Are we still friends Letho?

I laugh a little.

Me: Of course we are, why?

Niko: I can see you're not okay but what I am asking myself is that why aren't you coming to talk to me about it like you used to.

Me: You are married now and a Queen at that, you have important things to do.

Niko: You guys are important to me Lethokuhle, more than anything, I am where I am today because of you and your brothers you showed me love from a very young age,

you made me feel like a human being when I thought I was just a nobody.

I sigh, we start talking about everything like we used to and I end up feeling better, she is an amazing soul always know what to say because she has been through it all, but came out strong so she made me believe I can do it. We go back home when Sbonga called to ask where she is.

The week goes on pretty fast, it's the weekend and I just want to unwind. So I decide to hit the club by myself.

I sit at the bar and ask for a beer, I watch people dancing having fun, then there is noise as a group of guys and girls walk in and go sit at the VIP section, I look at them and notice that IV is amongst them our eyes lock and he quickly look away, I just mind what I came here to do.

IV: Hi.

I look next to me, he is now talking to a bartender for orders.

Me: Hi.

IV: I didn't know you come to places like this.

Me: Do you know me?

IV: Ouch..

He seems really disappointed but really does he know me like that? He do whatever then walk away. Most girls ask for pictures now I have to smile and pretend like I am happy about it, one thing I hate about going out in public is exactly this, when people treat you like Jesus, the most important thing to ever walk on earth, come on!

Later I call it a night and walk out, I notice a fight and it looks bad because even bouncers are over there now, I rush there and some girl is messed up bleeding on her forehead and IV on his wrist, I shake my head on walk back to my car because like I said I came here to drink nothing else.

Monday morning I am early for my class, I sit at the table that IV guy walk in with a bandage on his wrist, he sit on his table not even greeting me,I chuckle.

Me: Mr Khoza..

He look at me.

Me: Sawubona.(hello)

He gives me a very cold "Hi".

Me: Long weekend huh?

IV: Pun intended?

I laugh.

Me: Not at all.

IV: You were rude to me on Friday.

Me: I know.

He stares at me.

IV: You can't have a problem with gays.

I look at him confused.

Me: What?

IV: Your house is full of homosexuals so I don't understand why you have a problem with me.

I laugh getting up.

Me: You see things Mr Khoza, I didn't even know you are gay and also your sexuality is none of my business, yeah?

I walk out and go to class, why would he think that I have a problem with him because of his sexuality, I mean how? I don't even care.

I go eat my lunch in my car, he stands in front of me.

IV: I'm sorry..

I look at him.

IV: About earlier, I'm sorry.

Me: Start accepting who you are so that you won't go around accusing people of disliking you, the problem is you are ashamed of your truth now you want to paint me as a bad guy even though I didn't say anything about your

sexuality, I didn't even know you are gay, I don't even care bro.

IV: Uhm I... sorry.

He quickly walk away, I feel bad for him, I know when you fail to accept who you are you end up thinking people are judging you while they are really not.

The week is going well and the exams are starting on Monday and today is Thursday, IV has been avoiding me and I don't mind, I don't know him like that.

I go to the bathroom and find him looking down on the sink.

Me: Sure..

He gets startled and quickly wipe his face.

IV: Yeah..

He walk out, I do my business and go to my car, I ask to give him a lift again, he keeps playing with his knuckles he is clearly not okay.

Me: Are you okay?

He nods and look out the window, I let him be.

Me: Should I drop you here again?

IV: Yeah it's fine.

His phone rings before he can step out.

IV: Sisanda..

Silence.

IV: I don't have money for now sis I just started worki.... Uhm ok I will see what I can do.

He sighs after dropping the call.

IV: Thank you for the lift.

He opens the door.

Me: Are you in a hurry? We can grab something to eat if you want.

IV: I can't, I have to go to the bank.

Me: Maybe I can help.

IV: No thank you, I'm fine.

He step out of the car, and everything happens so fast right in front of my eyes, the junkies just took all his belongings, he didn't even try

to fight, he just stood there and let them, they are nowhere to be found in just a second.

I step out of the car and rush to him.

Me: Hey man go back in the car.

He slowly go back and I start the car again.

Me: You stay far from here?

He shakes his head, and nothing annoys me like that but in this situation I understand he has just been robbed, he manages to tell me where he lives and I am shocked to see this other side of town, the flats there are filthy not to sound offensive but they are really not in good conditions.

Me: Uhm..you stay here?

IV: Yes.

I nod.

IV: But I might as well go live in the streets man, I have to pay rent tomorrow and my little sister is demanding money and...

Me: So you are fresh from varsity I guess?

IV: I finished last year, this was my big break after struggling to get a job, I know it was only temporary but it was gonna make a difference.

Me: Why are you talking in past tense? It can still make a difference.

He laughs.

IV: Not with a family like mine, I just started working and they are already demanding I pay thousands for my sister at nursing school.

Me: Sorry man.

I look around again and the place gives me creeps no lie..

Me: you mind being my friend?

He laughs.

IV: What? Why would you want to be friends with me?

Me: This place scares the crap out of me so I wouldn't want someone I know to stay here.

IV: No I'm going to be okay, some of us have to start here we are not all royalty.

Me: Right!

IV: Sorry..I mean...I didn't..

Me: It's fine I get it.

IV: Thanks for the lift.

I nod and he step out and walk inside, I drive home thinking how the hell does one demand rent money if his or her flat looks like a pig sty Yhoo!

Today at school I am just busy the whole day answering questions my students might have before they start their exams, IV knocks and walk in, he stands next to me.

IV: Looks like the principal can't really tell you apart as well.

Me: What do you mean?

IV: He said I must take this to the HOD so he can sign this for me.

I look at him then chuckle.

Me: And what makes you think he is wrong?

He blinks fast then laugh a little.

IV: You are Mr S Gumede?

I shake my head.

Me: My brother is in the next class I am Lethokuhle not Sbani.

He quickly nods.

IV: Right! Sorry for disturbing you.

He walk out, he seems off, probably still shaken by what happened to him with those junkies.

I finally get a breather after school I didn't even eat lunch that is how dedicated I am with my work. I hear a knock on my window I roll it down its Irvin he looks like he has been crying because his eyes are red and puffy.

IV: Uhm..are you going to town I need a lift to...

Me: Get in.

He get in next to me I drive out.

Me: You are going to your place?

IV: No I need a bank first to block my cards.

He tells me which bank then we drive there.

IV: Thanks.

Me: I will be parking right here.

IV: It might take a while in there so you can go.

Me: I will wait.

He step out, I adjust my seat and close my eyes. I wake up when he taps my shoulder.

Me: Oh you are done?

IV: I'm sorry for keeping you waiting I went to Mr Price to buy a phone I have to do a sim swap.

I nod and close my eyes again as he do what he needs to do. He taps my shoulder again.

IV: You look tired.

Me: I am, I didn't even eat lunch.

IV: At least you can afford it mina I might as well sleep in the toilets in South beach today.

Me: Why?

IV: The last money I had in the card I deposited it to my sister and it's not even enough.

Me: Pay day is close you will be fine.

He chuckles.

IV: Yeah right...

I stretch.

Me: I need a very long nap man.

He nods.

IV: I will take a taxi so you can drive home now.

I drive to a hotel in South beach famous for its good food, I order then book a room with two seperate beds, I need to rest and I can't do that with my brothers kids all over me thinking I am their dad, those rascals are always turning the house upside down there is no peace unless they are asleep.

When we get in the room I take off my shoes and go straight to bed and fall into sleep, it has been a hectic week trying to cover all the work.

I wake up later and look around Irvin is fast asleep on the bed next to mine, the food is untouched, I wake him up, he sit up.

Me: Hi, why didn't you eat?

IV: It's your food I wasn't gonna eat when you just fell asleep.

Me: So in your mind I ordered all of this for myself?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: You can take everything I think I'm gonna eat at home.

IV: What do you see here? A charity case? A hungry dog? You brought me here to feed the poor hungry dog huh..

He is clearly angry, I look at him confused.

Me: Ukhulume ngani?(what are you talking about?) I just said I will eat at home, if you don't want the food you should have said that not all this crap you are saying to me.

IV: You don't...

Me: Ay..I'm leaving, are you coming?

He look down, I walk out and get in my car, I see him getting in, I drive to his flat he step out without saying a word and bang the door, dramatic I tell you.

I get home, take a bath then go eat.

Mengezi: Daddy come play with us.

That is why I chose to rest at the hotel, in this house you always have to play, I join them in playing with toy trucks until they get tired I take them to bed I don't even know where the couples are, Letho and Sbonga with their wives.

I check on Landile I find her already in bed, I get in next to her.

Me: Your tattoos still freaks me out, you won't go to heaven with all these drawings.

Nadia: I don't mind maybe hell is better than your heaven anyway.

I laugh.

Nadia: I see you are overworking these days, how have you been?

Me: That's the only thing that keeps my mind off things, when I am at school I forget a little.

Nadia: Yeah, I miss her too but I guess I have to live with it, she is not coming back.

Me: Jaa, so how is working in high places?

Nadia: I thought it will be a lot of pressure but so far it's been smooth.

I nod, she is now a police minister first woman to ever hold such title.

Me: I'm proud of you Landi and I look up to you.

Nadia: Thank you boy.

She look at me and smile.

Nadia: So when are you and Sbani introducing your partners to the family.

Me: I have nothing!

She burst in laughter.

Nadia: You are lying, you can't be out there looking like my hot self and have no ladies fighting over you, come on.

Me: Ay I'm fine, Noma showed me flames last year so I am taking a break.

She continues to laugh at me, Noma is my ex girlfriend that dumped me on the same day she was getting married, I was hurt and everyone made a joke about it here at home, I was really hurt, imagine boasting about having a girlfriend only to see pictures of her in her traditional attire next to her husband then when you call that's when she says it's over, fear women!!!

I sleep with her, she seems better but you can tell that she is still emotional.

Months go by pretty fast and today there is a little farewell party for IV since he won't be coming back when the schools open in January, miss Sondzaba will be back by then, after the hotel saga things have never been good between us, we are back to being

strangers that we are and he ignores me whenever he sees my car after school, I don't mind it's his choice after all.

So the party goes smoothly he says his thank you speech then walk out, I follow him and find him behind the Principal's car crying, I am looking at him as he wipes his tears.

Me: Hey.

He is shocked to see me he quickly turns giving me his back.

Me: You are hiding the fact that you are emotional about leaving good people like me?

He chuckles.

Me: I'm sure you'll find something soon, I heard the pupils like you so you are doing a good job.

He finally look my way.

Me: You've been ignoring me for months so I guess you can't wait to get away from me huh?

IV: I even forgot that there is you here I just see your brother.

Me: Good to know.

I give him my hand for a handshake, he shakes it.

Me: You gonna be okay, believe that.

He gives me a faint smile.

His phone rings he takes a deep sigh before answering.

IV: Mama..

A long silence I guess he is listening to his Mom, he finally huffs.

IV: Uhm okay I will send R6000 to her account now then R3000 to you.

"what do you mean R3000 Irvin!?! I can't even pay water bill with that money!" A woman shouts I guess he touched it by mistake and it went on speaker but he quickly walk away, I go back inside.

After our party I go to my car and sit there, I see him passing by, I hoot.

Me: Hey wanna have a drink?

IV: I'm not in the mood..

Me: Come on.

He finally gives in and get in, I drive to a pub in town and it's not full since it's during the day, we order drinks since we ate at school.

Me: So..you are a victim of what they call "Black tax"?

IV: I don't want to talk about it.

I nod.

Me: Have you found anything?

IV: I have sent out my applications to various schools.

Me: You will find something.

IV: Yeah but for now I have to go back home and stay with my mother..

He says sounding more depressed.

Me: What's wrong with staying with your mother?

He stares at me..

IV: With my last pay I have to take out more than R9000, how much do I get paid? These months I have been working but I can't even buy a single thing I like because she takes everything..

I can see he is hurting.

Me: I'm sorry.

He nods.

Me: Uhm I own a commune and only two girls and one couple occupy it, there is a backroom if you don't mind staying there and..

IV: I won't have money to pay for it so...

He shrug his shoulders.

Me: You can stay there until you find something.

IV: Why?

Me: So you don't have to stay with your mom and also I love helping out.

IV: Uhm..can I see it? The flat.

Me: Yeah let's finish up here.

We finish our drinks then I take her to the place, he looks at it for a long time then look at me.

IV: I can't stay here for free, how much do I have to pay?

Me: How about you pay me when you get a job?

He nods.

IV: Thank you I will stay..

Me: Good, also try to put yourself first in everything, be selfish just for once and do what you like with your money.

IV: Yeah only if it was that easy.

Me: Oh it is, you can start by giving me your phone I will switch it off and keep it safe for you.

He laughs and sit in bed.

Me: You need that money to make this place looks decent so do that with your hard earned money.

IV: I will do that..

Me: I don't trust you.

He laughs.

Me: I have to go now or should I drop you off at your place so you can pack?

IV: Yes thank you again.

He hugs me but quickly let go, my hands are in my pocket.

IV: Sorry..

Me: It's fine.

I drop him off then go home.

Sbonga: Brother..

Me: Hi.

Sbonga: You've been scarce.

Me: Yeah I have been busy.

Sbonga: I see.

I go to my room and sleep a little. I wake up just in time for dinner I can see a message on my phone from Irvin we exchanged numbers earlier today.

"I can't stay anymore I am going home tomorrow". I call him.

IV: Hello, Uhm thank you for your offer but I have to go home.

Me: Oh ok, it's okay.

IV: Yeah, bye.

Me: Sure.

I drop the call, so there are parents who do this to their kids because I am sure him leaving has something to do with his mother and her demands, but maybe one day he will stand up for himself.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 46

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LETHOKUHLE

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It's a new year and we are slowly but surely healing from losing Ella though it's still hard to accept that she is no longer with us in this world but life has to go on.

Schools are opening and I am looking forward to going back to school.

I wear my black pants and white shirt then a tie, I look smart for sure. I walk out and bump into my brother Sbonga.

Me: Boh..

Sbonga: Yeah bro.

Me: You're finally going back to work?

Sbonga: Yep it's long overdue, Lethu is going back as well.

Me: That's great, you guys have been lazy!

He laughs, I pat his shoulder and walk out, I drive to work.

School is nice as usual I get to meet new students in my class and I feel we are going to have a good time with them.

My day is over and I am sitting in my car, I remember that there is a person called Irvin whom I haven't talked to ever since he declined my offer of staying at my commune. I dial his number and it rings for a while before he picks up.

IV: Hello.

Me: Hi, are you good?

IV: Yeah, Uhm who is this?

I laugh.

Me: So you deleted my number?

IV: Okay I am dropping the call now.

I chuckle.

Me: Ok cool drop it since you want to act all important to me.

He is silent for a while then clears his throat.

IV: Mr Gumedede..

I drop the call and drive home, my phone has been ringing but I don't even look who is calling. I get in my room and my phone rings once again it's IV.

Me: Yeah..

IV: I didn't know it was you my numbers got deleted, sorry.

Me: Sure.

I chuckle.

Me: So how is home?

IV: Fine, I guess.

Me: You haven't found anything yet?

IV: No..

Me: I can pull some strings for you in my brother's school if that's okay.

IV: I don't want favours.

Me: You don't know what you want really..

IV: I have to go.

I click my tongue dropping the call then call Sage.

Sage: Little brother..

Me: Hi big bro, I need a favour.

Sage: Shoot..

Me: I need you to check if there aren't any posts in our schools around Durban.

Sage: Why? You want to change schools?

Me: No, I am asking for a friend.

Sage: Uhm can you hold a few seconds...

Me: Sure.

I wait for a while.

Sage: Bro.

Me: Yeah..

Sage: We have a post in one of our high school, a language teacher though.

Me: I'm sure he can do it, can he start immediately?

Sage: Yes, we don't have time to wait actually because this is for Grade elevens.

Me: Ok sure, I will send his number so you can call him to come through since we don't really get along these days.

Sage: That's okay brother.

Me: Thank you.

I send the number then go to bed.

Late at night I wake up to my phone ringing none stop, I put it in my ear.

IV: I told you I don't want any favours from you!

I drop my phone, you can't just call my damn phone to shout at me, no. He calls again.

Me: Hey! If you don't want the job they kindly decline, there are so many people sitting at home hoping for this chance but here you are sulking over bullshit, take the damn job or go to hell.

I switch off my phone and sleep facing up, some people don't know what they want for real.

A week goes by I don't even know if IV took the offer I blocked his number I don't like people who acts like spoiler brats when you only just trying to help them.

We have a meeting with dad at one of our schools, i go straight to the office I am already late, I greet everyone then take a seat.

Nkanyezi: Finally! We've been waiting for you sir.

Me: Dad..Uhm I mean Mr Gumede I'm sorry for being late I was....

He raise up his hand to stop me from talking, there is nothing he hates than someone who is

late for a meeting to him that means you are not serious about your job at all. He starts talking about how he wants to open more job opportunities, what I love about dad is that every decision takes he inform us, Sage do that as well.

We talk about a lot of things that can elevate our schools and all then we walk out, when we walk out I see a familiar face rushing towards us but he is looking at his files, then he stops in front of us in shock, we are all looking at him, he stares at us looking from me, to Lethu, Sbonga then Sbani, I see he is trying to find someone between us with his eyes but he is failing.

IV: Uhm...I'm sorry for not looking where I'm going I am...

Sbonga: It's fine man..

He nods and look at Lethu, I chuckle and walk away getting in my car, he knocks on my window I step out.

Me: Fancy seeing you here with the way you shouted at me for getting you a job..

IV: I'm sorry, I tried calling you but your number is not going through.

Me: Yeah I blocked you.

IV: Oh..

Me: Yeah.

IV: Thank you for this.

I nod and turn he grab my arm then quickly let go.

Me: What is it?

IV: I need a place to stay Uhm is that backroom still available.

I laugh shaking my head, he is looking down.

Nkanyezi: Hey aren't you supposed to be in class.

He shouts startling Irvin so bad.

IV: Ye...yes..Mr Gumede i'm...

He doesn't finish talking but just walk away.

Nkanyezi: I don't like that Lethokuhle, lunch time and after school are there for a reason.

Me: I'm sorry dad.

He go to his car and drive out, he wants proffessionals.

I go back to school and do what I'm paid to do, after school I drive to IV's school hoping I find him around, I see him walking to the opposite direction, I stop the car and step out calling his name.

Me: Khoza...

He walk up to me.

Me: You still want the place?

IV: Yes..

Me: You can have it, it's still available.

He heaves a sigh of relief.

IV: Thank you..

Me: Get in..

I drive to some lodge where he has been staying then back to his new place, I help him with the bags, a lot of them then he starts cleaning here and there since every now and then cleaners comes and clean the whole place, he fix the bed with his things, looks like he got the important things for now.

Me: I'm leaving...

IV: But we haven't talked about rent?

Me: Do you have it now?

IV: No..

Me: Then don't annoy me.

I go to my car and drive home.

In the morning I check his place first because his school is a bit far, I knock on his door, he opens wearing a gown.

Me: Want a lift to school?

IV: Uhm yes but I am still ironing you can come in if you don't mind waiting.

I walk in and sit in bed, it's already made like he hasn't slept there I guess he is neat like that. He go to the bathroom with his clothes then come back fully dressed.

Me: You're ready to leave?

IV: Yes..

Me: Sure let's go.

I take him to work then drive to mine.

After school I start at the pub and drink a little since it's Friday, then get some meat and more drinks. I drive to IVs house just to officially welcome him you know. He opens the door and help me with plastics, I sit in bed I think I am a bit drunk.

Me: Can you give me another beer.

He gives me one I drink up.

IV: Why are you drinking like you are stressed?

Me: What do you mean?

IV: A whole can in one go?

I chuckle.

Me: Nginxaniwe..(I'm thirsty)

He nods.

Me: I got you some meat, congratulations on your permanent job.

He smiles a little.

IV: Thanks.

I raise my bottle up a little then drink, I keep drinking until I pass out.

I wake up in the morning and I have a pounding headache my eyes are heavy, I sit up looking around, I almost jump out of bed when I see IV sleeping next to me, I don't even remember getting in bed.

Me: What..

I look at myself I am not wearing a shirt but my pants are still on, I huff getting out of bed then wear my shirt, looking for my car keys.

IV: Hi..

I look at him and nod.

IV: Uhm your keys are on top of the fridge in the kitchen.

I nod, it's an open plan place, so a kitchen is over there then his bedroom then a bathroom on the left.

I take my keys.

IV: I have pills for the headache.

I sit down wearing my shoes while trying to remember how I fell asleep yesterday but nothing comes back, I only remember telling him to keep the beers coming.

Me: I will be fine

I take my things.

IV: Lethokuhle.

I look at him.

IV: Yesterday Uhm do you remember?

Me: Remember what?

IV: Uhm the..we kissed.

I stare at him.

Me: No that is not true..

IV: Oh..

He get up and stand in front of me, he tilt his head I can see the bites there.

Me: No way..

I'm shook.

IV: I stopped you, you were too rough and...

Me: Stop lying man I didn't do that shit!

He nods and sit down.

Me: No..

I go home but sit in my car for a while trying to remember.

Me: Fuck No!!!

I now remember how I initiated the kiss, how I was on top of him, all over him.

Me: What the hell!

I wipe my face.

I walk in to take a quick shower then drive to a therapist maybe this getting too drunk was

just me trying to deal with some emotions. I end up taking a route back to IVs place again, I find him in bed, I sit down.

Me: I'm sorry about what I did yesterday, I really am I guess I had a lot to drink.

IV: Or you were trying to take advantage of me because you helped me out with a job and a place to stay.

I stare at him.

Me: When you say advantage of you, you mean I ... I... wanted to force myself on you?

Saying that makes me cringe, I wouldn't!

I look at him he is just looking down.

Me: I wouldn't do that..I'm sorry for what I did man, I'm not even into guys I don't know.. I'm sorry.

IV: I think I should just find my own place.

Me: No, look I won't come here anymore if I make you uncomfortable, I didn't mean to do that believe me.

I get up and stand by the door.

Me: I promise you I am not one of those guys who use people.

I walk out and drive back home, I am stressed out I need to talk to someone, I look for Niko, I find her doing laundry, I sit looking down. She stands in front of me looking deep in my eyes.

Niko: "What's wrong?"

Me: "I messed up man".

Niko: "You wanna talk about it?"

Me: I was drunk so I did something wrong, so wrong that I am even ashamed to say it.

Niko: It was a mistake?

I nod.

Niko: No one is perfect Kuhle, as long as you acknowledge that you made a mistake and genuinely apologized for it then it's okay.

I sigh.

Me: Nadia would kill me if she were to find out what I did.

Niko: Lethokuhle come on I'm sure it wasn't intentional don't beat yourself up about it.

Me: Yeah..Uhm let me go take a nap.

I take off my t-shirt and get in bed, I keep tossing and turning I end up facing up, I can't erase IV on my mind, I was really drunk but flashes of me on top of him keep coming back.

Me: Ay man!!

I shout.

Me: Come on Kuhle! Come on, I know myself.

I feel crazy talking to myself.

We start the week and I spend most of my time at school, funny thing is that I still think about that guy it's frustrating me, I want to forget everything about that day but seems like my mind is having none of that.

I receive a call from my security in my commune, bab'Hadebe.

Me: Baba.

Hadebe: Gumedede, we have crisis here at the flat can you come by please.

Me: Oh uh...I'm on my way.

I drive there and walk in, I find the two female tenants shouting at the back, Hadebe is trying to calm them down.

Me: Hello, what's seem to be the problem?

Girl: We want that gay guy gone! I saw him talking to my husband yesterday! He needs to leave.

I laugh.

Me: Ayboo!

Girl: I'm serious I can't have a gay man all over my husband.

Me: Uyahlanya Wena.(you are crazy)

Girl: I pay a lot of money here so when I have a complaint you should hear me out.

Me: I don't have to hear anything, just because you are homophobic I have to chase out my other tenant, you don't trust your husband

now you want to turn everyone's life upside down, sis if you don't feel comfortable living here anymore you can pack up and voetsek ok.

Girl2: Then I am also leaving! I hate gays.

Me: Go on baby...and at that pay up the three months rent money you owe.

They walk away cussing.

Me: Where is he?

Hadebe: He just quietly went inside his room.

I nod.

Me: Thank you for calling me, please make sure they don't trash the place, they look crazy anything is possible.

He nods and walk away, I sigh and knock on IVs door, I knock countless times but he doesn't open so I push the door and find him in bed, I shake him calling out his name but still I step on something then look at it, it's a bottle of pills, and it's not just one bottle but three and there are some on the floor.

Me: Shit..Irvin what did you do!

I call Hadebe to help me take him to the car then speed to the hospital, they admit him immediately while I try to fill up the forms, I know those girls probably said some pretty bad things to him but I feel like this attempted suicide, that's if he makes it, is way more that.

The doctor finally comes out and tell me what I already know, he overdosed some sleeping tablets with other antibiotics but he is going to be okay.

I walk in his ward and find him asleep with an oxygen mask on, I sit there quietly. Later I go home he was still asleep.

The next day I report to dad that IV is at the hospital then go check on him, I find him awake looking at the ceiling slowly blinking, I sit down looking at him but he doesn't turn.

Me: Why would you do that? Why kill yourself?

Silence.

Me: Suicide is never an option, talk, cry do something man but don't ever think about taking your life.

Still nothing.

Me: Have you called your mom?

Just then the door opens and about five women walk in and start praying immediately, he look away.

They finally stop then one lady stand next to him.

Lady: This demon doesn't wanna leave you my son..

She is wearing a very fancy watch her clothes too, I guess it's his Mom.

Lady: These ladies are here to pray for you Irvin they are from my church, you live a satanic way.

She sounds like those "women of God" that judges people.

She look my way.

Lady: Ooh!

She exclaims.

Lady: You are a Gumede! Nice meeting you, so you're the one who helped my son finding a job?

Me: Yes..

Lady: Thank you, maybe he will look up to you and stop this gay madness.

I chuckle.

Me: I will see you later.

Later I find him alone, I sit down.

Me: Hey.

He nods.

Me: How are you feeling?

IV: Uhm..will you be able to withdraw R4000 tomorrow from my card since it's payday then come here with it.

Me: Why do you need that money?

IV: It's for my Mom.

Me: For what?

IV: Will you be able to do it? I will tell you where my card is.

Me: Ok.

The next day I go to the bank and withdraw his money. I get to the hospital and his mother is there, I give him the money he immediately give it to his Mom who counts it then stare at him.

Lady: You will still send Sisanda's rent money right and for groceries as well?

IV: Yes.

Lady: Ok, get well soon.

She walk out, I look at him.

Me: Why does your mom need so much money? Isn't she working?

IV: She owns a beauty shop but it's not doing well for now.

Me: Oh, ok. When are you going home?

IV: Tomorrow.

Me: You feel okay?

IV: Yes.

Me: You are too young to have all these people demanding so much money from you, and you just started working I am sure the money your mom took is enough to pay your sister's rent and groceries really.

IV: No it's fine.

I go back to his place to take his clothes I find a diary and I just open any page out of curiosity and find it written.

"so the psychologist said I have gender dysphoria, I googled that term and it gave me exactly what I feel, I am unhappy and have anxiety I don't feel like a boy inside, who I am inside doesn't match with my body at all".

I turn to the next page.

"My wish is to wake up rich to I can atleast do surgery and be who I feel I am".

I am confused with all this I am reading so I just close it, I shouldn't have read his diary from the first place.

I just fetched him from the hospital now I just fixed his bed so he can rest, I sit next to him.

Me: I told dad that you're not okay, so you can take a few days off.

IV: I didn't mean to be a problem I just started working and already I am missing work.

Me: That's your fault and if dad finds out what you did he won't hesitate to let you go.

IV: Please..I won't do it again I need that job..

Me: Promise you won't do it again.

IV: I promise.

Me: Good then I can lie on your behalf.

IV: Thank you for everything you have done for me.

I nod.

Me: Uhm can I ask you something?

IV: Yeah..

Me: The other day, besides that I was too rough were you going to stop me if I wasn't?

He look down.

Me: I don't remember you stopping me when I started the kiss.

IV: I didn't stop you.

Me: Why not?

He shakes his head.

Me: Answer me..

IV: I don't know.

Me: I'm sorry for what I did okay, I mean it.

IV: It's okay.

Me: You gonna be okay?

IV: Yes.

Me: I can cook for you if you like, you are still weak.

IV: No I...

Me: I insist, or you don't trust that I can?

He laughs and it's good to hear it, I start cooking.

IV: Can you borrow me your phone please..

I take it out of my pocket and give it to him then continue to cook, he starts playing music on my phone.

IV: Really? These songs are ancient.

Me: But they have a lot of meaning, real love songs makes one fall in love.

IV: Pshhh...

I finish up cooking while listening to him complain about my old school RNB "slow jam".

I dish up and sit in front of him in bed.

IV: Uhm that's a lot of food.

Me: We are eating together.

IV: Oh..

We start eating but I can see he is a bit shy, so I force him to eat by feeding him, he is laughing,

I wipe his cheek which makes everything weird and very awkward I stop and take the plate to the kitchen, we are now silent.

Me: Uh..I have to go now.

IV: Ok.

I stop by the door and go back to sitting in bed.

Me: Why did you try to kill yourself?

IV: Those ladies said some hurtful things.

Me: I know but something else made you do that..

He sighs looking at his hands.

IV: I started having sex at a very young age with women just to prove that I am not gay, even slept with mom's friends.

Me: They forced you?

IV: No, I did it willingly to prove to them that I am straight..

Me: But why?

IV: Did you see how much she prays?

Me: You call that a prayer? Saying your son is used by demons just because he is gay is not a prayer.

IV: Our community respect her so I didn't want to bring shame by being gay, when I am at home I have to act a different way to show how much of a man I am.

Me: So you live a lie?

IV: I love my mother.

Me: That is why she takes half of your salary?

He look down.

We talk about his life till late, he hasn't had it easy in his life, the father is absent but married to his mother, he lives in Cape Town only comes back once a year or in two years and his Mom covers that up to the society by saying her husband works hard travelling all around the world.

I check the time and it's ten minutes before 11pm.

Me: I will see you in the morning.

IV: You can go in the morning, you look sleepy, you can't drive like that.

Me: No, it's work for me tomorrow since i'm not the one who tried to kill myself.

He playfully punch my shoulder, I find myself holding his hand.

IV: Uh your phone is ringing.

I let go of his hand and answer.

Me: Landile.

Nadia: Are you sleeping out?

IV is staring at me I don't even think he is aware that I am looking back at him.

Me: Yeah..yeah I will see you tomorrow.

She chuckles.

Nadia: Ok Mr I have nothing..

Me: You can call me Whitney Houston.

We laugh.

Nadia: I love you.

Me: I love you too Landi..

I drop the call and look at IV he blinks then look away.

IV: So you are sleeping here?

Me: Yeah.

IV: Ok you can take another bed cover in the closet.

I take it then get in bed fully dressed, he face the other way, I see a small writing on his neck, I touch it and I can see him tense up.

Me: Ivy Kay?

He turns looking up.

Me: Who is Ivy?

IV: That's the name I would give to myself should I become a trans-woman.

Me: A trans what?

IV: Never mind, it won't happen anyway I can't afford it, I can't even afford to buy TV my mother takes every last cent I have.

I don't know what's happening but I find myself pushing the bed cover then use his, I pull him close and hug him, my shoulder is wet instantly, I am brushing his back slowly calming him down, he finally stops and wipe his tears, we kiss, one of those slow kisses, I stop the kiss then hold him again, I have blocked everything that makes me believe that this is wrong, now is not the time to think about that.

He is now fast asleep, I am looking at him, he looks good, should he wear a weave many girls would be jealous because I am sure he would be way too beautiful.

In the morning I wake up alone in bed, he walk in, in a white gown then sit in bed looking at me.

IV: Hi.

Me: Hey, what time is it?

IV: It's 5 o'clock I was about to wake you up.

I nod.

Me: You don't feel any pain?

IV: I did in the middle of the night but i'm fine now.

Me: Ok.

IV: Uhm.. Kuhle what are you doing with me?

Me: Huh?

IV: Tell me.

Me: I don't know I am just doing what I feel like doing.

IV: Oh..

Me: Is that a bad thing?

IV: Yeah because I don't want to catch while its nothing.

Me: I am not going to work today.

He stares at me.

Me: Come back to bed.

He get in and I pull him close again.

IV: You need to wake up and go to work.

Me: But I just said I am not going.

IV: Why?

Me: I have a sick patient I have to look after.

IV: Is that me?

Me: Yeah, IV the overdoser!

He laughs.

IV: You are not funny.

Me: But stand up comedy is my second option after teaching.

IV: Quit it before you can even start.

Me: Don't crash my dream like that.

We laugh.

IV: Have you ever been in this situation before?
Holding a guy? Kissing him?

Me: No.

IV: Then why do it now?

Me: Umuhle ngathi intokazi. (you're pretty like a lady)

His cheeks turns red immediately, the smile on his face is out of this world.

Me: So I like pretty people no matter what gender I guess, I just found that out after meeting you.

IV: Wow..

He is still blushing.

Me: Yeah..

The week ends with me sleeping at IV's place, we kiss and cuddle that's it and like I said I blocked anything negative my mind has to say about this.

It's Sunday and he invited me for lunch, he went all out, pap, beef curry with green salad , there is beer and he has wine.

Me: This is good I'm impressed.

He smiles, his phone rings he frowns and answer.

IV: Sisanda...

They talk for a while he even walk out, I am done eating he isn't back yet, so I go to his bed, his laptop is on, I look at the screen in shock..he finally comes back.

Me: What the hell is this?

IV: I am doing research about this surgery that...

Me: Why!?

He frowns as my tone seems a bit high.

IV: I hope to do it one day, that's why.

Me: Uyahlanya?(Are you crazy?) Ufuna ukusikwa amasende?(You want to cut your balls)

IV: This has nothing to do with you, phuma Kimi nezindaba Zam(leave me and my business alone)

Me: Izindaba zakho zamasimba. (your business
shit)

He gasps, I just grab my phone with my keys
then walk out, I have never in my life heard of
such, like is he for real! What the hell!

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 46

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LETHOKUHLE

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I have been staring at the PC for the past thirty
minutes now looking up at this genital surgery
IV wants so bad I am against it, no way! I tap

on the video and I regret watching it my body has goosebumps and they are not from excitement or anything, I know it's an animated video but it looks scary and painful to watch even my balls hurt from just watching that. How does one undergo such surgery, having your balls and penis cut just so you can have a female genitalia, this looks so wrong I don't care! I wish I can unwatch that video.

I close my PC and drink some water, we haven't talked ever since that day he told me I should stay out of his business.

I research about this gender dysphoria he was diagnosed with and how serious it is.

Me: "This sense of unease or dissatisfaction may be so intense it can lead to depression and anxiety and have a harmful impact on daily life".

I read out loud from the internet then huff, so there are people out there who have issues with being male or female because they feel

there is a mismatch from their biological sex with their gender identity, so this is IV and how he feels.

I sigh and switch it off, it's the Easter weekend and people are going out, I just drive to IVs place because honestly I have been missing him even though we had a little misunderstanding.

He opens the door then go back to bed, I walk in and close the door.

Me: Hi.

IV: Hi.

Me: Can I sit?

He nods I sit in bed looking at him.

Me: People are out having fun, you don't wanna go out?

He shakes his head.

IV: No I'm fine.

Me: Ok.

IV: Why are you here Lethokuhle?

Me: I came to check if you're okay.

IV: As you can see I'm fine you can go now.

Me: When was the last time you saw a psychologist?

IV: Why? You think I'm crazy because I don't feel like a man?

He shouts.

Me: No that's not what I'm saying, I just think you should seek help so you can accept yourself the way you are.

IV: you think I haven't tried that!

His voice is now shaky.

Me: Angiqondile ukukuphatha Kabi(I don't mean to upset you) I'm just saying that you...I like you this way,. You don't have to change yourself.

IV: This isn't about you Lethokuhle! Or anyone else for that matter, I don't want this just so you can like me!

He is talking while looking down I can tell he is crying.

Me: I'm sorry..

I take his hand, he wipes his tears with the other one.

IV: I want to be alone.

Me: No..

He look at me, but I won't leave him alone after reading about this depression and anxiety he have and I just upset him so maybe he will have suicidal thoughts again.

Me: I will stay with you we don't have to talk about that surgery anymore.

I take off my t-shirt, he quickly look away I smile a little, I take off my shoes and get in next to him, I pull him to my chest, he moves his hand up and down my abs which makes me feel things, so I hold his hand stopping him.

He ends up falling asleep, but I can't sleep, I open the fridge and drink some water, his diary is on the counter, I page through it.

I can see that there is a sum there like he was counting money, I read down "money saved" I guess he has been saving up probably for this, but I am sure it will take a while with his Mom demanding a lot from him, I am hoping I manage to convince him not to do it.

I close the diary and go back to bed.

Me: Hey

I shake him, he opens his eyes, beautiful eyes.

Me: I'm hungry.

IV: So..

Me: Don't be that guy..

He smiles and cover his head I pull the covers away.

IV: Don't be that guy..

Me: Oh it's like that now?

He nods, I pinch him until he moves away falling on the floor.

IV: Ouch..

I look at him laughing.

Me: Get up...

He get up I pull him on top of me, I can feel my dick twitch, he seems uncomfortable I guess he feels it too as it grows bigger.

IV: Uhm you said you're hungry I will...I should...Uhm...

He tries to get away but I hold him still.

IV: Letho..

I kiss him, it's getting hot as I feel his hand going down to my crotch, he brushes my dick over my pants, I groan deepening the kiss.

Me: Fuck...

I untie his gown he is in his pyjama pants only.

He unzip my pants and his warm hand grabs my balls.

Me: Aaahh...

He massage them then stroke my dick, he go on until I cum so hard.

Me: Shit..Aah fuck..

He get up and walk away as I am still trying to catch my breath, he gives me a towel I wipe myself and a bit on my pants, he sleep next to me now looking shy.

Me: Are you okay?

IV: I want to know what's happening between us Kuhle.

Me: Like I said I like you and love spending time with you.

He nods.

IV: So is it okay to assume that Uhm we are together.

Me: Don't assume, we are together.

IV: Ok.

Me: And you don't have to change yourself.

His face changes then he move away.

Me: That surgery costs a lot of money and it's risky IV, leave it alone, don't even think about it!

IV: I will raise that money, I know I'm not rich like you people but I will do it! I will have enough money to do it!

Me: So I am you people now?

IV: I don't like the fact that you undermine me.

Me: How did I undermine you now?

IV: You don't think I can raise that money just because I am not rich! That's undermining my capabilities.

Me: So you want to prove a point with this shit!

IV: Don't call it shit it's what I want!

Me: It's bullshit!

We are now sitting in bed facing each other I can tell he is angry his whole face is pink.

IV: Get out..

Me: I'm not going anywhere until you understand that whatever you call that surgery is crap, nonsense total bullshit..

He slap me then quickly get up and stand a bit far, I chuckle.

Me: I dare you do that again, ngizokukhaba unye.(I will kick you, you'll shit yourself)

IV: You should leave.

Me: Nx..

I wear my t-shirt and shoes, fix my pants then go to him, I grab the back of his neck not too tight.

Me: Use that money you saved because there won't be any surgery here.

IV: You can't tell me what to do, I just met you for what? Only 5 seconds and you think you can dictate me, no.

I walk out and find a new female tenant hanging her clothes.

Me: Hey.

She blush.

Her: Prince Uhm Sbani, Letho..

I chuckle, as she look at my left hand, they know only two brothers are single.

Me: I'm Lethokuhle.

I give her my hand, we handshake.

Me: How are you finding this place so far?

Her: There is some peace and quiet I love it.

Me: Good to hear.

My phone vibrates on my pocket I take it out,
"Trying to make me jealous huh?"

I chuckle.

Me: "Not everything is about you IV".

I put it back in my pocket, but it vibrates again.

"I am leaving".

Me: Sis I will see you okay, have a nice stay here.

Her: Thank you.

I go back to IV's room and find him chewing his nails.

Me: So you gonna threaten me about leaving now?

IV: You just said we are together but you are flirting with that girl.

Me: Was I flirting?

IV: I'm leaving..

I shake my head looks like I have a special one here.

Me: Don't you think it's too soon for all these fights?

IV: Which is why I want to walk away from this now.

Me: Ok..

He widens his eyes.

Me: You can go.

He blinks rapidly.

IV: Oh...I will pack.

Me: I will help you.

I watch him as he slowly open the closet and take out his suitcase luggage.

He opens it and sit on the floor, I sit in front of him, I am watching him as he packs, he is trying so hard to blink the tears away, he keeps biting his lower lip, I have seen this, depressed people try so hard to get away from people, most of them are scared of rejection so they remove themselves just to avoid disappointment, I saw it with Niko I am seeing it in IV.

Me: Hey..

He keeps his head down, I pull him to me, he straddle me, my hands are on his back and his are wrapped around my neck his head is on my shoulder.

Me: Don't do that to me.

He huffs.

Me: You gonna be okay.

IV: I won't, it's been years.

Me: But that Surgery is risky you might not wake up.

IV: I will take that risk once I have all the money I need.

I sigh holding him tight.

Me: You are not leaving right?

IV: No I'm not.

Me: Can you go out with me?

He look at me.

IV: As in like a date?

Me: Yeah you can call it that.

He smiles and nod a little.

Me: Okay, I will wait for you to get ready.

IV: Okay.

He get off me and go to the bathroom, he comes back after a while fully dressed, I guess he is not comfortable to be naked around me.

I take him to have lunch with me at the hotel so we can have some privacy.

Me: So...Uhm how long do you think it will take to raise this money?

IV: If my mother would let me breath a little, maybe 6 months I would have made at least half.

I nod.

IV: You have a problem with transgender?

Me: No I have a problem with you wanting to undergo that surgery which can cause some serious damage if something goes wrong.

IV: That's why I am raising money so I can get the best doctors overseas to do it.

I sigh.

Me: Ok..

We've been together for a while now and I can see that he is in so much pressure with his mother and sister demanding money and also trying to save this money, he'd rather buy

small portions of food just so he can raise that money, I am worried about him this is getting scary.

He just left me in bed to get some food at the mall, I get up and search his computer, I see that he is in the process of donating his sperms, this is what worries me because when he is this desperate he can do anything to get money. I go to the bathroom to take a shower, once I'm done I walk out and find him dishing up.

IV: Hey baby.

Me: Yeah..

IV: Tomorrow I won't be available the whole day I am going somewhere.

Me: Somewhere doesn't have a name?

IV: I'm going out with some friends.

I nod.

Me: How much do you need?

IV: Huh?

Me: How much do you need, I can see you are even willing to sell your kidney for this, so tell me how much is this surgery I will give you the money.

He stares at me.

Me: Do a quotation on how much are flight tickets, the accomodation then the actual surgery I will give you all of it.

I take my keys and jacket then walk out, I didn't even eat his breakfast.

I get home and sit in bed thinking. Later I go through my finances, checking my savings. My phone rings.

Me: Yeah.

IV: Are you coming back today.

Me: No.

IV: Oh...

Me: Goodnight.

IV: Ok..Uhm I cooked for two.

Me: You will warm it up for yourself tomorrow.

IV: Ok sure.

I get in bed and sleep.

In the morning I start by his place.

I stand by the door watching him sitting on the floor with his legs crossed.

Me: Meditating?

He look at me.

I sit in front of him holding his hands.

Me: You want to be with me right?

He nods.

Me: I will pay for you to change your appearance if that's what you want but not surgery please my love.

IV: I won't do it anymore I can see you are against it so I won't do it anymore.

Me: Really?

He nods.

IV: I am thinking of buying a second hand car with that money.

Me: You want a car?

IV: Yes.

Me: Can you drive?

He chuckles.

IV: I'm not just a pretty face.

Me: And you're pretty!

He giggles.

Me: I love you.

IV: You do?

Me: A lot..so Uhm I think it's time you meet my family.

IV: NO! Hell No!

Me: Why not?

IV: Those identical people freak me out I can't baby, no.

Me: Come on you will get to meet even Grandma.

IV: Hhayi...

I laugh with the way he said that.

Me: Please..

IV: No Letho..no.

I sigh.

Me: Ok.

I look at him, he look down, there is something very attractive about him, I kiss him.

Me: These coming holidays let's go somewhere.

IV: Like a vacation?

Me: Yes.

IV: Oh..where?

Me: Anywhere you like even out of the country.

He widens his eyes.

IV: That's gonna cost a lot of money.

Me: I think you are worth every penny I have.

He hugs me tight.

IV: I would love to go out of the country but I wish to see Mpumalanga first, I heard it's beautiful there.

Me: Then we are going there first.

IV: Thank you so much.

It's the holidays and I am at home packing up while he is video calling me.

Me: Have you packed?

IV: Yes.

Me: Show me?

He moves his phone on the bed, I see a lot of bags, matching bags.

Me: You know it's only for 6 days right?

IV: Yes, so?

Me: Why do you have three bags?

IV: One is my cosmetics, the other one it's my underwear and the bigger one it's my clothes.

Me: Couldn't you pack everything in one bag?

IV: No..

Me: Yhooo!

IV: I miss you.

Me: In an hour I will be there to pick you up.

IV: I can't wait...

I drive to his place and find him wearing grey tracksuits looking so cute, he get up excitedly and hug me.

Me: You look excited.

IV: I am excited.

I drive to King Shaka Airport, I keep looking at him, how happy he is.

The flight takes off, he is holding my hand looking out the window like a little kid.

Me: It's your first time flying?

He nods with glassy eyes.

I kiss the back of his hand.

We reach our destination and he goes crazy taking selfies and everything.

We are having a great time here, he seems happy and free.

Me: I have a gift for you.

IV: Oh what is it?

I give him a box it's wrapped up, he slowly opens it and gasps.

IV: No way!

I smile.

Me: I saw how much you love taking those selfies and i think you need a phone with a great quality camera.

IV: An iPhone Letho?

Me: Yeah..

He can't stop hugging me and kissing me, he opens it and he takes the first picture of me and him together.

IV: Thank you I love it..Oh my God!

Today we are going back home it has been a great week but we have work tomorrow.

I am sleeping facing up, he get on top of me.

IV: I wish we didn't have to go.

Me: Me too, it's been great here.

IV: Thank you for this Lethokuhle, I'm really grateful.

We kiss and it's getting heated real quick, we are taking off each other's clothes, mmy pants are off and so are his, we are naked now still on top of me.

Me: Fuck, I want you so bad..

I flip us over now I am on top of him, his dick is semi hard.

Me: I want you...

He bite his lower lip.

IV: I have never done it like this before.

I stare down at him.

Me: You have never been intimate with a man before?

IV: It never went this far I'm sorry I didn't...

Me: Don't be sorry it's okay..

We kiss again, I get up and look for condoms, luckily I have them in my bag.

I go back to bed and we kiss all over again.

Me: Do you want this?

He nods a little. I use a lot of lubricant on the condom so I don't hurt him, I slowly try to thrust he hold me tight.

Me: Tell me if i'm hurting you okay..

He nods, I keep trying till I am fully in, I can feel the starches on my back. I slowly move for a while he wraps his arms around my neck kissing me. I finally cum and get off him discarding the condom in the bathroom then I sleep next to him.

Me: Hey, I didn't hurt you right?

IV: No,it was good.

I kiss him and look at the time.

Me: We should get ready to go.

We take a flight back to Durban and go to his flat, he looks happy and that's all I want.

We've been together for over 6 months now and I think I want my family to know him already, we've managed to hide our relationship from the media too, so we don't post each other or anything, I came back from school earlier than him so I am waiting for him to come back.

He walk in and put his bags down and come hug me.

IV: Hey love.

Me: Baby..

He sit next to me taking off his shoes.

Me: I don't want to hide this anymore, I want my family to know about you.

IV: Oh but don't you think it's too soon.

Me: We've been hiding for 6 months!

He nods.

Me: So tomorrow are you coming with me to eat lunch with my family?

IV: But what if they don't like me?

Me: I know they will, trust me..

I am fetching him at his place I find him already dressed in black jeans and a black shirt and a black coat that is just on his knees it's a bit cold outside.

Me: Morning.

He nods, he looks nervous.

IV: Can't we do this another day?

Me: Everything is gonna be okay, let's go.

I take his scarf from bed and help him put it around his neck then kiss him.

I drive in the yard he keeps rubbing his hands together.

We walk in and everyone is already seated around the huge table in Grandfather's house but him and his wife Fiona are back home, grandma is here though with grandpa Luh.

Me: Hello everyone.

Ziyanda: Oh hey I see you brought a friend, welcome you can have a seat.

She is smiling, we sit down.

Ziyanda: Introduce us Lethokuhle!

I laugh.

Me: How when there is so many of you here, where do I even start?

Ziyanda: You can start by telling us who this young good looking guy's name is.

Me: His name is Irvin, IV Khoza.

Ziyanda: Oh hey IV.

I roll my eyes, she is too forward.

IV: Hi ma'am.

Ziyanda: Don't be shy I am a lovely soul, we all are.

Everyone chuckles, I look at Niko, she is smiling then look away. We eat while listening to grandma praising herself about her good

looks and everything you can think off, we have been laughing none stop.

Luyolo: But my wife is right, she is the hottest woman in the world.

We laugh.

Ziyanda: So IV what do you do?

IV: I'm a teacher ma'am.

Ziyanda: Oh that's nice, birds of the same feather kind of vibe huh..

I laugh, she is crazy.

Me: Uhm so uh...IV and I are together, he is my partner.

I look at him, he is looking down, Niko is over there looking excited.

Nadia: Ooh..

I look at her.

Nadia: Together as in like a couple?

Me: Yes Landi..

She smiles and nod.

Nadia: That's good..

Warm air fills the room we bow our heads as Mkhulu shows up, I look at IV he looks freaked out, I hold his hand.

Mkhulu: There is nothing good about this!
Ichilo..(disgrace).

We all look at him..

Me: Mkhulu..

Mkhulu: Ichilo! (Disgrace!)

He vanishes leaving all of us in silence.

Nadia: Why is it a disgrace for Lethokuhle to have a partner of the same gender I mean it's not new in this family so what is that all about?

He shows up again looking a bit calmer now, now I want answers from him.

Mkhulu: Hlukana nalomfana manje
Lethokuhle.(Break up with this boy now
Lethokuhle)

Me: Ngobani?(Why?)

Mkhulu: Sengikhulumile. (I have spoken)

Langa: Mkhulu I think it's only fair you tell him why? I married Sfiso, Nadia married Pamella why is it now a problem.

Mkhulu: Ihlazo elikhulu leli Langelihle, laba bobabili abakwazi ukuthandana. (this is a huge disgrace, these two can't be in love)

I move back my chair and get up, I take IV's hand and walk away.

Mkhulu: Lethokuhle!

I ignore him, we get in my car and drive to his place, he takes off his clothes and get in bed, I get in next to him holding him tight, until Mkhulu explains to me why I can't be with someone I love, there won't be any break ups here period!

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 47

*

LETHOKUHLE

*

I have been avoiding my family, I packed a few clothes and I am going to stay with IV for a while. We are in bed we haven't talked about what happened with Mkhulu the other day.

IV: Kuhle..

Me: Baby..

IV: Who was that?

I know who he is talking about.

Me: Our great grandfather, Gumede.

IV: Why does he show up like that?

Me: I guess he is one of those strong ancestors.

He nods.

IV: So Uhm your ancestors doesn't want you to be with me?

Me: They don't have a say in what I do with my life.

IV: It won't work though, I heard how ancestors can turn on you and things go pretty bad.

Me: I don't care..

IV: But we...

Me: IV hayii man!

I shout getting up.

Me: I don't want to talk about this!

I wear my clothes.

IV: Manje uyaphi? (Now where are you going?)

Me: Out!

I grab my keys and walk out banging the door, I am frustrated.

I get a few beers then drive back to the flat after driving around for a while. I walk in and find him busy in the kitchen.

I open the can and drink it all up.

IV: Uhm baby Nadia called and said you should call her back.

Me: Why did you answer my calls?

IV: Uhm it was ringing none stop, I'm sorry.

I take my phone and switch it off.

Today I am at work I drive in and Sbani's car is behind me, I sigh stepping out the car then walk away.

Sbani: Lethokuhle!

He shouts.

Me: Yeah.

Sbani: You are avoiding me now?

Me: I have work to do.

Sbani: Don't do that, we all want answers from Mkhulu about this come on, dad said you

should come home so he can summon grandfather.

Me: I'm not in the mood for that old man Sbanisethu.

He sighs.

Sbani: Please just come home so you can find the answers.

Me: I will see.

I try so hard not to let my students feel that I am not okay. During lunch IV always calls me but today lunch time is almost over and he hasn't called, I just let him be.

Later I go to his place to change first.

IV: You are going somewhere?

Me: You didn't call today.

IV: I thought you needed some space after shouting at me for answering your phone.

Me: I'm going home for a while but coming back soon.

IV: Ok I will cook dinner.

I nod and walk out.

I get home and Nadia quickly get up and hug me.

Nadia: Are you Okay?

Me: Yeah..

Ntsika go straight to the point, calling out Mkhulu but he takes his time, we are all sitting quietly, he finally shows up.

Mkhulu: Ntsikayekhaya.

Ntsika: Mkhulu we need answers, you can't just talk to a child like that in front of his partner and not state reasons for what you said.

He sighs..

Mkhulu: Ngiyazi kuzobanzima Lethokuhle.(I know it's gonna be hard) but kumele umele.(you have to leave him).

Me: I want to know why?

Mkhulu: Nakhiwe ngembewu yomuntu oyedwa.(You aree made from the same man's seeds)

I look at him confused now all the elders are looking down.

Me: What does that mean?

Suddenly I don't understand my language.

Mkhulu: Umfowenu(He is your brother)

I feel like my world is coming to an end, I look at Landile but she is keeping her head down.

Me: No..

Mkhulu: Ngiyaxolisa Phakathwayo (I'm sorry Phakathwayo)

Me: Then why let me fall for him, why didn't you give me a warning sooner! You do that to everyone here, you did it with Lethu when he forced to be with Niko he just didn't want to accept it so why didn't you warn me too
Mkhulu!

I am now on my feet.

Me: Why?

Mkhulu: Angeke sikuvezelwe konke Nathi, ngikubone loku sowumlethe layikhaya.(We are not shown everything, I only saw this when you brought him here).

I sit down shaking my head, everyone is quiet.

I get up and walk out.

Nadia: Lethokuhle..

I lean on my car looking down.

Nadia: I'm sorry.

Me: It's fine..

I get in my car and drive to a club, I am drinking vodka like it's water, how can this happen, why did it have to be like this. My head is spinning.

Bouncer: Sir are you okay?

Me: Yeah..

Bouncer: You can't drive like this is there anyone we can call?

Me: No..

He speaks to someone they keep looking my way then one of them put a phone on his ear.

After a while I see Landile walking in.

Me: Why are you here?

Nadia: They called me to get you.

Me: I'm fine..

Nadia: You can't drive.

Me: I said I'm fine!

Nadia: Letho..

Me: Leave me alone okay! You did this, it's your fault!

She look at me.

Me: No good deed goes unpunished Landile!
And I am the one getting the punishment now!
You wanted kids but didn't think about what would happen in future, look at me now! I fell in love with my fucken brother! He is my half sibling!

People are taking videos and pictures but I don't care

Nadia: Let's go home.

Me: No..I'm fine here.

Nadia: Please..

I walk out getting in my car but she quickly open the door and drag me out.

Nadia: You want to die, you are drunk!

I leave her there and book into a nearby hotel, I go straight to bed.

In the morning I wish I didn't wake up, I wish I died in my sleep.

I drive to IV's place I don't even know what I will say to him.

I knock on the door, he opens the door and hug me tight but I can't hug him back.

IV: I was worried about you, you left your phone and your family kept calling, I didn't answer it though.

I go to the closet and get my bag, I start packing my clothes.

IV: Kuhle..

I continue to pack.

IV: What is going on?

I don't even have energy to talk.

IV: Uhm are you breaking up with me? Is it because I answered your phone yesterday?

I pick my bag up, he sit down as I walk to the door.

IV: Your phone is over there.

I take it and walk out, I get in my car I took it this morning where I left it just opposite the club. He stands next to the window I roll it down looking at him, his eyes are red.

IV: I think you left this by mistake.

He gives me my t-shirt, I take it, he walk away, I wipe my eyes and drive back home. I find everyone sitting in the lounge I don't greet I

just walk pass them going to my room and throw my bag on the floor. My phone vibrates.

"I'm sorry if I did something wrong, please forgive me" I want to throw the phone on the wall so bad.

"I love you Kuhle, can we please talk".

I switch it off and get in bed facing up, someone knocks and open the door it's my brothers, they sit next to me.

Sbonga: Letho..

Me: What do you want?

Sbonga: To know how you feel.

Me: I'm pretty sure you know the answer to that Boh, I mean how would you feel if someone were to tell you that you are related to Sniko, you Lethu related to Precious? Huh how would you feel?

They keep quiet.

Me: Stop asking me obvious questions.

Sbonga: I'm sorry..

Later I switch on my phone, it rings immediately, it's IV I put it in my ear not saying anything.

IV: Can we meet please you owe me an explanation Kuhle.

Me: Just forget about me okay.

I ask my brothers to give me some space.

I am woken up by a knock on my door then the door opens, I sit up as he slowly close the door.

Me: Why are you here?

IV: I asked them to open for me.

He sit in my bed.

IV: I saw your video trending, I heard you saying you fell in love with your brother.

I look down.

IV: What is going on?

I sigh wiping my face.

Me: Please leave Irvin..

IV: Just tell me what's going on Lethokuhle! I deserve to know!

He shouts crying, I look up trying to stop the tears from falling. Nadia walk in causing IV to get up.

Nadia: Have a seat.

He sit back down.

Nadia: You know I was married to a woman right?

IV nods wiping his tears.

Nadia: Letho and his brothers are my biological kids.

She sighs.

Nadia: Pamella and I got an anonymous sperm donor then she carried our kids.

IV is staring at her.

Nadia: Now we just found out that you and my kids are from the same seed.

He look at him confused.

Nadia: It means the man who donated the sperms for us is your father.

IV: No.

Nadia: So that means you guys are half siblings.

My heart is in pieces as he says that.

IV shakes his head.

Nadia: You can't be together.

He slowly get up and nod.

IV: Ok.

He walk out, Nadia tries to hold my hand but I move it away.

Nadia: I... Lethokuhle..I'm sorry.

Me: Get out..

She get up and walk out.

It's morning and I feel worse than yesterday, I drive to the flat just for closure I need to hug him one last time, and tell him I love him because I do, I really do.

I walk in his flat and it's empty he took all his belongings, I quickly take my phone trying to call him but it takes me straight to voicemail.

I run to my car and drive to his school, I find him walking out of the gate, I park next to him and step out.

Me: Baby...

He look down.

Me: Uhm..IV I went to the flat and I didn't find your clothes there.

IV: I am leaving.

Me: To where?

IV: It doesn't matter, you are my brother right..

Me: You don't have to leave, let's do a DNA test, maybe they are wrong please, I can't just let you go.

He is staying at a hotel but I convince him to go back to the flat, we fix everything in silence, I already called the doctor now I am praying that Mkhulu made a mistake.

We are now waiting at the doctors office to give him our samples.

Doctor: So we are checking for possible half siblings DNA?

Me: Yes.

He nods.

Me: I can pay for you to speed up the whole thing.

He chuckles.

Doctor: There won't be a need for that sir, I will call you tomorrow for results.

Me: Thank you.

We go back to the flat, he takes another bed cover and sleep facing the other way.

Me: Uhm.. should I go?

He doesn't answer but he is sniffing.

Me: Baby..

IV: Stop calling me that! We are half siblings we can't be together.

Me: But we are waiting for the results.

IV: We are siblings I can feel it!

I get in next to him.

Me: But that doesn't change the fact that I love you..

IV: It does Kuhle, you heard what your grandfather said, we have to break up!

I kiss him, taking off out clothes, I make love to him, I refuse to believe that we are biologically related when I am in love with him like this. I hold him tight as he cries.

Me: I love you.

When the doctor called today I couldn't help but fear for what those results say.

We are sitting silently as the doctor go through the papers then put each one in front of us but we don't even take it.

He starts talking in what I would call riddles I am confused.

Me: Just tell us the results please.

Doctor: So you share 26.05% of your DNA

I look down.

IV: What..what does that mean?

Doctor: You are half siblings, some may share 25%, it varies.

He get up and walk out.

Me: Thank you.

I walk out and find him leaning on the car.

IV: What now?

I look down, I don't know what to say, so we just committed an accidental incest, I slept with my half brother.

He look at me with the eyes full of tears, I don't even know if it's okay to hug him now.

IV: I love you..

I wipe his tears.

IV: I want to leave.

Me: And go where?

IV: I don't know.

Me: I don't even know if I can hold myself when you are here, I love you too much.

I take him to his place, he sit in bed, I take a chair and sit in front of him holding his hands.

Me: I will pay you to go and be who you always wanted to be.

He cries harder.

Me: If you're here it won't be easy to let go..so I want you to go and be what will make you happy, I will pay for the surgery and everything you want.

I pull him up and hug him.

Me: I wish things were different, I saw a future with you, I wanted to be the one to make you happy for the rest of your life but I can now only do this for you.

I get him online tickets, he will be leaving in three days, that will give me enough time to get the money he will need to start the whole process then I will keep sending him any amount he will need going forward, I am just

scared for him, that Surgery, many things can go wrong.

I give him money to get the things he will need.

He is leaving tomorrow morning so I am helping him pack then give him a card, it has a lot of money in it and his ticket.

Me: I guess you will have to change the currency once you get there.

He takes the card.

Me: You are going to Thailand, the doctors there are highly recommended for this kind of surgery.

He nods, he is not okay.

Me: And please do me a favour.

IV: What is it?

Me: Give your doctor my number and also send his before you can start the surgery.

He nods.

Me: And also don't hesitate to call me if you need anything but I will keep sending some money.

He wipes his eyes and hug me, I look at him smiling.

Me: I won't be here to take you to the airport but your cab will be here 8:30 in the morning.

IV: So you won't take me to the airport?

I shake my head.

Me: It won't be easy seeing you leave.

IV: Ok, can you give this to my mother please.

He gives me a brown envelope.

IV: Her number is there you can call to meet up with her.

Me: You won't say goodbye?

IV: No, she will try to stop me.

I nod.

Me: Good luck.

He nods.

IV: I thought once this happens I would be happy but I'm not...

He says tears streaming down his face.

IV: I don't want to leave you.

Me: You have to go, I don't want you here okay!

He nods, my heart is breaking seeing him like this.

I take my things and walk out leaving him sobbing.

I go straight to my room and get in bed.

In the morning I drive to his place, I can see a cad diver putting his luggage in the boot, I am parking a bit far, he is standing next to a cab with a phone on his ear, mine rings it's him, but I don't answer, he keeps calling then finally stops, he get in the cab and it drives to the airport I am following slowly behind it. The driver helps him with the bags and he wheels them inside, I sigh and drive back home, he left with my heart, I was willing to give him my all.

The whole week ends with me locked inside my room, I will get a sick note or something to take to work I can't go there when I am feeling this way.

"Kuhle" I look around.

"I love you" he is smiling looking at me, I smile back.

Me: I love you too.

His smile is so beautiful. I wake up when there is a banging on my door and grandma is shouting my name, I just realised that I was dreaming about IV, I miss him and he haven't contacted me with his new number, I don't even know if he is safe.

I am sitting alone in the backyard my eyes are closed, I feel warm air I don't move nor open my eyes.

Mkhulu: Lethokuhle...

I want to cuss at him but I choose to keep quiet.

Mkhulu: Akukona ukuphela komhlaba. (it's not the end of the world)

Me: I didn't need to know that he is the child of the man who donated sperms for Landi and Ella, I didn't need to know...

Mkhulu: Bowufuna ukulalana nomfowenu omncane!?(you wanted to sleep with your little brother!?)

Me: It was going to be fine if I didn't know Mkhulu, now I know and it hurts okay! I wish you didn't tell me!

I am crying.

Me: And he is not my brother I am a Gumede not a Khoza or whatever that man's surname is.

He sighs.

Me: I hate you so much..

He look at me with soft eyes.

Mkhulu: Ngixolele.(forgive me)

Me: Just leave me alone!

Later I join them for dinner but I can't eat.

Ziyanda: Lethokuhle..

I look at her.

Ziyanda: I'm so sorry for everything.

I nod.

Ziyanda: Uhm how is he taking all of this?

Me: Who?

Ziyanda: Irvin.

Me: I don't know.

Ziyanda: Uhm..where is he?

Me: He went to Thailand.

She stares at me.

Me: He had to leave and i wish he never come back.

Ziyanda: What do you mean by that?

Me: I mean exactly that grandma! If he comes back here and move on I will kill him so I prefer he do that far from here.

She gasps.

Ziyanda: He is your brot...

Me: Say it and it will be the last time you see me in this house..

She look at me in shock.

Me: So let's all forget about ever meeting a person called Irvin shall we..

They all look at each other.

Me: Good..

I get up and walk away, I look for the letter to his mother, I call her and ask to meet, we meet at the mall, I find her already seated at spur sipping juice, she smiles when she sees me.

I sit opposite her.

Her: Prince..

Me: You can call me Lethokuhle.

She nods, I give her the letter, she slowly opens it then giggles.

Her: Why is Irvin sending me letters, couldn't he call.

I shrug my shoulders, she reads the letter with her eyes popped out.

Her: Where is my son?

Me: I don't know.

Her: But he gave you this letter!

I chuckle.

Me: You were part of the problem in his life, you failed to accept and support who he is, no wonder he didn't tell you he is leaving he knew you were probably going to quote bible verses and interpret them the way it suits you, judgemental "Christian".

Her: Tell me Where Irvin is!

Me: Worried that you won't be able to milk him his money?

She is fuming in anger, I get up and go back home, I search my call logs, messages and emails but there is nothing, maybe this is a

good idea, to never contact each other that way we can both move on but I will keep my promise about taking care of everything he needs there.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 48

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LETHOKUHLE

*

This is eating me up everyday, I haven't got enough sleep ever since he left, I dream about him, I still smell his scent on my skin and it doesn't help that he hasn't contacted for three

full weeks, I am getting worried and I just want to hear his voice so I can know he is okay.

I take my laptop and search the doctor's name that I did research on, I heard he is the best I know he would probably consult with him. I get his office number then buy a global airtime so I can call him.

It rings for a while then a lady speaks.

"Good day you are speaking to Esther, how may I help you?"

I clear my throat.

Me: I am calling from South Africa, my name is Lethokuhle Gumede, I called to ask if my friend Irvin Khoza came there for consultation? I am worried about him he hasn't called ever since he left three weeks back.

Esther: Ok sir let me check for you.

I hold for almost five minutes.

Esther: Can you spell his Surname for me.

I do that and wait once again.

Esther: Oh there he is, he came here two weeks back to consult and also start his hormone therapy, he is set to come back two days from now to start with Surgery.

Me: Ok thank you, Uhm did he leave his contact details there?

Esther: He did but I can't give you it's against this surgery's policy I have already given you too much information.

Me: Please I am his family I am worried I need to hear he is okay, please.

She sighs and give me IVs new number I immediately drop the call and dial his number, it rings four times but no one is answering.

Me: Come on...

I call again, I feel like I am dreaming when I hear the sound of his voice.

IV: Hello..

Me: How can you do this to me? You promised to call.

He sniffs.

IV: I called you the day I left but you never answered, I thought you wanted nothing to do with me.

Me: I was there at the airport..

IV: You were?

Me: Yes, but I wouldn't have been able to say goodbye.

We are quiet for a while.

IV: How did you get this number?

Me: Your doctor's receptionist gave it to me.

IV: Okay..

Me: How is everything? I heard about this hormone therapy.

IV: Yeah it's estrogen hormone therapy, that will induce my feminine physical traits and suppress the masculine ones.

Me: But there is nothing masculine about you baby.

He giggles driving me more madly in love.

Me: Are you okay there, do you have food? Is it a good place?

IV: Yes you gave me enough money, thank you.

Me: Ngiyakukhumbula.(I miss you)

IV: I miss you too.

I sigh.

Me: I thought by now I would have stopped loving you this way but it's not happening.

He cries all over again, I wipe my eyes.

Me: Baby...

IV: Yeah..

Me: Uhm...I want you to start a new life there after all this, don't come back here.

IV: Kuhle...

Me: Please, it will be better this way, we will move on eventually.

IV: Ok..

It breaks my heart hearing him sob over the phone and he is miles away I can't hold him.

Me: I love you.

IV: Are you still going to call me? Or we shouldn't call each other?

Me: I will call from time to time.

IV: Ok.

I huff and drop the call, it's 8 O'clock in the morning I guess it's 1 pm there in Thailand because it's 5 hours ahead of South Africa.

I go join the family for breakfast since it's the weekend.

I sit down and everyone is looking at me, I haven't been interacting with them for the past weeks so I guess they are shocked to see me here.

Miyah: Morning Letho..

Me: Hi mom.

She dish up a lot of food for me, I look at her.

Miyah: You should eat, have you seen yourself?

I nod, I looked at myself in the mirror today and I look sick, cheek bones are all out. I slowly eat but this lump I have in my throat makes it hard for me to swallow, I feel a hand on mine, it's Sbonga, I look at my hands they are shaking and he squeeze it, I can feel tears in my cheeks.

Nadia get up and walk around the table, she pulls me up and we go to my room, I sit down, she sit in front of me.

Me: I want mom.

She look down, I feel like a child I need my mother right now nothing else would make me feel better other than Ella's hug.

Nadia: Letho...

Me: I need her.

Nadia: But she is gone..

I cry so hard, I think she doesn't even know what to do, Pamella's death hits hard in a time like this.

I feel hands wrap around my shoulders.

Ziyanda: It's okay.

I get in bed and cover my head, I feel like I have lost everything.

I wake up it's dark outside, grandma walk in with a glass of water, she gives me some pills.

Ziyanda: For the headache.

And I do have a headache, I drink the pills, she fix my bed covers and check my forehead.

Ziyanda: You gonna be okay..

I nod, but I don't think so.

Ziyanda: We love you and you gonna be fine.

Late at night I try so hard not to call him but I find myself calling, I know he is sleeping.

IV: Mmmm.

Me: I'm sorry for waking you up.

IV: Kuhle..

Me: Can you Skype, I need to see your face.

IV: Yes..

We connect and when he shows my heart beats so fast, he keeps wiping his eyes then look at me, his face looks chubby.

Me: "How are you?"

He smiles.

IV: You are showing off, I don't know sign language.

I smile.

Me: Are you okay?

IV: No, I am gaining weight and I am always sleepy.

Me: It's the treatment?

IV: Yes.

Me: You gonna be okay, Uhm so do you have someone hitting on you there?

He shakes his head laughing.

IV: No, I am always indoors I bought enough food to last me a month.

Me: Good, You manage without a car?

IV: Yeah it's fine.

He giggles.

IV: Why is it good that no one is hitting on your little brother?

That moves something in me making me so angry.

Me: Goodnight IV..

IV: Uhm that was a joke I'm sorry I can see you don't like it.

I just switch off my laptop, no one will convince me to see him as my brother! Not grandfather or even DNA test results, I am in love with him, he is not my brother!

3 months later.

IV and I decided that we shouldn't call each other often because it complicate things between us and we always end up saying hurtful things we don't mean.

He is done with the treatment, tomorrow he has booked an appointment for Surgery, I am

anxious I don't know if he will be okay. I Skype him, he keeps getting more attractive and beautiful, YES he is beautiful, if only you could see him through my eyes.

IV: Kuhle..

He is cold, three days back I was rude to him.

Me: Hey, how are you?

IV: I'm hurt, the things you said to me were not right..

I look down in shame, I really said a mouthful, from a very sensitive topic about him not able to stand up to his Mom and sister to telling him that he will always be a man no matter what he does.

IV: I know I am a man but you saying that I am crazy for changing while you paid for this hurts because I thought I have your support in this.

Me: I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, I am just worried, what if something goes wrong.

IV: I know you paid for this but I think we should just stop talking to each other, I don't need this negativity when I am about to undergo such surgery, I don't need this...

He wipes his tears.

IV: Please never call me again.

Me: No, I'm sorry for the things I said baby, I am scared for you so I am hoping you change your mind.

IV: So you were just sending me away not that you really wanted this for me.

I did this so he can be away from me because I knew I wasn't going to stop seeing him here.

IV: Bye Kuhle..

Me: Please...

IV: If I don't make it after this surgery just know that I love you, thank you for all you have done for me.

Me: Don't talk like that.

The screen goes blank, I take my phone and try to call but he is not answering.

Mkhulu shows up, I look at him.

Mkhulu: Leave this boy alone Lethokuhle! We won't have you drag our family name through the mire committing incest!

He shouts.

Mkhulu: I won't repeat myself!
Uyangizwa?(you hear me?)

I nod.

Mkhulu: Kuhle.(Good)

He fades away, I sigh, that was a warning for sure.

I am looking at the watch in the wall, IV is probably going to theatre now.

Niko: Hey..

I look at her.

Niko: Grandma is talking to you.

We are at the table eating, I look at grandma.

Ziyanda: I need you to drive me to the mall.

Me: Me?

Ziyanda: Yes.

Me: Ok.

I drive her to the mall but I'd rather be in my room, she buys groceries then we go back home.

Ziyanda: Help me unpack.

I help her.

Ziyanda: I miss the Letho that was always loud, loved helping me with shopping and packing.

Me: I grew up I guess.

She sighs.

Me: You know maybe if mom was here I wouldn't be feeling this way.

She look at me.

Ziyanda: But we are here trying to help you deal with this.

Me: But mom understood me better.

She nods.

Ziyanda: I was like that when mom passed away too what I can say is that it gets better.

Me: It got better when I met Irvin but I lost him too.

I go to my room. A day pass I am hoping he will call and tell me that the surgery went well.

My phone rings I am happy to see an international number.

Me: Hey I'm glad you made it.

Someone clears their throat.

Me: Uhm hello who is this?

I really thought it's IV.

"Hello sir I am doctor Robinson".

I stand on my feet, that's IV's doctor.

Me: Uhm, is Irvin okay? Did the surgery go well?

He sighs.

Me: He is okay right?

Doctor: The surgery was a success but..

Me: But what?

Doctor: A few hours after the surgery his heart stopped beating but we used emergency aid to restore the heartbeat and got the blood moving again.

I huff.

Me: So can I talk to him?

He sighs again.

Doctor: He is on mechanical ventilation since when his heart stopped for a few seconds he developed blood clots, he is in a coma.

Me: Is..is he going to be okay?

Doctor: We are monitoring him closely but for now we can only hope, he just needs support, he doesn't have family here?

Me: He has me, I will look for the next available flight from South Africa.

Doctor: Ok good, maybe if he hears a familiar voice he will wake up.

Me: Thank you for calling me.

I drop the call and quickly search for online tickets to Johannesburg then Thailand. I am frustrated to see that I can only get the flight at 6 pm the next day, and it's a 13 hours flight so it will take me 3 days to get to see him.

I pack my clothes and passport all the documents I will need.

I go to the family so I can tell them I'm leaving.

I sit down.

Me: I am leaving for Thailand tomorrow afternoon, but I will take a flight to Johannesburg in the morning.

Nadia: What?

Me: Irvin is in a coma.

Ziyanda: Oh no, is he going to be okay?

Me: I don't know that is why I am leaving.

I get up but I feel like someone is poking my heart with a knife, I groan sitting down.

Sbonga: Letho..

I breathe in and out then get up again this time
I fall on the ground, funny thing I am awake
but I can't feel my arms, hands then my legs, I
am just numb.

Sbonga: Lethu let's take him to the car.

Mkhulu: No..

I can hear all of them talking but I can't see any
of them I don't know how because I can feel
my eyes are wide open, all I see is a grey.

Nadia: What do you mean no Mkhulu, we have
to take him to the hospital.

Mkhulu: He doesn't listen, a hospital won't
help him.

I want to talk but I can't move my lips.

Nadia: Please don't do this to my son, I will talk
to him, please.

Mkhulu: Nothing good comes out of two
related people sleeping together, he will learn,
when I warn someone I expect them to listen!

Ntsika: Please Gumede, we will talk to him.

I call feel cold tears from the corner of my eyes.

Mkhulu: So you would allow Nqoba to sleep with Kayise because they are not from the same womb but they are your seeds Ntsika? Because this is what this boy is doing! Not in our name!

Nadia: Then what Mkhulu, he shouldn't be a Gumede if he fell in love with his half brother which he knew nothing about!?

Mkhulu: I am saying not in our name Landile! A Gumede committing incest! Never!

Nadia: Ok, then I am changing their surname.

Mkhulu: Changing them to what!?

Nadia: Any surname that won't hurt my kids like this for something they didn't know.

Mkhulu: I warned him!

Nadia: I don't care, I am going to change their surname it's fine.

Her voice is shaky.

Nadia: Bhuti I am leaving with my kids, I can't take this.

I feel myself coming back, I move my body and it moves, I sit up, Nadia is sitting on the floor.

Ntsika: Landile you know you can't leave.

Nadia: I can and I will, Lethu, Sbani and you Sbonga go pack for your brother and yourselves, we are leaving.

Ziyanda: Hhayi Landile.

Nadia: I have been quiet for too long, first they let me grow up painfully on the streets alone now they are hurting my kids I can't take it anymore.

Me: Landile..

Nadia: You are going to Thailand because today we are leaving everything connecting us to the Gumedes, everything!

Grandma takes her phone crying.

Ziyanda: Luyolo...come home please.

Mkhulu: So you are choosing to disobey us.

Nadia: I am choosing my kid's happiness.

My phone rings in my pocket, I slowly take it out.

Me: Hello.

Doctor: Uhm sir...

Me: Is everything okay?

Doctor: We lost him.

Me: What do you mean?

Doctor: He didn't make it, he stopped breathing and this time we couldn't bring him back.

I let go of the phone my whole body tense up.

Me: He is lying to me, no..

Ntsika: Lethokuhle!

I look at him, he touch my nose I look at his hand it has blood.

Ntsika: Mkhulu..

He is staring down at me, I feel cold.

Me: Did you do this?

He shakes his head and fades away.

I look at grandma.

Me: The doctor says Irvin didn't make it.

She sighs with tears in her eyes.

Four days later, I am at the airport waiting for his belongings, they said he signed to be cremated should he not make it during or after surgery.

Someone comes wheeling the bags and it's his that he had the day we took a vacation to Mpumalanga. I put them in my car and drive home, Grandpa managed to stop Nadia from leaving home so we all stayed.

I am in my room, I slowly open his bag and I see the phone I got for him, I switch it on, there is a picture of me, I am wearing my pants but nothing on my upper body, I think he took it in that vacation as well.

I sigh and take the scarf he had on the time I introduced him to my family, I look at it for a

while then pack all of his clothes in my closet, I don't think I will ever heal from this, ever.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 49

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LETHOKUHLE

*

9 Months later

I am just a lonely man going to school then back at home, I don't even like going out anymore.

I just came back from school so I am looking for something to wear, I open my closet taking out my t-shirt my eyes move to IV's clothes. I

wear my t-shirt then take all his things out going to the back, I go to my car to find some petrol and a lighter. I pour everything with petrol then light it up, I watch it as it turns into ashes.

Me: I am moving on from you today, I have been holding on for too long.

I go back to my room and take his phone that still looks new, I open his gallery going through his pictures which half of them is me and him together.

I switch it off and put it back in a drawer then go join my family, they are conversing but I am not here it still hurts me that IV left me yet it's been months, almost a year I don't know man maybe I love too much but my heart gets heavy everytime I try to get close to someone.

The buzzer goes off and Nkosazana opens for whoever it is.

A man, IV's mother and two Detectives walk in.

Detective: Afternoon boGumede.

Dad greets them back.

Nadia: Sokhela what brings you here?

Sokhela: This lady and Mr Khoza here reported a missing person two months ago, their son.

I look at this Khoza guy.

Sokhela: And the mother says he was last seen with your son, which one is it ma'am?

She looks around in confusion.

Me: It was me..

They nod.

Khoza: Where is he?

I sigh.

Me: You've been missing for a while in his life sir and no one searched for you.

He stares at me I don't know if he is trying to intimidate me but it's not working.

My family is looking at me too, I promised to tell his mother that he is dead but changed my mind.

Sokhela: Sir we have to take you in for questioning.

Me: There's no need, I will answer everything you need to know right here.

Ntsika: You can have a seat.

They sit down.

Me: I have just one question before you guys ask me anything, why did you search for him only two months ago when you last saw him 11 months ago?

Lady: I thought he was going to come back some day but he hasn't.

I chuckle.

Me: Your son is dead.

She gasps.

Me: He went to Thailand for a gender transitioning surgery.

They look at me in shock.

Me: But I guess there were complications so his heart stopped and he died.

Lady: What! Gender what?

Me: You heard me and in the letter I gave you he told you that he wants to live the life he always dreamed of, he told you he wanted to be who he felt he was inside so I don't know what's shocking, because I am shocked that it's only now you look for him.

Lady: Where did he get the money because I know he didn't have enough to go out of the country for that stupid surgery.

Me: I gave it to him.

Khoza: What? Why?

Me: Because I loved him.

Khoza: So you sent our son to die out there?

Me: No I sent him to go live his life the way he always dreamed of.

Khoza: Officers take him away! He has a hand in my son's death.

I chuckle.

Me: Was I part of that Surgery perhaps?

Khoza: You gave him the money!

Me: Yes I did but it was entirely up to him, he signed for that surgery and also for his body to be cremated should he die during or after surgery and that's what they did.

The mother screams going on her knees, her husband is still staring at me.

Khoza: You look familiar.

Me: Yeah you probably saw us on TV sir.

Ntsika laughs spitting out the tea he was drinking.

Khoza: Where is your father?

Me: Right here, meet King Ntsika, twin brother Nkanyezi, Langa and Sfiso, they are my fathers and there is Landile over there my mother.

He is getting irritated.

Sokhela: Do you know the name of the doctor that was operating him?

Me: Dr Salm Robinson.

He writes down then get up.

Sokhela: We will come back if we have more questions sir, thank you for your time.

I nod. The man help his wife up and walk out. I sigh looking down, it still hurts especially when someone brings it up.

Sbani: So we just met our father a second ago?
I look at him.

Sbani: That was meant to be a joke Letho don't kill me.

Me: Your joke is dry like you, so fuck off.

Sbani: Ay unganginyeli Wena.(Don't shit on me).

Me: I will fuck you up right now.

He get up.

Sbani: Oh I'd love to see you try mama's boy..

Nadia: Sbani fuck off!

Sbani: But he...

Nadia: Stop acting like a child and sit your ass down and never in your life go around calling

strangers father as if you have daddy issues,
stupid boy!

Sbani: I was joking people.

Nadia: And like he said, your joke is dry as fuck.

He sit down looking at me.

Me: Keep staring at me I will punch your face.

He smiles.

Sbani: I love you little bro.

Me: Go to hell.

Sbani: I'm just happy you are here with us
talking, I missed annoying you so much.

I chuckle.

Sbani: I'm glad you are finally healing I know it
must be hard.

Me: Yeah.

Sbani: Let's go out tonight it's been a while.

Sbonga: Yeah count me in..

Lethu: Me too.

I nod, maybe it's time I continue living freely I am single anyway.

We just walked in a club and it's buzzing people are having so much fun, this is where I met IV for the second time.

We sit at the bar, I look around wishing he would come and stand next to me ordering his drinks, I wish for a deja vu, a miracle.

I hear people laughing so loud the hair at the back of my neck stand up, I look behind me it's a group of ladies, one of them is facing the other way and three are looking our way.

Sbani: Ooh check those cute mommies, I am definitely getting laid tonight!

He sips on his glass then go to the ladies, when he get to them, one of them run out like she is being chased by something, Sbani comes back as the other girls walk out.

Lethu: You are scaring the ladies away brother.

He laughs.

Sbani: Aah that one has issues, the minute our eyes met she wanted to faint, I'm hot like that! We laugh, I walk out just to get some air, I am just standing there feeling the breeze from the sea that is not far from here.

"Ivy come on, we just got here". The ladies shout at one lady who is walking away. I see a car coming in the opposite direction in speed, I run to her and pick her up moving her away from the street. She is shaking my hands are on her waist she is facing the other way. I have goosebumps as she touch my hands removing them from her waist, her friends are here now but she still haven't faced me.

"Are you okay, oh my God you were almost hit by a car". One of the girls says hugging her, looks like she is crying.

"thank you Prince for saving her". Another one says causing this girl to walk away again until she get into the close by flat.

They sigh.

"I guess it was a bad idea to take her out, she is not ready".

Me: What's wrong with her?

"Uhm I don't know but it's been months locked up in her apartment so we were just trying to cheer her up today and she agreed now this happened, I feel bad".

I nod.

Me: What's your name?"

I ask the talkative one.

"I'm Andiswa but you can call me Andy".

I nod.

Me: Maybe we can have a drink or two it's on me, with your friends of course.

She look at them blushing they all agree.

Andy: We will check on Ivy later, she probably needs some time alone".

We go back inside the club and Sbani is thrilled to see the ladies, he loves girls I don't

remember him being in a serious relationship ever.

We have some fun but my mind keeps going back to the lady that was almost hit by a car. Sbani is having fun while my married brothers make sure no girl is near them and I am happy they are taking their marriages serious.

Andy: So Uhm when are you getting married Prince?

I laugh.

Me: When I find the love of my life.

She giggles.

Andy: Oh..okay.

We drink till late and then call it a night.

Sbani: I will see you guys in the morning..

He says wiggling his eyebrows I chuckle.

Me: Ok, be safe.

Sbani: Always brother..

We get a cab home and I go to bed.

In the morning Sbani calls so I can fetch him in those girl's flat. I drive there and park my car, I can see one girl walking in the room, I think she is the girl I saved yesterday. I step out of the car and go to where she went in. I knock for a while.

"who is it?" Says a voice inside, I blink shaking my head maybe it's in my head, that hoarse voice sounded familiar.

Me: Uhm I'm Lethokuhle, the guy from yesterday I wanted to check on you.

I hear the key turning I wait for the door to open but it doesn't, I slowly turn the handle, she was locking the door.

Sbani walk out from the opposite room with a girl behind him.

Sbani: Oh brother, you are here.

I nod and look at the girl, I think she said her name is Boni.

Me: Hi.

Boni: Hello..

Me: Is your friend okay?

Boni: Yeah she's fine, we talked this morning
thank you again for saving her.

Me: Ok.

I drive home and go to my room, I take IV's
phone and go through his pictures.

Me: I feel like you are here, so close to me.

I sigh.

Me: I miss you so much.

And after so many months without crying I
feel tears coming out of my eyes.

I wipe my tears and put the phone back, I look
for his scarf which is the only thing I left when I
burnt his clothes.

I go back to the club and today it's chilled
playing some soft music and it's not packed
since it's Sunday.

A woman goes on stage and take a mic, she
greet first.

Her: I can see that most people are here with their partners today, it's a special night we have anonymous here, she wants to sing a song, let's give her the round of applause.

She stand on stage facing the other way.

"I am going to sing a song by Sam Smith title: The lover that I lost" she says then the piano starts playing, she starts singing and a certain part makes my eyes water, the song is speaking to me in some way.

"You've been on my mind, every single night

I can't visualize life without you

I've been tryna go a week without losing sleep

But there's something that I need to go through" I wipe my eyes as she sings that part.

Once she's done she goes off stage, she takes a seat alone facing the opposite direction, I stand behind her, she has long locks falling on her back.

Me: Hi..

Still she doesn't turn but just nod her head.

Me: I love your voice, you can sing you even made me shed a tear.

She chuckles.

Me: Can I join you?

"I am waiting for someone". That voice again.

Me: You are the girl I saved yesterday?

She quickly get up.

Me: Are you shy? I noticed even when you sang you were facing the other way.

"I should go".

Me: No please I will go, Uhm your name is Ivy?

She literally runs away, maybe she is one of those people called introverts even when she is out she prefers to be alone.

I bump into Andy when I go back to my seat.

Andy: Oh hey Prince Uhm..

Me: Lethokuhle.

Andy: Right, how are you?

Me: I'm good, you can sit with me.

We sit down.

Me: So was that your friend singing a few minutes ago?

Andy: Which friend?

Me: The girl I saved yesterday.

She look around.

Andy: I didn't see her going out today, I thought she locked herself in.

Me: Maybe it wasn't her then.

She nods.

Andy: So Uhm I have a party next week Friday, Boni tells me she invited your other brother can you also come.

Me: What kind of a party? Phela nowadays we even have divorce parties.

We laugh.

Andy: Oh it's just a birthday party.

Me: You are throwing yourself a birthday party? Where is the boyfriend?

She giggles.

Andy: Well there is no boyfriend, I am single.

I nod.

Me: I see.

Andy: I never thought one day I would sit in the presence of a Prince like this close.

She keeps going on talking and to be honest I am not interested in her at all, she is really pretty but she lacks something yet I don't know what it is.

Me: I will be there.

Andy: Aaaah thank you so much! People at home are gonna be so jealous, two Princes attending my party!

She screams excitedly.

Days go by and I am not looking forward to that party at all, I don't feel like going but Sbani begged me to go with him.

I am sitting in my bed wearing my sneakers,
Sbani walk in and look at me laughing.

Me: What is it?

Sbani: Look at me.

I look at him and quickly take off my white t-shirt, he laughs.

Sbani: Come on..

I look for a red one.

Me: There is no way I am matching with you,
we are too old for that.

Sbani: You are the boring brother I wish I could
take at least Lethu because Sbonga is just as
upright.

Me: Then go alone.

I wear my Red shirt and black pants, she didn't
tell us the theme.

We walk out and he drives to the party, the
party is outdoors there is a pool, ladies are in
their short dresses and there is a big table set
outside, and a lot of guys are here as well,

music is pumping. We step out of the car and the girls start screaming and snaps are taken Sbani seems to be enjoying the attention but I'm not.

They finally gives us a break, we join everyone. Andy comes to greet us with hugs.

Andy: Thank you so much for coming guys.

Me: Uhm where is that friend of yours?

Andy: She is getting ready in her room.

I nod and make my way inside, I knock once and open the door, music is playing, my ringtone to be precise and the lady is trying to put the necklace on, I get closer and touch her hand, she is a little startled.

Me: Let me help you..

I move her locks to the side and put on her necklace, my heart almost stops when I see "Ivy Kay", I step back a little.

Me: IV.

She doesn't answer.

Me: Please turn around, it can't be..

She remains in one position.

Me: Please....

My voice is shaky, she tries to walk away but I pull her arm, she still her head away.

I turn her around, her face is wet with tears, it's him, I mean her.

Me: It's you...

She shakes her head and run out the door leaving me stuck where I am standing but how, why would she lie about her death, I mourned for IV, I cried for months while he was right here all along, how cruel can one be.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 50

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IV-IVY KAY

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I am packing my clothes so fast the cab is waiting for me outside, after running out I only came back 5 minutes ago, the party is over I didn't want to bump into Letho.

I hear the handle turning, I freeze.

Letho: I told your cab driver to fuck off, sit down.

I go to bed and sit still not facing him, he sit as well.

Letho: When did you come back?

Me: Six....six months ago.

He chuckles.

Letho: I see.

Me: I was going to tell you.

Letho: How, when you made me believe you are dead?

He is too calm I am getting scared, I know at some point he is gonna flip.

Me: I'm.. sorry.

Letho: I don't wanna hear that, I want an explanation.

Me: You said I shouldn't come back.

Letho: So..what? You wanted to hurt me by faking your own death?

I don't answer.

Letho: You better answer me, I need answers.

Me: I thought it was going to be easier for you to move on when you believe I'm dead.

Letho: Did I say I wanted to move on?

Me: No but we had to at some point.

Letho: Did you?

Me: Not yet.

He chuckles again.

Letho: Not yet...not yet.

He says laughing.

Letho: You are so selfish and self centred you know that.

Me: What did you want me to do? You are my broth...

Letho: Fuck off! Futsek man! I know my brothers and Wena you are nothing to me!

He shouts.

Me: Then leave me alone.

Letho: Ok.

I look down as he goes to the door.

Me: I never stopped loving you but the universe is against us being together, we can't run away from this.

Letho: Ok but just so you know, if I see you with someone else I will kill you and bury you in the mountain like a dog..

I cringe as he bangs the door, I get up and carry on packing, he walk in again.

Letho: You can try to run but I will find you, that's a promise.

He walk out again, I know he would never hurt me that is just anger talking, I know him.

I decide to leave in the morning because it's already late and I don't know where to go.

In the morning I am finishing up packing, I hear a knock on the door I go open and he stands there still wearing yesterday's clothes, his eyes are red.

Letho: Can I hug you?

I slowly nod, I can't help the sob that escapes my lips as my head lays on his chest, he is taller.

I can smell alcohol mixed with his expensive cologne.

Letho: God...

He doesn't let go for a while, he look at me with his hands on my cheeks, he has tears in his eyes.

Letho: God heard my prayers, it took a while but he heard me, I prayed for this day so hard, I longed to see your face just one more time, you're here..

I hold his hands as tears run down his face.

Letho: You don't know how broken I was, I tried to move on but I couldn't.

His voice is coming out as a whisper.

I hold his hand and we go sit in bed, he look at me smiling but you can see that behind that smile there is pain.

Letho: You look beautiful, this suits you best.

I smile.

Me: Thank you now I feel like myself, and I wouldn't have done it without you.

He look down.

Me: I'm sorry Kuhle.

He nods, this sadness makes me cry.

Me: I didn't mean to hurt you like this, I'm sorry.

He takes out the phone in his pocket, it's the phone he gave to me as a gift.

Letho: You can have it.

I take it, it has most of his pictures.

Letho; So, what now?

Me: I think we should stay away from each other.

Letho: It won't be easy now that I know you're here.

Me: See, that is why I lied, we shouldn't be together.

Letho: I don't see myself with anyone else but you.

Me: It might take some time but you will move on eventually.

He sighs.

Letho: Ok.

He get up.

Letho: I hope you're happy now that you got what you always wanted, being you.

Me: I would have been happier if I was given a chance to love and be loved unconditionally.

He wipes his face.

Letho: Bye Ivy..

He walk out, I sit down and weep I wish it was easy for my heart to stop loving him.

I have decided to stay, Letho hasn't come back for three days now I guess he finally accepted that we can't be together.

I am taking out trash I hear people giggling it's Boni and Sbani I don't greet I just pass them.

Sbani: Let me call my brother we should get going.

I walk back in the gate.

Sbani: Oh there you are...

I look up only to find Letho with Andiswa, they are coming from Andy's apartment. I look at him but he looks unbothered.

Andy: Oh hey Ivy meet my boyfriend Prince Lethokuhle, he is the guy who saved you the other day.

I look at Letho again, he gives me his hand I shake it with a lump in my throat.

I walk pass them.

Andy: We should do a double date.

I clear my throat they look my way.

Me: Don't close the gate my boyfriend is coming.

Andy: Ok baby.

I look at Letho, he is playing a dirty game and two can play that game.

I go to my room and cry I don't want to see him moving on he shouldn't do it here.

Later I can hear music playing in the car I look out the window it's Lethokuhle's car, he is supporting an obviously drunk Andy, I take a knife and walk out as they already walked in, I slash all his tyres then go back to my room.

After a few minutes I hear a banging on my door, I open the door he walk in and pin me on the wall his hand is on my neck but it's not tight.

Letho: What did you do?

I stare at him.

Letho: You gonna be a man that you are and fix my tyres right now!

He grabs my hand and drag me outside, he push me to his car.

Letho: Fix it!

I don't move I am hurt that he is going to remind me how much of a man I am, that is not fair.

He grabs my hair back I scream in pain.

Letho: Fix it IV before I hurt you.

I use my elbow to hit his stomach he let go of my hair.

Me: I don't care who you fuck but don't rub it in my face.

Letho: I'm not fucking anyone!

Me: But she called you her boyfriend.

Letho: You said I must move on.

Me: But not with her!

Letho: So you gonna choose for me now?

Me: No, I think you should let me go, this hurts Lethokuhle.

He sighs.

Letho: Where do you want to go?

Me: I think it's best you don't know.

He nods looking down.

Letho: Find a secured apartment, I want you to be safe.

Me: Ok.

Letho: I wish I could change everything about myself so I can be with you.

I see Andiswa walking out rubbing her eyes, she still looks pretty much drunk.

Andy: Hey baby, you are still here?

Letho just look at her.

Andy: Let's go back inside.

Letho: I'm busy, can you give us some space.

She look at me then nod walking away.

Letho: So Uhm do you have enough money to start over?

Me: Yes.

I am lying I only have a few thousands in my bank that would last me for maybe two months that's it, I am not working I am scared to go out there I don't know how people will take this trans woman thing.

I look at him.

Me: Go back to her.

Letho: I will call my brother to fetch me and the tow truck.

Me: I'm sorry for slashing your tyres.

He nods and take out his phone making a phone call. We stand in silence I don't even

know why I am standing here next to him, he is waiting for his brother.

Lethu: Can you give me your new number.

I hesitantly call it out, he punch something on his phone then put it back in his pocket.

A car drives in I turn to go back in my room.

Letho: Ivy..

I stop but don't turn, he doesn't talk I turn to look his way he is just looking at me, I feel like his eyes are telling me something, he nods and get in the car. I go back inside, as soon as I step inside my room I am startled to see Andiswa sitting in my bed with the phone Letho gave back to me.

Me: Uhm Andy...what are you doing in my room?

She chuckles and show me the screen of my phone, it's me and Letho, I am kissing his cheek, we look happy.

Andy: What are you Ivy?

Me: Uhm...I

Andy: So Letho is gay?

Me: I don't know.

Andy: Don't Fuck with me!?! You are a man!

How did I miss this?

She get up and step closer to me.

Andy: Well listen here MAN, I won't let anyone get inbetween me and the good life the Prince is about to give me so you better watch yourself or I will expose your little secret.

She push me out of the way and slam the door shut. I look for my other phone and find a bank notification, I have a lot of money sent, I stare at my phone as I remember Letho asking for my number.

" you didn't have to send that money Kuhle" i send the text.

"I wanted to, and if ever you need anything, I'm here". He replies.

"but this will complicate things Letho, please don't do it again".

He replies with "Ok".

I pack then sit in my bed looking for a bachelor's flat, luckily I find one available in Glenwood it's not that far from Letho's home but it's secured so I hope I won't ever bump into him, I don't go out often anyway.

I am moving in today and I have everything I need, I made sure Andy and her friends don't see me leave I left early in the morning I don't want any more threats.

I am done cleaning my new place, I want to be happy but a huge part of my life is missing, I miss him so much I wish I can sleep in his chest one more time.

"Sisi". A voice says in front of me, I look at him.

"you are crying, are you okay?"

Me: I'm fine.

I wipe my eyes I am standing by the door.

"I live just opposite you, I see you are new here do you want to eat lunch with me".

Me: No I'm fine.

"I insist, I know how tiring moving is, you must be exhausted".

I nod and close the door.

We are eating in silence, he does cook well if he cooked this food.

"So whats your name?"

Me: That's the first thing you should have asked before inviting me to your place".

He chuckles.

"I know, you are just too beautiful".

I smile.

Me: Thank you, I am Ivy Kay.

"Nice name, I'm Thabo".

I nod.

We start talking about his work, he is a fire fighter and has a baby girl, he is a really nice guy.

I go back to my place later and find my door slightly opened, I am confused because I thought I closed it.

I am scared so I tip toe inside and look around then my room but no one is there and nothing is missing because my phones are still in my bed.

Weeks pass and I always feel like someone is watching me. Well Lethu has never contacted me ever but it's okay, Thabo has been a good friend, he tried hitting on me but I just told him I am not interested.

I am in my bed just scrolling down my phone, I feel like someone is trying to unlock the door but there are keys in the keyhole.

I slowly get up, now they are using something to hit the handle, I take my phone and make a call, but he is not answering.

I try several times he ends up answering.

Letho: IV.

Me: Uhm I'm sorry for calling you but someone is trying to break in my place.

Letho: What? Where are you?

Me: I'm inside, and...

The door is kicked open I let go of the phone, two guys walk in, one of them is Thabo.

Me: Uhm..what is going on?

Thabo: Who is this?

He says showing me a picture of me before surgery.

Me: Uhm it's..

Thabo: So you go around fooling people that you are a woman?

Me: No I never fooled anyone.

Thabo: You fooled me! I even asked you out thinking you are a girl!

Me: I'm sorry.

Thabo: Let me see you fight like a man you are...

They step closer, I step back, he grabs me and punch me so hard I taste blood. They take turns hitting me till I'm on the floor, they are kicking me, then they run out leaving me on the floor, I can't move, I wake up later I am still on the floor, I passed out, my whole body hurts I don't even know how I will manage to wake up.

I hear running footsteps.

"I think this is the place". Someone says then they run in.

Letho: Ivy..

I wince in pain he touch my arms trying to pull me up, he is with his other brother.

Sbonga: Uhm let me help you, it's gonna hurt but we are trying to help you.

They both carefully pull me up I am clenching my jaws so that I don't scream.

They help me get in bed.

Sbonga: Let's take her to the hospital.

I shake my head, Letho is just staring at me.

Me: I'm fine.

My speech is slurred a bit because my right jaw is painful.

Sbonga: You have to report this.

I shake my head.

Letho: Can you give us some space Boh?

He nods and walk out.

Letho: Who did this?

Me: I don't know I didn't see them.

He chuckles, I don't want to get him in trouble.

Letho: I'm gonna ask you again, who did this? Because I know for sure it's someone living in this complex, no one would just get in to beat you up like this, it looks personal.

Me: It's a guy who lives opposite me.

Letho: Why would he do this?

Me: He asked me out days back and I turned him down then he found out who I was before and got angry.

He sighs and get close, he tries to take off my t-shirt but I stop him.

Letho: I'm trying to help you.

I nod, he takes it off then go to the kitchen, I hear water boiling then he comes back, he clean up the bruises in my face it hurts, I let him till he finish up, he gives me another t-shirt then sit next to me.

Letho: Let me tell my brother to leave I am waiting for them to come back.

He walk out then come back again, he takes off his shoes and get in bed in silence, I slowly sleep next to him.

Letho: Come here.

I sleep in his chest, I feel safe as he wraps his arms around me, I don't care about the pain anymore it doesn't matter.

Later he goes to the bathroom, my front door is pushed open since it broke earlier I can't lock it anymore. Someone covers my mouth.

Thabo: Listen and listen good if you think of telling the cops or anyone about what happened earlier you are good as dead..

Letho: Is it?

He says with hands in hands in his pocket, the guys is shocked he quickly let go.

Thabo: Prince?

He asks confused, Letho steps closer to me everything happens so fast Thabo is on the floor groaning like a wounded animal.

Letho: You better pack your shit and run because I'm not done with you, you hear me?

He get up and rush out the door while Letho go to my closet and put my things in a suitcase.

Me: What are you doing?

Letho: I am taking you to a hotel.

Me: I can't stay there it's expensive.

Letho: I will take you to those cheap ones then and stop talking it's irritating.

Me: Oh.

I feel like crying when he says that.

He calls a cab and direct it to the hotel and it's definitely not cheap but I won't talk since I'm irritating.

He checks in and I sit in bed my whole body is still in pain.

Letho: Let me go and get something for the pain.

I nod, he walk out, I sigh.

He comes back a few minutes later.

Me: Uhm I'm thinking of going back home, I can't live a life I can't afford.

He sighs.

Letho: Ok.

Me: Thank you for coming to my rescue.

Letho: I should have come sooner but my brother was still tracing your location.

I nod.

The room is filled up with warm air I see him looking around in fear.

Me: Kuhle..

The old man I saw at his home is here I am scared out of my mind, he look so angry.

"you don't learn!"

Letho: I'm just helping him Mkhulu, I don't love him anymore."

I look at him.

"you don't want to make me angry Lethokuhle!"

He nods looking down.

Letho: This is the last time, I'm sorry Gumede".

The old man chuckles and fade, Letho is still looking down.

Me: Uhm you can go home I will be fine.

Letho: No, I will leave in the morning.

Me: Ok.

In the middle of the night, I can hear him tossing and turning, I turn to look at him.

Me: You can't sleep?

Letho: I am getting married.

My heart almost stops.

Me: Uhm...to...to who?

Letho: Andiswa I haven't asked her yet but I will today.

Me: Ok.

I get up and stand in the balcony looking down, I slowly climb up and stand at the edge.

"Stop".

I look around, Letho rush out looking at me.

Letho: IV don't do that! Get down please... please.

I look down again.

Letho': Please don't do this, please.

I huff once, I feel some wind blowing it push me back I almost fall but Letho hold me.

Letho: I'm sorry baby...I'm sorry.

"LETHOKUHLE!"

A bold loud voice makes him quickly let go of me, he is wiping his eyes.

Letho: Mkhulu, ngizomyeka.(I will leave him)Ngiyaxolisa Gumede.(I'm sorry Gumede)

Mkhulu: Goduka uyekhaya.(Go home).

Letho: Ok.

He go back inside, I look at this old man, his stare give me the creeps, I quickly look down.

Mkhulu: Leave and never look back.

I look at him again.

Me: I will leave but know that whatever person you choose for him he will never love him, and a loveless marriage will make him a monster.

He stares at me, I go back inside and get in bed, I cry myself to sleep.

The next day I pack up and go take a taxi home, I have some explanation to do to my mother, she probably will never allow me inside.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 51

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LETHOKUHLE

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I am sitting in my bed looking at the ring in my hand, it's been a month and a few weeks since IV left and I know I will regret this for the rest of my life but what can I do, the ancestors have me by the balls, Mkhulu said Andiswa is "the one" and I know better than to ignore

him, I don't want to end up losing IV because knowing my ancestors they wouldn't hesitate to hurt him just to prove a point.

My door opens Sbonga walk in and grab a chair sitting in front of me.

Sbonga: Nice ring.

I nod and put it back in a box.

Sbonga: Is it for that girl I met the other day?

I chuckle.

Me: I wish it was.

He look at me confused.

Sbonga: Don't tell me you are going to marry someone you don't love.

Me: The girl you are talking about is IV, the one I introduced to you guys.

Sbonga: Unamanga!(don't lie)

He exclaims.

Sbonga: Like how? Isn't he supposed to be dead, I mean that was a woman there..

I explain to him how Ivy faked her death and that the surgery was a success that is why she is a complete woman now.

Sbonga: Wow!

Me: I know.

He look at me.

Sbonga: You love him don't you.

Me: It doesn't matter Boh, Mkhulu already showed me the girl I have to marry.

He sighs.

Sbonga: They want you to bind you with someone you don't love for life?

I nod.

Me: I even hate living.

I take the rope under my bed.

Me: Yesterday I was so close to ending my life but a picture of him came back I don't want to hurt him, I know how much he loves me.

Sbonga: Yhoo..

Me: But I'll be alright I guess.

Sbonga: Nothing good comes out from marrying someone you don't love Letho, someone is bound to get hurt.

Me: I don't have a choice.

He sighs shaking his head, my phone rings it's Andiswa, sigh, I feel nothing for the girl.

Me: Hello.

Andy: Babe Uhm can you pick me up from campus I don't feel like taking taxis today.

Me: Get a cab Andiswa.

Andy: Are you busy?

Me: Yeah I will see you later.

Andy: Ok babe, love you.

I drop my phone, I don't even remember asking her out let alone telling her we are in a relationship, we Just spent a little time together alone we haven't even done much except when we kissed, it was very brief and she initiated it.

We join the family for lunch.

Ziyanda: Hhayii Lethokuhle!

We all look at her.

Ziyanda: Are you okay? You look suck what's wrong?

Me: I'm fine grandma.

She stares at me.

Me: IV is alive.

Ziyanda: Huh?

Me: He is alive and well.

Ziyanda: Thank goodness! So Where is he I still want to get to know him?

Me: I don't think that's a good idea granny, Mkhulu told him to stay away and also I am getting married.

"what!!!" They all shout at once.

Nadia: Married to who?

Me: I will introduce her soon.

Ntsika: How long have you been together?

Me: It doesn't matter, Mkhulu said she is the one.

We continue eating but I can feel some heavy eyes on me, I slowly look up it's grandpa.

Luyolo: Come with me.

I follow him outside, we sit down.

Luyolo: What's wrong?

Me: I don't love the girl pa.

He sighs.

Luyolo: This is hard, I know how it feels boy trust me.

Me: I'm gonna be okay though, maybe this is what I need to get over IV.

Luyolo: Are you sure?

I nod.

Luyolo: Ok, just know that grandpa will always be here should you need someone to talk to.

Me: Thank you.

I go to my room and look at IVs number for a while, I delete it then toss my phone in bed, I look at the ring again and shake my head.

Me: I can't do this, I don't want to live a lie.

I call Andiswa.

Andy: Hey babe.

Me: Can we meet for a few seconds.

Andy: You can come over, I cooked.

I drive to her place and walk in, she is in her shorts and man's t-shirt, she offer me a seat and a drink.

Andy: Food will be ready in a few.

I nod.

Me: Uhm..look I will just get straight to the point.

She nods.

Me: I don't feel you at all, so this needs to stop very fast I don't even know how we reached a point of you calling me babe.

She blinks looking at me with her mouth hung open.

Me: I'm sorry.

I get up and walk to the door.

Andy: Is it Ivy?

Me: Doesn't matter, bye.

She huffs.

Andy: But I might be pregnant..

I quickly turn to look at her confused as fuck.

Me: What.. what?

Andy: The day of the party we were too drunk, we had as quickie in the bathroom.

I stare at her in shock..

Andy: Now I missed my periods.

Me: you are lying.

She sighs.

Andy: You can ask your brother if you don't believe me, he caught us in the bathroom.

I just walk out and rush to my car, that girl is lying, there is no way that I would be drunk and can't even remember sleeping with someone.

I walk in Sbani's room and find him in bed.

Me: Hi.

He nods sitting up.

Me: Are you okay?

Sbani: I have a headache.

Me: Sorry...Uhm at that party do you remember anything that happened there?

He chuckles.

Sbani: Like catching you with your pants down fucking Andiswa?

I feel sweat dripping down my forehead immediately.

Me: So it really happened?

Sbani: Yeah you were out of it that day after going in that room you came back and had a drink after the other, no dash.

Me: No..

Sbani: Whats up?

I just get up and walk out, I am pacing up and down my room, having a baby with someone I don't even love, no.

"Lethokuhle". I sit down bowing my head.

Me: Yebo Mkhulu.

Mkhulu: Kmele wenze izinto ngendlela.(You have to do things the right way).

Me: Ok.

I am in the tight corner, I even wish I can skip the country and start over.

Later I go back to Andiswa's place and find her sleeping on the couch.

Me: Hey..

She nods.

Me: Are you okay?

Andy: Yes.

Me: Tomorrow can we see the doctor to see if you're really pregnant.

She nods.

Me: Andiswa.

She look at me.

Me: I want to be honest to you, I am in love with someone else but if you are caring my child I will do things right.

She wipe her tears.

Andy: Thank you for being honest.

I nod

Me: I will book an appointment then tell you the time, I will pick you up.

I drive back home, I don't even want to think too much into this because it might not be true.

We are at the doctors office Andy is sleeping in bed the doctor is doing a scan, I am holding my breath.

Doctor: Would you look at that!!

He exclaims I look down in defeat I was hoping she is not pregnant I mean she deserves better, someone who loves her I don't think I ever will.

Andy: Uhm am I pregnant?

Doctor: Yes! And it looks like it's multiples.

I widen my eyes, looks like my ancestors have outdone themselves this time.

Andy: What?

Doctor: There are two heartbeats ma'am.

I just go back to my seat and look down, I had doubts that even if she is pregnant maybe it's not mine but look at that, multiples and Gumedes are like two peas in a pod.

I look at Andiswa she look excited as she get off bed.

Andy: Did you hear that baby? We are having twins!

She screams I fake a smile nodding.

I drive to uncle Letlotlo's house and walk in.

Me: Aunty Zano is uncle Lee around?

She nods and show me where he is, I go there with Andiswa.

Me: Take off your shoes.

We take off our shoes and walk in his consultation room, we find him sitting on the floor with his legs crossed like he is meditating, his eyes are closed, we sit down opposite him.

Letlotlo: Last born.

He still have his eyes closed and last born is how he calls me.

Me: Malume. (Uncle)

He opens his eyes and look at Andiswa then me.

Letlotlo: it will find you again...

Me: What?

He look at me and nod, I want him to explain what he means but I know he has already past that as he stares at Andy in the eyes.

Letlotlo: She is caring your kids.

Andiswa look at me.

Andy: So you brought me here because you didn't believe these kids are yours!?

She looks angry.

Me: I just needed to confirm you can't be angry, I was drunk I don't remember shit!

Letlotlo: KUHLE!

He shouts.

Me: I'm sorry.

Letlotlo: Fighting a battle that even your great grandfather didn't know isn't fair.

Me: What are you talking about?

Letlotlo: Flames of the past..go Prince.

I nod and get up, I try to help Andiswa up but she slap my hand away and get up walking out, I look at uncle Letlotlo again but he has his eyes closed again. I walk out and find Andy crying in the car.

Me: Ngiyaxolisa.(I'm sorry)

Andy: It's okay.

I drive her back to her place then take a ring, I huff.

Me: Uhm will you accept this ring.

She stares at me.

Me: We have to get married so I guess this is me proposing.

She screams again in excitement like she wasn't crying a second ago.

Andy: This is a weird proposal but I can accept it, thank you so much!

She hugs me and take the ring putting it on.

Andy: Thank you so much I can't wait to brag! I am pregnant and getting married!

Me: I have to go.

Andy: Oh I thought we can just...

Me: I have an important meeting to get to.

She nods and step out of the Car, I drive home.

I walk in and find them eating lunch, I sit down.

Ziyanda: You don't greet anymore?

Me: Hi everyone.

Ziyanda: What's wrong with you?

Me: Uhm I'm going to be a father.

They look at me.

Ziyanda: Uhm you are seeing someone?

Me: I asked her to marry me.

Ziyanda: But here you are looking all sad and shit..

They look at her.

Ziyanda: Don't look at me like that, he is supposed to be happy but he's not, am I the only one concerned?

Nadia: We are concerned too mom, let him talk.

Me: There is nothing more to say really, she is carrying twins and Uncle Lee confirmed they are mine and I gave her the ring.

Qhawekazi: Gave her the ring? Did you propose or you just gave her the ring?

Me: I gave her the ring and the advice I would give you, Nkosazana and Qhawe is that when you meet Someone you have an interest in starting a relationship with, do a DNA test to see if you are not from the same mother given you are donated eggs.

Langa: Don't call my kids donated eggs Wena!
I laugh a little.

Me: Just take the advice guys, I am in this mess because of donated sperms I tell you.

They all laugh but I am dying inside.

Me: I will see you in the morning, I am having an early night.

I sit in my bed and think about how a month and a few weeks ago I got the love of my life back but I let him go again not that I had a choice but they should have at least gave me time to say goodbye properly and right now I don't know if he's okay because his phone has

been off since he left, I am worried I wish we stayed in contact even just to find out if he is doing okay and if he's mother accepted who he is now.

I look at my Facebook I have a lot of notifications which is weird because I hardly post and it's not even my birthday.

I open them and find out that Andiswa Ndimande and I are "engaged", most people are happy that the prince is finally getting married some are shocked I am tempted to just deactivate my account because this doesn't feel right and Andiswa is just rushing everything.

The next day she calls me so early in the morning.

Me: Andiswa..

Andy: Hey daddy Uhm I need some money.

Me: For what?

She sighs.

Andy: I need to do my hair and stuff.

Me: Couldn't you wait and call me around 7 o'clock at least it's 6 o'clock in the morning Andiswa!

Andy: I didn't check the time Letho and stop shouting at me.

Me: Aargh man!

I drop the call but I can't fall asleep again so I just transfer the damn money to her and switch off my phone.

I wake up when Mengezi jumps in my bed.

Me: Hey!

He giggles falling next to me.

Mengezi: Hi daddy.

Me: I'm not Sbongakonke.

He laughs.

Mengezi: Grandpa is calling you.

Me: Did he say you must jump in my bed first?

Mengezi: No.

I chuckle and go to the bathroom, I take a quick shower then wear my clothes. I go to the lounge I'm shocked to see Andiswa with three women there.

Me: Sanibonani.(greetings)

I sit down after they greeted back.

Ntsika: So which one is responsible for the pregnancy young lady.

Andy looks at me and my brothers back and forth I hear Niko chuckling I look at her she just look away, she loves the fact that most girls can't tell us apart yet it only took her 2 days when we were younger to tell the difference.

Andy: Uhm it's Lethokuhle.

Ntsika: Show me Lethokuhle maybe you made a mistake.

She is in a very awkward position and dad ain't making it easy for her, she keeps looking at our hands, she finally breaths out then point at me.

Andy: It's him.

I chuckle that was luck.

Ntsika: Are you sure?

Andy: Uhm ..yeah yes.

They demand some money and talk to dad about damages and all after asking me if I know her and accept that she is carrying my kids.

I walk her out later.

Me: Why didn't you tell me you guys are coming?

Andy: I wasn't supposed to tell you, my aunt said I shouldn't.

Me: Ok.

Andy: Thank you for the money.

Me: Sure.

She hugs me I hug her back because the elders are looking.

Andy: I love you.

I nod and go back inside.

Mkhulu shows up and look at me without saying anything.

Me: Gumede.

Mkhulu: You are not excited when that girl gave you something that boy wouldn't have given you.

Me: I'm happy about my kids Mkhulu.

Mkhulu: Are you?

Me: Yes I'm just under a lot of pressure, marriage is a big step.

Mkhulu: It needs to be done, soon Lethokuhle.

Me: Okay.

He look at me again.

Mkhulu: I am doing this for you, you deserve kids of your own.

I nod.

Mkhulu: Let go of that boy it was not going to work.

Me: I have let go.

Mkhulu: Good.

He fades away I look down, I miss IV but it is what it isi

Two months later, Andiswa is starting to show she is three months and two weeks pregnant I am excited about my kids but not so much for the mother I fail to even pretend to love her, I even suggested we get married after the babies are born she was disappointed.

I came to check on her in her flat with everything she likes to eat. I sit down as she start eating everything.

Andy: You are not going to eat with me?

Me: No, I'm good.

Andy: Uhm can we talk?

Me: Aren't we talking?

Andy: I want an apartment.

Me: A what?

Andy: Something like a bachelor flat or something, this place is small for me and our babies.

Me: They are not even born yet.

Andy: Letho I need a bigger space and I want to own it, not paying rent every month.

I sigh.

Me: I will see what I can do.

She nods, I pay that rent I don't know why she's sulking.

Andy: And Uhm are we ever going to have sex again?

Me: Uhm look I have to go.

Andy: ok.

She starts tearing up but I just can't bring myself to sleep with her, how do you become intimate with someone you don't love, I can't do it, I guess I was too drunk that day when I slept with her because I really can't when I'm sober.

Andy: What's wrong with me Lethokuhle that you can't even share a bed with me, am I too poor for you? Am I ugly?

I get up and go to the door.

Andy: Maybe I should do an abortion so that ...

I turn to her real fast.

Me: You are not going to blackmail me with my kids young lady, don't even go there baby..

I walk out angry as hell, blackmail me with my kids just for sex, that girl is crazy.

I am in my room and I feel like I'm suffocating I wake up gasping for air looking around, Mkhulu is standing in the corner staring at me.

Me: Gumede.

Mkhulu: If you think you are going to run away from marrying that girl then you have another thing coming.

Me: Kanti ngikwenzeni Phakathwayo, wangizonda kangaka(What did I do to you Phakathwayo, why do you hate me like this)

He clicks his tongue and fade away, I wipe my eyes and start looking for flight tickets to different countries overseas, I can't live like this anymore.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 53

*

LETHOKUHLE

*

I just finished packing, I walk out dragging my suitcase to my car then come back to get my backpack with my documents. I find Sbonga next to my car.

Sbonga: Uyaphi? (Where are you going?)

Me: Taking a holiday.

Sbonga: But the schools are not closed.

I ignore him putting things in my car, he walk inside and come back with the rest of the family.

Nadia: Lethokuhle uyaphi?

Me: I'm not sure yet, I'll see.

Nadia: Why?

Me: I just need time away from everything.

She sighs.

Nadia: When are you coming back?

Me: Maybe around the time of Andiswa's due date.

Nadia: What! That's life 6 months away!

Me: Yeah I think by then I would have healed.

"if you walk out that gate know that you are leaving our family name behind".

We all turn to look at him, I can't help the tears from falling.

Ntsika: Kanti Yini kangaka mkhulu? (But why like this mkhulu)

He keeps chuckling angrily.

Me: Landile, I will call you.

She turns to look at me then nod.

Nadia: You know it will be hard right?

Me: Yeah but I'll live.

I hug her then get in the car driving out, I hear one of my tyre getting flat instantly I stop the car and step out calling a cab.

Letho: What's wrong?

Me: I'm leaving the car.

Letho: Do you really have to go?

Me: Yes.

The cab arrives I get in and it drives to South Coast, I decided against going far away from my family I know it was going to hurt them so I will be just an hour and 30 minutes away from home if I could call it that.

I get to my holiday resort and put my bags down throwing myself in bed, I don't know how long I will be here but I really need this even if it means losing everything as Mkhulu threatened.

The next day I go to the beach on my own and take a walk on sand just looking at the waves it's been peaceful out here.

I go back to my room when it's starting to drizzle. I take a shower then go back to bed since it's getting worse there's even thunderstorms now.

Lightning strikes out of nowhere making me shiver I feel every part of my body getting numb, not again. I try moving my limbs but nothing, I try to call for help but my mouth isn't moving.

The whole night i'm stuck in bed, I want to pee so bad but how when I can't move anything the only thing I managed to do the whole night is to cry, I don't know what I did wrong

for my ancestors to hate me like this, we can't choose for the heart.

I ended up peeing on myself I couldn't hold it anymore.

I hear a knock on the door but I can't tell them to come in. I just lay there motionless.

Hours later, it's already dark outside there is a knock again then the door slowly open.

"Hello sir!"

She ask looking around then her eyes stops at me.

"Uhm I'm sorry for coming in like this I was just worried that you didn't open earlier for your lunch and dinner so I wanted to check if you're okay".

I shake my head, she get closer to bed and look at me confused.

"Are you okay?"

I shake my head again.

"should I call the ambulance?"

She is panicking, I shake my head again and look at my phone not far from me, at least my head can turn. I keep moving my eyes to my phone, she finally gets it and take my phone. She switch it on then sit next to me and scroll down my contact list.

"should I call this one?" She keep asking on the list one by one, she ask IVs number I finally nod, I have been shaking my head.

"okay i'm calling this one".

She tries to call but it doesn't ring at all, she keeps trying but it's not going through, she takes out her phone and it's starts ringing.

"Hello". My tears fall at the sound of his voice.

"Uhm hey Uhm I am Ncedo I'm in South coast I am a receptionist at a holiday resort,I am calling in regards to Mr...Uhm it's Mr Gumede..right?"

I nod.

IV: Uhm..Gumede from Where?

Ncedo: I'm not sure miss, but he is not okay, he can't even talk he needs someone and he kind of hinted I call you".

IV: Uhm I don't know any Mr Gumede who can't talk miss I think you got a wrong number.

Ncedo: Maybe I can send a picture.

IV: Yeah..

She takes my phone and do something then a call comes through her phone.

Ncedo: Hello.

IV: What's wrong with him?

Ncedo: I don't know he was okay when he checked in the other day but now he is not in a good state.

IV: Please send me the location now, please.

I close my eyes, maybe they will just kill me but I don't care as long as I die with IV next to me it's okay.

The girl leaves since she is still at work and I am grateful she came in.

I don't know how many times I have peed on myself and thank God I haven't eaten for a while maybe I would have needed a toilet by now.

I hear a door slowly opening, I look at the door, it's the love of my life looking gorgeous as ever, she is wearing all black from head to toe, high heeled boots she looks amazing, she blinks for a while staring at me, if I wasn't paralyzed like this I would have jumped hugging her tight.

I am using "she" because she is a trans woman and looks good on it.

She slowly comes to my bed and look at me with tears in his eyes.

IV: Kuhle..

I nod trying so hard to fight the tears back but I fail. I feel her hand wiping my tears.

IV: I'm here..

She sleeps on my chest, she is shaking.

IV: It's okay..

She moves the blanket away, I am so embarrassed but there's nothing I can do. She takes off my t-shirt then try so hard to help me up, she is failing, she rush out and come back with Ncedo.

IV: He has been sweating, can you help me take him to the bathroom please.

Protecting my image.

Ncedo: Of course.

I just love that the girl doesn't know me or I would be in the papers and Social media by now. They help me to the bathroom and the girl leaves I feel so useless as she wash my body so gentle.

She sighs looking down at me as I sit in the bathtub, I want to tell her I'm sorry for getting her in this mess.

She tries to help me out with her all and we finally get to the bedroom it was difficult. She help me in bed then walk out, she comes back

a few minutes later with food. She feeds me then sleep next to me holding my hand.

IV: I'll be here for as long as you need me to, I don't care how long it takes I'll be right here.

She sleep on my chest I close my eyes praying that I get another chance to wake up the next day just to see her again and feel her touch even if it's the last time.

I wake up at night pressed and I really need bathroom I try to move my legs nothing, my hands still nothing, I shake my head vigorously causing her to jump sitting up.

IV: Are you okay?

I shake my head.

IV: Were you dreaming?

I shake it again and look at the bathroom door she nods quickly and she takes me to the bathroom, now I am sitting on the toilet seat I don't know I just cry so hard, what is she supposed to do now? Wipe my ass like literally.

She kneels in front of me crying as well.

IV: It's okay Kuhle..I love you.

I don't even want to go into details about what she does next but now we are in bed, my pride as a man is gone, I feel helpless and ashamed.

Two whole weeks I am just like a baby, I am being bathe and fed, sometimes Ncedo comes to help IV, I can see how much this affects her but she is still here I don't know why. I am in bed with my eyes closed but I'm awake.

Ncedo: Ivy...

IV: Mmh..

They have been talking like friends lately.

Ncedo: Why don't you call his family, you can't do this on your own you need help and I am not always around.

IV: I can take care of him.

Ncedo: Until when Ivy?

IV: until he gets better.

Ncedo: But what if he never gets better, you need to contact his family please.

She huffs.

IV: What if I make thing worse for him? I don't even know why he left home so what if he doesn't want to go back? No one in his family has called ever since I came here, are they not concerned?

Ncedo: I hear you Uhm, I think you guys should move in with me, it's a small apartment but it can accomodate us and that way when I'm off I will be around to help out.

IV: Thank you so much, thank you.

Ncedo: It's okay.

Later we go to Ncedo's apartment it's a beautiful flat, I am sitting on the couch with a fleece blanket and IV is sitting next to me looking down, she keeps wiping her eyes, how I wish I could hold her hand and tell her how much this means to me.

My phone rings, she takes it and look at me, it's the first time it rings ever since I left home.

IV: It's Andiswa..

I shake my head, she drops it, it beeps, she stares at it then turn it to me.

"So you left me pregnant just like that I had to hear it from your family".

It's a text, I look down I don't even want to see how she looks right now. She storms out leaving me scared, what if she decides to leave me for good this time.

Ncedo: Hey Kuhle...

She sit next to me.

Ncedo: I think you are a very good looking man, do you have a brother?

I smile, I want to laugh so bad I imagine her with a womanizer Sbani maybe she can tame him.

Ncedo: I just need his numbers man!

Ivy finally comes back and sit opposite us, her eyes are puffy she has been crying.

Ncedo: Are you okay?

IV: I'm fine, but I think you were right I should call his family, he is not my responsibility.

Ncedo: Uhm...

IV: I don't even know why I came here.

Ncedo: Ivy what's wrong?

IV: I'm leaving.

He walk away, I look at Ncedo with pleading eyes, she stares at me then nod. Ivy comes back with her bag she came with.

Ncedo: Ivy please don't go.

IV: Why should I stay?

Ncedo: You love him? You love him Ivy, I have seen it please don't give up on him.

IV: Our love was doomed from the start, so it's over now, he has a baby on the way, his baby mama should be here not me.

She walk out, leaving Ncedo huffing.

Ncedo: Yhoo!

I sleep on the couch because Ncedo failed to take me to the bathroom.

"And if I lose you

I'm afraid I would lose who

Who I gave my love to

That's the reason I stay around

Even though I fell way

In too deep, can't think about giving it up

But I never knew love would feel like a heart attack.

It's killing me, swear I never cried so much

'Cause I never knew love would hurt this fuckin' bad

The worst pain that I ever had"

She is singing heart attack by Trey Songz while crying, I open my eyes, we are looking at each other.

IV: I'm not leaving until you tell me to.

She wipe her eyes.

IV: I will leave when you get better.

She sit on the couch and my head is on her thighs, i fall asleep again.

In the morning my phone is ringing and I am still sleeping on her thighs.

IV: It's Landile.

She help me up and drop the call. She turns the phone to me I see Landile's face, so she was video calling her.

Nadia: Lethokuhle.

I nod.

Nadia: Are you alright? You haven't called I thought you just needed space but its been a while I miss you.

I close my eyes and open them again.

Me: I...fine.

IV screams dramatically then quickly cover her mouth.

Nadia: Uhm when are you coming back?

I shake my head.

Nadia: Is he okay?

Me: Fine.

Nadia: Uhm okay please call me some times, please.

I nod.

IV place the phone down and squeeze me.

IV: You are speaking again.

Me: It's..ha.. hard.

IV: You will get there, at least it will make thing easier, you can be able to tell me what you want.

Me: I..love..you.

She smiles a little.

Me: a.. thanks.

She nods and hug me again.

Another week ends with me able to speak again, Ncedo is excited.

Months go by I can talk but still can't use my hands or legs , IV still pretty much do everything for me and not even a single day has she complained. I have been in contact with my family but told them not to trace my location I'm okay I still need time away.

Today I just feel down, sitting outside while IV and Ncedo are having a very jolly and loud conversation outside.

I feel like something is pulling my muscles in my legs I groan, it's painful it keeps going.

Me: Aaah...

The ladies run out and stand in front of me.

Ncedo: Kuhle what is it?

Me: My legs hurt..

I keep groaning then suddenly it stops, now it's my arms I am even sweating the pain is too much IV is even crying.

IV: Call an ambulance Ncedo!

It stops after a while, I stretch my leg and it allows me to, I'm shocked I look at IV she is just as shocked.

I stretch another one.

Ncedo: Oh my God!

I hold on the chair and get up, I can't believe I am standing on my own two feet.

Ncedo and IV both hug me at the same time, ladies and tears it's like someone died.

IV: I'm so happy, you can stand on your own!

They are happy more than me, they help me inside since my legs are still a bit wobbly.

They cook and dish up I am happy that I finally can feed myself again, IV keeps brushing my cheek.

My phone rings, she takes it, she is used to that, it's grandma.

Me: Mama..

Ziyanda: Hey baby, Uhm Andiswa is about to give birth.

Me: Huh?

I stand on my feet.

Ziyanda: It's Still early will you be able to get here?

Me: Yes..Uhm yes I think so.

I drop the call and look at IV she is looking down, I hold her hand.

Me: Will you come with me please, both of you.

IV: I can't.

Me: Please, I need you.

They both agree, but we wait for Ncedo as she rush to her home to get his brother's car then comes back, she drives to Durban and the girl

is flying on the road, she is one experienced driver.

We get in Durban in no time and I direct her to the hospital. We walk in and I find grandma and Landile in the waiting area, I hug them.

Ziyanda: You got here in time, your sister is about to go in now.

And just then Nkosazana walk out of her office wearing scrubs.

Nkosazana: Hey brother, you're here.

I nod nervously.

Nkosazana: Go and change we are taking her to theatre your kids have big heads!

She says laughing, I chuckle and go change into scrubs too then go in there. Andiswa is awake just looking away from me. I am scared to watch them cutting her so i look everywhere else but not there.

I finally hear a cry I quickly look as they place the baby on her chest for a few minutes then

take her away, they do that to the second one and take her away again.

Andiswa starts shaking vigorously.

Nkosazana: She is having seizures I need an oxygen masks, mechanical ventilation now!

She shouts and the nurses push me out to say I am traumatized is an understatement.

Ziyanda: Is everything okay?

I shrug my shoulders, we sit in silence, IV is with Ncedo a bit far from us I think I just need to hug her so I can feel better, but Nkosazana walk out, I get up.

Me: Is everything okay in there sis?

Nkosazana: Uhm your boy and ugirl are okay..

I smile a little, double blessings.

Me: Uh what about their mom?

She look down.

Nkosazana: Unfortunately...

Me: No..

Nkosazana: I'm sorry..we tried everything we can but she...

Me: Yhooo..

I sit down defeated, my kids will grow up without a mom, I know I didn't love Andy but I didn't hate her and she is the mother of my kids, she gave me those blessings in there and the kids need their mom.

Nkosazana: Do you want to see the kids?
Grandma I need you.

I nod, she calls the nurse to accompany me, I see them they are both covered in a blue hospital blankets, I look at them with sadness, so they won't be able to feed on their mom's milk, they won't know her or feel her touch, this is so unfair. They say it's goodwill but it hurts man. I take the girl she is so light skinned.

Me: You are my light so I am giving you a name
Lucinda.

I put her down then take the boy who is just as light skinned.

Me: You are Lucius the second since we already have the Lucious in the family, just spells differently, you are both my light.

I put him down and sigh, what now?

They have taken their mom to the mortuary and grandma contacted her family. I am with IV and Ncedo now.

Me: Andiswa didn't make it.

IV: I'm sorry.

Me: I'm just worried about the kids man, they need their mom, this is not fair on them.

I huff.

IV: Uhm should we leave?

Me: I need to talk to my sister see if it's okay to take them home today.

They nod, I talk to Nkosazana and she allows me to take them home they are now dressed in pink and blue, they came with a bag. Ncedo

hold the other one and I give IV Lucinda, she looks scared to even hold the baby.

IV: What if she falls Kuhle.

I smile a little as she hold her carefully.

Me: You are doing great.

I drive us home, I stop by the gate since the gate won't open because the car is not recognised by the system.

Me: Let's walk in.

They step out, lightning strikes I step back and push Ncedo and IV a little behind me, Mkhulu is here and the whole family is here in a second.

Mkhulu: Ufunani la.(What are you doing here?)

He looks at me then behind me.

IV: Kuhle.. take the baby I will leave.

Me: This is my home Gumede.

Mkhulu: Is it?

Letlotlo: You can't punish children for what happened long before their parents were even born Gumedede, let it go!

He says coming behind everyone then look at Mkhulu.

Mkhulu: I don't want any Khozas near my family, I don't want the past repeating itself, not with my grandchild!

Letlotlo: The grandchild you've been hurting ever since he met his lover?

Mkhulu: A lover? Khoza people are manipulators, blood suckers, I won't be surprised if he is after our wealth just like how his ancestors took everything away from us after starting from scratch when Zulu took our throne, they took everything all in the name of love!

I am so confused.

Letlotlo: It's not their fault that you were weak Gumedede! You willingly sold all your father's cows and planned to run away with a Khoza

girl and when she ran away with the money and left you, you blame the kids! While you planned to betray your own family!

Mkhulu: You are calling me weak!!

He is angry and the clouds are turning dark I'm scared for the my newborns.

Me: Get back in the car guys.

They go back with my babies.

Me: So you made me suffer for your own stupidity Mkhulu.

Lightning strikes right before my eyes I quickly step back, that was close.

Letlotlo: Get mad Gumede but it's clear you can't control him, he is a true Gumede stubborn just like you but the only difference is that he is not weak like you.

I don't know what's uncle Lee's plan because he is making him more angry and it's causing the weather to change.

The rain starts pouring hard.

Mkhulu: I don't want him here.

Letlotlo: Too bad, he is staying and he loves that Khoza boy with everything in him.

Mkhulu: They are related!

Letlotlo: They are cousins , there is a ceremony for that! you lied about them being the seeds of the same man!

I stare at Mkhulu.

Me: Mkhulu...

Letlotlo: Let the kids be old man or just retire as an ancestor, you hold grudges and take out your anger on wrong people.

He groans and fade away, the rain stops and the weather becomes clear as if it never rained before. I am still confused.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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LETHOKUHLE

*

Insert 54

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We are in my room with Ncedo, Ivy and the babies after uncle Lee told us we can walk in and assured us that Mkhulu won't do anything to hurt me or IV.

Ncedo: Your house is huge? And you all look the same, what's going on?

I laugh.

Me: I guess we are just blessed.

Ivy is so quiet looking down.

My brothers walk in causing Ncedo to gasp in shock.

Ncedo: What the hell!

My Brothers look at her.

Ncedo: What!

She keeps blinking.

Lethu: Uhm we heard about what happened, we just came in, are the little ones okay?

Me: Yeah they are good but their mom didn't make it.

Sbonga: Sorry about that brother.

Me: It's Okay.

Sbani: Uhm hello ladies.

Ivy greets back but Ncedo is still looking at them in awe.

Sbonga: Sis are you okay?

Ncedo: I'm just...Uhm I...what are you guys?

I chuckle.

Sbonga: We are brothers..

He shrug his shoulders

Ncedo: Wow I have never seen anything like this, four identical people?

Sbani: This is a dream come true in a flash baby.

We laugh.

They take the kids.

Sbonga: You will find us in the lounge, dad has to burn the incense for them.

I nod.

Me: I'm coming back now guys.

Ncedo: Ok.

IV is still looking down she looks stressed. I will talk to her later.

They burn the incense to welcome my kids but we still have to take them home for the actual introduction ceremony.

I go back to my room and find Ncedo sleeping in my bed.

Me: Is she asleep?

She nods, I sit next to her.

Me: What's wrong?

IV: I feel uneasy, being here doesn't feel right I want to go.

Me: Oh uhm...ok.

She get up and take her bag, the baby girl starts crying she drops the bag and go to her, she carefully picks her up and start rocking her.

IV: Askies baby..

I watch her as she manages to put the baby back to sleep by just rocking her. She put her down then take her bag again.

Me: Can you at least leave tomorrow I will take you home, please.

She sighs and nod a little.

Later they are scared to eat dinner with my family so I take their food to them in my room.

Me: Uhm I'm taking the kids to grandma, are you okay with sharing a room or should I find another one?

IV: I'm fine with it.

Ncedo: It's all good.

Me: Ok I'll see you guys in the morning then.

I find a spare bedroom then take off my clothes, I take a shower thinking that I haven't been able to bath myself, I couldn't take a shower, I couldn't clean after myself and I had IV by my side through it all, she stayed throughout.

I go back to my room and call her.

IV: Mmmm.

Me: You're already sleeping?

IV: Mmm yeah.

Me: I want us to talk, can I come there?

IV: I guess.

I go to their room and ask if she could come with me to my room, we both get in bed facing up.

Me: I'm sorry for waking you up.

IV: It's okay.

Me: Uhm if you leave tomorrow are we going to stay in contact?

IV: If you want that then it's fine.

Me: Uhm Ivy.

She look at me, her eyes...gosh..her eyes.

Me: Thank you for everything you did for me , I don't even know what to say...what you did for me was just....

I stop when I feel the lump in my throat.

Me: I don't know man, that was..

She put her finger in my lips.

IV: Shhh it's okay, you know why I did it and I would do it again and again.

Me: Thank you so much.

I pull her close.

Me: Can you sleep here with me?

She nods closing her eyes, as I hold her in my arms I realise that this is what I want for the rest of my life, nothing else.

In the morning I wake up alone in bed I guess she went back to Ncedo.

I force them to come eat breakfast with our family.

Grandma hugs Ivy excitedly, she actually squeeze her.

Ziyanda: I can't believe I didn't notice it's you yesterday, girl you look great!

Iv giggles shyly.

Iv: Thank you.

We sit down and start eating, grandma is asking Iv about life after surgery and it's interesting how much she loves being a trans woman, she is so confident and open about it, the conversation between grandma and her is flowing until I feel hair at the back of my head stand up, I look down.

Mkhulu: Lethokuhle.

Everyone drops their folks and spoons, the voice is filled with anger and it echos in the room.

Me: Qwabe..

Mkhulu: It's time for you to choose, this family or this boy.

Ntsika: Kodwa Gumede..

Mkhulu: Choose now!

I get up.

Me: You want me to choose Phakathwayo?

I say staring at him..

Me: I choose "this boy" and you know why? She was there for me when I couldn't do anything, I was paralyzed because of you! and she came and took care of me, she did what most people wouldn't do Mkhulu, I watched her cleaning after my mess! Ubukisile ngami and sekwanele. (You showed off and I've had enough)

IV: Lethokuhle.

I look at her.

IV: Don't leave your family because of me, please.

Me: I've had enough sthandwa Sami.(my love) and I'm putting a stop to all this abuse, I'm done with it.

She shakes her head.

Me: Can you help me with my kids please, Ncedo.

Ncedo get up and she walk to my room with IV.

Me: I'm leaving everything behind Gumede, everything! Your stupid surname! Your wealth you can have it i'm done aybo! Kwanele. (It's enough)

"I will pay the cows that my ancestors took from you just tell me how many were they I will work and pay for them no matter how long it takes just please, don't hurt him again"
Ivy says behind me, she is holding my son to her chest.

IV: If it's your cows you want back then I will do it, just give me time so I can start working again, I will pay everything I promise.

Mkhulu chuckles.

Mkhulu: You mean you will pay those cows with the money you will milk Lethokuhle like you did when you took his money and went overseas? You are just like your great grandmother, a gold digging hoe.

I feel the room shaking a bit, brother Phiwokuhle walk in followed by his six cheetahs they purr as he stands in the middle of the room staring at Mkhulu.

Mkhulu: Great King..

Phiwo chuckles.

Phiwo: They have been watching Mkhulu.

Mkhulu: Who is they?

The room is filled with heavy presence, I know my grandfather Misokuhle, he is here then a

lot of people who have the same resemblances.

Miso: "It's enough!, We've fought so hard to keep the peace in this family, my grandchildren deserve better Mkhulu but you have been punishing Letho harshly for something even myself didn't know, and as a family we have decided to disown you Mkhulu, you are exactly like my twin brother Kuhle who was just greedy and had a rotten heart, Gumede you are on your own."

Mkhulu: Misokuhle! Misokuhle!

He shouts and fades away calling out his name.

Miso: "He won't bother you again, this is your home Lethokuhle, stay".

I nod.

Me: Is Mkhulu going to be okay?

Miso: "Don't worry about him, he is about to feel the wrath of those who came before him, the great ancestors who gave him the power that he has been misusing".

He is using sign language.

Me: Thank you grandfather.

He smiles and they all fade away leaving the room in complete silence.

Luyolo: I feel Sorry for the old man, Misokuhle once was in that position, all alone rejected by the other ancestors, he could see them together everyday but couldn't be with them.

I look down.

IV: Uhm sir if you'd allow me I would like to pay the cows but I can't pay all of them at once.

Luyolo: I don't thi...

Ntsoaki: Let him do it baba, it's the right thing to do.

Luyolo: okay.

IV: Thank you, Uhm here.

She gives me the baby.

IV: Ncedo and I are leaving, thank you for welcoming us into your home ma'am.

Ziyanda: Can't you stay for today I want to get to know the both of you, maybe you can take the old lady out.

They laugh.

IV: You don't look or sound old.

Ziyanda: Oh but I am old baby, so...are you staying?

They nod.

I go to my room and sleep in between my babies, Ncedo and IV went out with Grandma.

Andiswa will be laid to rest this weekend and Grandma is in contact with them and helping out with the funeral arrangements.

IV walk in looking great, she changed the hairstyle, I sit up.

Me: You look great, love the hair.

She giggles sitting on the couch, I go sit next to her.

Me: So when am I going to see you again?

IV: Uhm your grandma offered me my job back so I don't know if I should take it, it will seem as nepotism because I know y'all and we are related.

I give her the look she just laughs.

Me: I don't like that.

IV: Sorry.

Me: So where is Ncedo?

IV: Helping sisMiyah with cooking, she just loves to talk.

I smile.

Me: I like her.

IV: She has become a very important part of my life, she is like a sister to me.

I nod.

Me: So did you go back home?

She chuckles.

IV: Yes but mom chased me out the day I left here, so I came back, I was singing at different

night clubs and they paid me, that's how I was able to pay my rent.

Me: I'm sorry.

IV: Aah it's all good, I'm over it I have just told myself that I am on my own with no family.

I hold her hand, she smiles looking away.

Me: I make you blush huh?

IV: Come on, no.

I laugh.

Me: Too bad..

I peck her lips, she looks at me with her glassy eyes.

IV: I don't think it's normal to love a person this way, it's scary.

Me: I know, I feel the same way baby but I don't want us to fight it anymore, please can you be mine again.

IV: Okay..

Me: Thank you.

We kiss for a while then hold each other this time no one will come between us, they would have to kill me.

It's the weekend and we just laid Andy to rest, they allowed us to take the babies without a fight, Andy's mom is just a hardworking woman.

IV have started working and I am happy for her though they isolated her because of who she is now but dad quickly addressed that to the staff and now they are okay with who she is now.

I walk in her flat that I found for her to make sure she is always safe.

She is sleeping in a couch watching her favourite show, those Real housewives of Atlanta..I don't know.

Me: Hey baby.

She sit up I kiss her lips and sit next to her.

Me: Can we go out.

IV: Yeah I have been lazy to cook anyway.

She go to the bedroom, she comes back looking hot!

Me: Damn!

She giggles.

Me: Umuhle.(you're pretty)

IV: Thank you.

We eat lunch out then I book us in a hotel room on the 5th floor, we stand at the balcony looking at the sea.

IV: It's beautiful here.

Me: Yeah..it is.

My heart is pounding.

IV: Are you okay?

I turn to look at her.

Me: Uhm....

I slowly go down on one knee praying so damn hard that she says yes, I open the box she gasps.

Me: Babe, can..can you spend the rest of your life with me and help me raise my kids please, will you marry me.

She wipe her tears and turn giving me her back.

Me: Please..I love you and I don't see myself with anyone else, please.

She finally turns around and nod with tears streaming down her cheeks.

IV: Yes..

I breathe out and take her hand sliding the ring on her finger then get up.

Me: Thank you.

I hug her tight then kiss her, we sleep in bed holding her in my arms, we haven't done anything ever since she came back into my life, she seems uncomfortable everytime the kiss get heated so I am not pressuring her it will happen at a right time.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 55

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LETHOKUHLE

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I just woke up from a very disturbing dream, I saw a younger version of myself in a very bad state, looks like he is mentally ill because he keeps laughing and grabbing stuff from the air. I feel hands on my back, it's my love, she kiss my cheek.

IV: You look devastated, what is it?

I tell her about my dream.

IV: Maybe it's just a dream babe, I mean you're okay, even the kids are okay.

Me: What if this was a vision of the future?
What if one of my kids will be mentally ill?

IV: Come on, people dream all the time it
doesn't necessary means it's going to happen.

I sigh, this dream scares me. I go take a shower
then wear my clothes that I keep here in IV's
flat, we haven't gotten married, she wants to
first pay all the cows he "owes" to my family I
don't even know how many cows are there
because we haven't heard from Mkhulu ever
since they disowned him, I kind of miss him, he
wasn't always cruel.

I go to the kitchen where IV is busy making
breakfast, I sit down, she put the plate in front
of me then sit. We eat in silence until she
clears her throat.

IV: Uhm I'm buying another cow this weekend.

Me: Two cows in a month Vee? You just
started working you don't have to be this hard
on yourself.

IV: I want all of this to be over, I don't want to be indebted to your family forever.

I look at her.

Me: Do you have any idea how many cows you have to pay?

IV: No but maybe we will get the sign once I have bought all of them.

Ntsoaki told us that it shouldn't be money but cattles.

Me: Ok.

I get up and take my keys, she walk away and come back with my jacket.

IV: You will need this.

I take it from her.

Me: Thank you, I will see you later.

I kiss her and walk out driving to school, it's Saturday I have an extra class with my matric students because we are a little behind with school work.

I spent a few hours at school then drive to the mall to get something for us to eat then drive back to the flat.

I find her talking on the phone, I walk in and go to the kitchen.

IV: Sisanda please sis..

Silence, then a sniff, I sit next to her on the couch she is crying I pull her to my chest.

Me: nWhat's wrong?

IV: I called my sister to set up a meeting with my parents I want them to know that I'm engaged.

Me: Why are you hurting yourself with this Ivy? They made it clear that they don't support you with the way you are now, let it go.

She push me away.

IV: Easy for you to say Kuhle! Your parents will be around when we get married while no one in my family will come! Let it go you say!

She shouts getting up.

Me: I didn't mean to upset you I just don't want to see you cry for those people, they don't deserve you or your tears.

She look away.

IV: I think it's too soon for all this..

Me: What's all this?

IV: The engagement, I want to fix things with my family first.

Me: Oh..so what? Are we calling it off?

She look down.

Me: I'm going home to check on the kids, call me once you have the answer to my question.

I walk out and drive home with a heavy heart, I might seem chilled but deep down I'm hurt that she is thinking of breaking off the engagement but I don't want to seem like I want her to choose me over her family.

I get to my kid's room and take Lucy sitting on the rocking chair, she is asleep, they are

growing I still feel bad everytime I think about the death of their mom.

I wake up to my phone ringing, I slept on the chair with my daughter on my chest, I take out the phone and answer the call.

Me: Hello..

IV: Hey, are you coming back?

Me: Yeah.

IV: Okay, can you bring the kids over.

Me: Ok.

I pack a few things for them then drive to her flat. We take them to the spare bedroom then she makes bottles for them.

One thing I love the most about her is that she loves my kids, you can tell just the way she takes care of them when they are around.

Later she feeds and bath them then put them to bed, we go to our room and sleep in bed, the silence is too loud for me.

Me: So what have you decided?

IV: Uhm can you accompany me tomorrow, I want to try and talk to my mother, please.

I hold her hand, at least she want to do this with me.

Me: I will go with you baby.

IV: Thank you.

Me: you still love me?

IV: I love you so much.

We sleep, she keeps waking up checking on the kids, she comes back to bed, I pull her close.

Me: Are they asleep?

IV: Yes.

Me: Ok, I love you.

IV: I love you too.

We fall asleep again. I wake up to him singing lullabies to the little ones, the room smells clean, I sit up looking at them.

Me: Looks like I'm the only one who hasn't taken a bath today.

IV: Look Lucy daddy is up, say hi daddy.

I smile and get off bed going to her, I kiss her cheek and look at my babies in bed, they are both eating their left hands.

Me: I'm going to take a shower.

She nods.

I take a shower then go back in the room, I find my clothes placed neatly in bed, black jeans and black t-shirt and a navy-blue blazer I guess he wants me to look presentable to her mother that we are meeting today.

We first drop the kids home then drive to her home, she keeps playing with her hands looking very nervous, I just play soft music.

We are at the gate I can see some neighbours are already peeking. My baby breaths out loud then look at me.

IV: Let's go.

I step out and go open the door for her and hold her hand, she slowly step out, I massage her shoulders.

Me: You are so tense, relax baby I am here okay.

She huffs.

IV: Ok.

She knocks for a while then a door opens, a young lady is staring at us with her mouth wide open.

IV: Hi Sisa...

Oh this is her sister Sisanda.

Sisa: Mama!

She shouts still looking at IV, the mother comes running to the door then look at IV in disgust.

Her: What are you doing in my house?

IV: Uhm can we come in please I need to tell you something.

Sisa: When you said he has changed I didn't think he took it this far!

IV: Mom please.

The mother looks around first then open the door wide for us to come in, we sit next to each other while they sit on the opposite couch.

Her: You want the whole neighborhood to gossip about me Irvin! Didn't I tell you to never step your foot in my house looking like this again?

IV: I'm sorry I just wanted to share the good news with you.

They stare at her.

IV: Uhm..I'm getting married.

She says waving her left hand smiling nervously.

They don't say a word.

IV: Uhm this is Lethokuhle Gumede, my ...

Her: Your what huh! Your what! You bring your satanic ways in my house Irvin, you want to make me a laughing stock, you want people to lose the respect they have for me, tarnishing my reputation!

She is shouting now on her feet.

IV: I thought you'll be happy for me mama, this is what makes me happy, I feel comfortable like this.

Her: Then go be comfortable somewhere else not here! Not in my house!

IV: I just want you to accept me please.

Her: Get out of my house.

IV: Mo..

Sisa: You are a disappointment Irvin, I don't even know what to call you, please leave.

She wipes her tears, I get up and stretch out my hand, she hold it getting up.

IV: Please..

Her:Out!

I hold her hand walking out with her, she lean on my car and cry, I stand in front of her wiping her tears.

Me: Ngizohlezi ngikhona(I will always be here)
Angiyi ndawo(I'm not going anywhere) I am your family, me, you our kids and the whole Gumedes, we are your family.

She cries on my shoulder I keep brushing her back.

Me: Let's go home.

I open the door for her and drive back to her flat, she takes off her clothes and get in bed I go back home to check on the kids then go get us something to eat at a restaurant, as I go back in my car, I feel dizzy and quickly lean on my car taking deep breaths, I stand there for a while I hear tyres screeching then a big collision of trucks then people start screaming.

I walk up to where the collision happened there is a woman crying kneeling next to a boy, I kneel in front of her, I'm shocked to see

my ex, Norma, my eyes moves to a boy my heart almost stops as I look at his face which is full of blood, that is a younger me, the boy I kept seeing in my dreams.

We are pushed away by the cops and paramedics, I don't even know what to think at this point.

They put the boy in an ambulance Norma get in with him.

Me: Norma..

She doesn't even look my way, they close the doors and drive away.

I go back to my car driving to the flat, I find IV still in bed, I just go straight to the shower, my mind seems blank I can't think straight, what is going on?

I go back to the bedroom, IV is awake now her eyes are puffy.

IV: Hey when did you come back?

Her voice is hoarse from all the crying, I can't answer her I don't feel like talking, she look at me as she realise that I'm not answering her question.

IV: Babe.

Me: I have to go home.

IV: Oh..

I wear my clothes and drive home, I get in and find them all laughing together.

Me: Hello.

Nadia: Hey, are you okay?

I stare at her then sit down, now they are all looking at me.

Me: I saw Norma today.

They look at me confused.

Nadia: No, don't tell me you want love backs you have Ivy remember?

Me: There was an accident..

Now they are more confused.

Me: A boy was hit by a car in a collision.

Nadia: Huh?

Me: The boy looks like me Landi.

Nadia: I don't understand.

Me: Norma was with a boy that looks like me.

She finally looks like she gets it.

Nadia: Where is he? Where did they take him?

Me: I don't know.

Now I feel like I just lost something so precious to me, my heart is heavy.

Nadia: Uhm okay let me try and find out about that accident maybe I will find out where he was admitted.

I nod looking down, none of this has made sense to me.

Nadia finally comes back and tell me she knows where they took the boy.

Nadia: You want to go there?

I nod.

Me: I need some clarity on this, I am confused.

Nadia: Okay let's go.

Sbonga: We're right behind you.

We walk out, Nadia drives us to St Augustines hospital.

We walk down the passage, Nadia ask the questions I look around and spot Norma with a woman comforting her, it's her mother, I go to them.

Me: Norma..

They both look at me then look at each other.

Me: Where is the boy? Is he okay?

She get up and hug me crying out loud, I can't get myself to hold her I need answers as soon as possible. She finally let go wiping her tears.

Norma: They have been in there for an hour no one has said anything to me.

I nod, a doctor comes to us.

Norma: Is he okay doctor?

He look at us then back at Norma.

Norma: Uhm they are family.

He heaves a deep sigh.

Doctor: It doesn't look good, he has internal bleeding on his brain, he is in a coma.

Norma: No..

Her mom hold her as she cries.

Sbonga: Uhm can we see him?

He look at us for a while then nod.

Doctor: I can only allow at least three people for a few minutes.

Norma follows him first, I look at her mom she just sit down covering her face.

Me: Can you come with me?

Sbonga nods.

Nadia: We'll wait here.

Boh and I walk in and the slow beeping machine stops me at the door, there are so many pipes on him, his head is bandaged, I feel

Sbonga's hand on my shoulder, we walk in and stand next to the bed, Norma is crying painfully.

Sbonga: Huh?

I look at him, he sees it too that boy looks exactly like us.

Me: How old is he?

She sniffs.

Me: How old is he Norma?

Norma: He..he is 5 years old about to turn 6 next month.

I chuckle in disbelief.

Me: What?

Norma: I was...

Me: How could you?

Norma: I didn't think you'll accept him because...

Me: Because what Norma? You left me not the other way around! You should have gave me my son and fucked off!

Norma: I'm sorry..

The machines starts beeping fast, he starts shaking vigorously, a series of nurses and doctors rush in, we are pushed out of the room, my head is spinning.

We stay in silence for almost 20 minutes, the doctors walk out again but one of them comes to us with his head hanging down.

Ntsika: Pillay..is everything okay?

Doctor: We did everything we could but he...

I don't wait for him to finish I rush into the ward and find the nurses covering his head with a sheet.

Nurse: Sir you can't be here.

Me: Please I just need a few minutes, please.

They nod and move away. I uncover his head.

Me: Gumede... please boy don't do this to me, wake up and give me a chance to know you, please.

I hold his small cold hand.

Me: Give me a chance to be a father to you, wake up...

Tears are burning my eyes.

Me: Ngiyakucela.(I'm begging you)

They cover him again, I feel like I'm suffocating my vision becomes blurry then i'm out.

I wake up in a hospital bed, my family is here they are too quiet, I slowly sit up grandma sit in bed holding my hand.

Me: What's going on?

Ziyanda: I'm so sorry.

Me: He didn't wake up?

She shakes her head.

Me: How can I find out about him like this?
Couldn't they give me time to fix my mistakes

and be there? Why didn't they show me sooner that I have a son out there!

Ziyanda: Baby calm down.

Me: Those ancestors have took everything away from me, first it was Pamela now a son that I didn't even know I had.

I get off bed.

Ziyanda: Lethokuhle..

I wear my shoes and walk out, Norma is now with her whole family and her husband, she is crying, I grab her pulling her up from her seat.

Me: Ukhalelani ngoba uwena owenze Yonke lento? (Why are you crying because this is all your fault?)

The husband get up and try to touch me.

Me: Stay out of this and don't even think of putting your hands on me Mr.

I look at Norma.

Me: I am burying my son at home.

Norma: You can't..

Me: I wasn't asking, you took chances, gambling with his life! he was never going to have a normal life hiding him from his family, you killed him!

I grab her neck.

Nadia: Lethokuhle!

I'm hurt, I'm angry and I'm mad as fuck.

Me: You killed my son!

A hand grab me pulling me away from her.

Me: I am burying my son and if I were you I wouldn't try to stop Lethokuhle or else you will be next..

I spit on the floor walking out, I walk a distance from the hospital then sit down on the side walk.

Sbonga step out of his car and give me his hand, I get up.

Sbonga: Let's go home.

He drives home, I go to my room and sleep on my tummy, an innocent soul died because of

me I should have known, I should have felt that he is out there.

I wake up and sit in bed, it's dark outside, Niko walk in and sit next to me.

Niko: Hi.

I nod.

Niko: Here's your phone, Ivy has been calling.

I take it and toss it next to me, she hold my hand.

Niko: I know how it feels, I'm so sorry.

I shake my head.

Me: At least you got to hold your girls Niko, you were given that little time to be with them, I was robbed of that chance, that bitch will pay for this.

Niko: Don't lose yourself plotting revenge, I lost a lot when I did that I ended up hurting myself and my husband emotionally.

Me: I won't let her get away with this Sniko, I found out about my son on his death bed, how could she!

She hugs me as I break down failing to hold my tears back.

Niko: You gonna be okay.

I finally calm down, my door open IV walk in, Niko get up and hug her briefly then walk out.

IV: Baby..

I wipe my face.

IV: I have been calling you.

Me: I have....I was..

I can't seem to get the words right.

She wraps her arms around me.

IV: What's wrong?

She is now also crying with me.

We sleep in bed holding each other. I watch her as she falls asleep.

She finally wakes up and play with my beard.

IV: What happened baby?

I huff.

I tell her how I found out about a son today and lost him just like that.

IV: What!?! How can she hide the baby from you all these years.

Me: What makes me angry is that she left me, I found out about her wedding on Social media, I never hurt her, never cheated so I don't understand how can she hurt me like this.

IV: I'm sorry babe.

In the morning I wake up early and drive to Norma's house and buzz at the gate it slides open, I find a housekeeper standing at the door.

Her: Hello sir.

Me: Hi, is Norma and her husband around?

Her: Yes sir they are inside, come in.

I walk in and find them dressed up like they are on their way out. They look my way.

Me: I came to get my son's birth certificate.

Norma: Lethokuhle I am burying my son at home.

Me: You dug my son's grave the day you gave birth to him and didn't tell me and my family so don't fuck with me princess I will hurt you so bad you'll curse the day you were born.

Lwazi: We are getting late Letho I understand you are upset but please let us do this, you didn't even know about him I raised him.

I find myself throwing a fist at him, he groans holding his cheek.

Me: You don't know me so don't you mess with me, now give me my son's birth certificate.

I say taking the gun from my waist, Lwazi pull his wife to him.

Lwazi: Give him what he wants Norma.

She quickly take out the papers from her bag and give them to me, there is a birth certificate

I take it and throw the rest of the papers back to her then walk out, she named him Kuhle, I chuckle, she gave him my name but hid him from me.

The whole week I am arranging my son's funeral, it will be at the palace so dad Ntsika can introduce him and he can be accepted by our ancestors.

We just came back from the graveyard, I didn't allow Norma to attend the funeral and I made it loud and clear to her so she didn't come, I'm heartbroken.

IV: Kuhle..

I look at her.

IV: Did you eat?

I shake my head.

Me: I'm okay I'll eat later.

IV: You've been saying that ever since we came here, you need to eat.

Me: And I said I will eat later, I need to be alone.

She nods and walk out, I get in bed and close my eyes.

"Baba" I look behind me and I see him standing there smiling.

Me: Hey son.

"Thank you"

Me: For what boy?

"I'm okay now, I'm home where I always wanted to be, thank you".

He waves fading away, I wake up looking around, so I was dreaming about him, at least he is at peace, he never had it easy I heard he was mentally challenged from when he was four and before that he was always sick, I hate what Norma did to me and it will take time to heal.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 56

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SBANISETHU

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From my three brothers I am the only one who is not in a committed relationship and I'm good with that, I mean, I'm still young having flings here and there since I'm not ready to be tied down, no, though Letho and Ivy haven't gotten married yet.

One thing I love about myself is that I don't string girls along I tell them straight up that I'm not looking for anything serious just a bit of fun and I make it very clear that one shouldn't catch feelings, that's the deal with me before I

get into any "relationship", it's like that or I'm gone baby.

I just woke up from my nap, I only came home around six this morning I was out with Boni, the girl I have been having fun with for a while now, she understands my terms of being in a relationship that is why we have been at it for a while, she knows there is no meeting my parents or those cost dates or vacations because we are not in that kind of relationship with her, we hang out, fuck and that's it.

I take my phone and look at the time, it's 10:15 am, I take a shower then go to the kitchen, they ate breakfast a long time ago, so I will make my own right now.

I finish eating then go look for my brothers, I find them sitting outside, looks like they just finished washing their cars, I sit next to Letho.

Me: Whats up!

They just look at me.

Me: What? Do I have something on my face?

Sbonga: When will you stop acting childish?

Me: Ukhuluma ngani? (what are you talking about?)

Sbonga: Going out every night fucking different girls an..

Me: Woah! Do you guys see a ring on my finger?

Lethu: Sbani you're not getting any younger bro it needs to stop, tone it down a little you act like you just hit your puberty stage.

I laugh getting up.

Me: I don't wanna end up beating someone up so I'm gonna go since y'all are ganging up on me.

Lethu: Grow up Sbani..

Me: We may look the same ok but I run my own race, I do my own shit so leave me alone, you didn't hear me telling you shit when you were beating up Niko here.

He look at me then nod getting up.

Lethu: Sure..

Me: Uhm...

He walk away, Sbonga get up and slap me so hard.

Sbonga: Bastard.

Me: I didn't mean to...

Sbonga: Fuck off..

He walks away too, I sit down and brush my cheek.

Letho: Don't do that to Lethu bafo(brother), you don't have to remind him of his past with Niko, that's wrong.

I get up and look for him all around the house, I find him with his wife.

Me: Hey Presh..

Precious: Hi daddy..

She walk out with Nosy, their baby girl who is now 18 months old.

Me: Uhm i'm sorry about earlier I didn't mean to bring up your past.

Lethu: But you did so, whatever bro.

Me: Ngiyaxolisa.(I'm sorry)

Lethu: It's cool man now go away.

I sit down.

Me: Look I am really sorry Lethu.

He nods, I know how much it hurts when someone brings up a nasty past, I decide to give him some time to calm down cause I can see how much he is disappointed and sad about this.

I chill outside alone, I see Ivy's car driving in then she step out with her friend, I get up to greet them.

Ivy: Hey future hubby.

I laugh.

Me: Hey baby.

We hug laughing, she knows how to tell her future husband apart from us, I then hug the

girl that is always staring at us in amuzement when she's around us.

Me: Ncedo right?

She nods.

Me: Long time Barbie uhlalaphi?(where do you live?)

Ncedo: I recently moved this side not so long ago, I was still back home all along.

I nod.

Me: Welcome to Durban baby, the home of fun!

They laugh, I walk them in, mom Miyah is happy to see them, she reminds me a lot of my mother Pamela, I still miss her everyday.

Miyah: Let's get started ladies, this way, Bunny get me some wine and the glasses please.

Ncedo: Bunny?

Me: Really mom?

That's how she calls me and to her I will never outgrow the name no matter how old I get.

I get them some wine and take it to Grandpa's house, they are busy with some sewing machines and checking some designs, I guess it's for the wedding. I feel a poke in my finger then Ncedo screams.

Miyah: What's wrong?

Ncedo: I just poked my finger with a needle..

Mom checks her out.

Ncedo: I'm okay Ma.

They start doing their business but my finger hurts I keep looking at it.

Ncedo walk out and go to the car.

Me: Hey, are you going somewhere?

Ncedo: Yeah we need a few things in town.

Me: Can I drive you?

Ncedo: Yeah sure.

I drive her to town and we walk in to the store she takes everything she needs and I insist on paying for it then we walk out.

"Sethu! Sethu!" I turn looking at her, it's Boni.
She hugs me excitedly then kiss my lips.

Boni: Hey baby, I missed you!

I chuckle, we don't do this in public ever.

Boni: Who is that?

I turn to look behind me and Ncedo is standing awkwardly looking down, I look at Boni.

Me: Since when did we start asking each other about the people we hang out with Boni.

Boni: Sorry I was just curious.

Me: I'll see you later.

Boni: Ok.

I open the car for Ncedo then get in driving home.

Ncedo: Your girlfriend is pretty, her skin is perfect damn, pretty dark skin.

I nod dismissively.

I help her with her stuff to where the other ladies are then drive to Boni's place and walk in, I find her sleeping in bed I sit next to her.

Me: Hi.

Boni: I didn't think you'd actually come back, thought maybe you will be busy with that girl you were with.

Me: Are you catching feelings Boniswa?

Boni: What? No of course not.

Me: Good because I would hate for this to end.

Boni: Me too so I promise no catching feelings.

Me: Great.

Boni: I'm going out tonight with my girlfriends.

I nod and transfer some cash then leave going back home, the noise at the other side of the house sends me there, the ladies are having fun, I join them looks like the wine is taking over, they are so loud and laughing.

Later mom ask me to take Ncedo to her place since she has a job interview in the morning

and Ivy is sleeping over, I drive her there and walk her inside a small but beautiful flat.

Me:: Nice place.

Ncedo: Thank you, Uhm would you like a drink?

Me: Do you have beer?

She shakes her head.

Me: Then I'm cool.

Ncedo: Ok.

Me: I have to go.

Ncedo: Thank you for bringing me home.

Me: Cool.

She get up to open the door for me, I walk past her, I feel goosebumps.

I look at her she is looking down.

Me: Uhm can we take a walk to the garage so you can get something to eat since it's late and i know you will get hungry after all that wine has left your system.

She laughs.

Ncedo: Now that's an idea, thanks let me change my shoes.

She walk away and come back wearing some sneakers. We walk down the streets it's late but there are streetlights.

Me: So, your man was okay with you moving here? Where there are Charming men like myself? Does he trust himself?

She burst in laughter.

Me: Uzosbizela amaphara ntombenhle.(you will attract the junkies to us beautiful lady).

She giggles.

Ncedo: You're not as hot as you think Bunny I stop walking and look at her, she is still laughing so hard.

Me: Don't call me that Wena.

Ncedo: But I already did what you gonna do?

Me: You wanna see?

She shakes her head I walk up to her and lift her tiny body up.

Ncedo: Put me down Sbani what are you doing?

Me: Say you're sorry..

Ncedo: But I'm not!

I laugh putting her down my hands are still on her shoulders.

I move my face and our lips lock, I kiss her for a while she seems stunned then gently push me away clearing her throat.

Me: Let's go.

I hold her hand and we walk to the garage, she buys some fried chicken and chips and something to drink, we walk back in total silence.

Me: Bye I'll see you around.

She nods.

Me: We don't talk anymore?

She smiles.

Ncedo: Bye Bunny.

I shake my head and walk out the door, driving to Cindy's house, I spend almost an hour there just having a good time, she's one of my fuck buddies, I have plenty of them some I can't even remember their names.

It's another day just came back from work and I keep getting hurt , like I twisted my ankle or being cut by a knife on my finger its weird.

I walk in the yard and find mom and Ncedo talking in the lounge.

Me: Mama Miyah!!

I kiss her cheek.

Miyah: You are back earlier than your brothers that's the first.

I chuckle.

Me: Have some faith in me baby.

I look at Ncedo, she has a plaster around her middle finger.

Me: What happened to your finger?

Ncedo: I cut myself with a knife.

Me: You're one of those clumsy girls huh?

She smiles.

Ncedo: I guess.

I nod and go to my room. After a while she walk in with a tray with food and juice.

Ncedo: Your mom said I should give you this.

Me: Thanks.

I take the food and eat up.

They stay up late again and Ncedo sleeps over and I decide to check on her in her room I find her sitting in bed in a short gown, her thighs are all out.

Me: Hey..

Ncedo: Uhm what are you doing here?

Me: Came to say goodnight.

Ncedo: oh goodnight.

I cannot resist this beautiful thing in front of me so I make my move by pulling her up holding her waist.

Ncedo: What are you doing?

Me: Just appreciating this goddess in front of me, you're beautiful.

I kiss her lifting her up, her legs are on my waist she kiss me back so good, I throw her in bed and follow her getting on top of her, untying her gown she is all naked underneath.

Me: Damn.

I kiss her while taking off my t-shirt, then kiss her neck down to her boobs licking one after the other, she is breathing heavily, I push up her leg to my shoulder giving myself a better view of her pussy, I stroke her clit she moans out loud.

Me: Not so loud baby..

I eat her pussy like the last meal of the day it is, then take off my pants she push me back.

Me: What is it?

Ncedo: I can't, please go.

I look at my dick it's poking its way out of my boxers.

Me: But look at me baby.

She look once and quickly look away.

Ncedo: Go..

Me: Fuck..

I get up and wear my pants then pick up my t-shirt on the floor, she is looking away and she has covered her body with a sheet, I walk out grab my car keys. When I am next to my car I feel eyes on me I turn to look she is peeking through the curtain she quickly let go, I get in my car and drive to Boni's place, I don't ask anything but just go down to business with her, once I'm done I go back home.

In the morning I join the family for breakfast, Ncedo is here too looking down to her plate.

I walk out and find Ncedo standing next to Ivy's car.

Me: Morning.

Ncedo: Hi..hi..

Me: Are you good?

Ncedo: I'm fine.

I nod and walk to my car, she clears her throat behind me, I give her my attention looks like she wants to say something.

Ncedo: Uhm where were you going last night?

I raise my eyebrow in shock.

Me: What?

Ncedo: Uhm..I.. sorry never mind.

She walk out the gate,Ivy walk out with Letho holding hands.

Letho: Sbani zange umbone uNcedo? (you didn't see Ncedo?)

Me: She walked out just now.

They look at each other confused I just go to my car and drive out, I can see her standing at the bus stop, I stop next to her and step out.

Me: My brother and Ivy are...

Ncedo: They just called i'm gonna catch a taxi.

Me: Or I can take you home.

Ncedo: No.

Me: I insist.

She finally agrees, I drive to her place and we walk in, she sit on the couch taking off her heels, I sit next to her and massage her feet.

Me: So did you get the job?

Ncedo: Yeah at Hilton hotel.

I look at her.

Me: So you are the face of the hotel?

Ncedo: A receptionist.

Me: The face of the hotel.

She shrug her shoulder.

Me: Every man that comes in there will be mesmerized by your beauty so obvious they will wanna check in..

She chuckles.

I look at her for a while she end up looking away.

Me: Do you have someone?

Ncedo: No.

Me: Why not?

Ncedo: It just didn't work out.

Me: Will you work it out with me.

She removes her leg from me.

Ncedo: Uhm.. no.

Me: So you don't like me?

Ncedo: You have a girlfriend.

Me: This is me and you talking baby, you don't have to bring up someone else.

She doesn't say anything.

Me: Give me your love baby.

I pull her close and start kissing her, we take off each other's clothes and today I get lucky, she gives me all of it in every position and the woman is flexible man, just perfect, we wipe ourselves then she sleep on my chest.

Ncedo: Bunny..

I chuckle and play with her hair.

Me: Baby..

Ncedo: Uhm so I will be the other woman?

Me: No you are my woman, and we don't discuss other people, okay? This is our relationship, you and me.

My phone rings I wake up to take it in my jeans then answer.

Me: Hello.

Boni: Hey baby are you busy?

Me: Yeah, what's up?

Boni: I'm in town saw these amazing shoes and..

Me: How much do you want?

She giggles, I just drop the call and send her the money then go back to bed, I try to touch Ncedo but she moves away and get up wearing her gown.

Me: Where are you going?

Ncedo: This was a mistake, you have to go.

Me: A mistake?

She take my clothes and give them to me, I wear them.

Me: Come here..

I sit in bed and pull her to my lap.

Me: Are you okay?

Ncedo: Yes.

I nod.

Me: We need to get some morning after pills, first time sleeping with a woman and forgot the condoms, what did you do to me?

She get up and walk away, she comes back in a while.

Ncedo: You can get them but I'm on injections.

I nod.

Me: I will get them just to be on a safe side.

She nods.

Me: I will come back soon.

I drive to the Pharmacy and get the pills then go back to her place, I find her watching TV, I sit next to her.

Me: Here.

She take the pill and drink it up same time.

My phone keeps ringing on the table but I don't wanna answer it.

Ncedo: Get out..

Me: Huh?

Ncedo: Leave Sbani I don't want you here.

I look at her confused.

Ncedo: I'm serious or I'm calling the cops.

Me: Aybo! What did I do?

Ncedo: I pay for this shit maybe you think I'm one of those girls you pay everything for and they accept all your shit well not here baby now get out!

She get up and the cup on the table falls on the floor breaking, she goes down and pick up the glass, I feel a sharp pain in my hand, I look at it, I have nothing but Ncedo screams holding her hand it's bleeding.

Me: Shit..

I kneel next to her, she is crying so hard looks like she is afraid of blood.

Me: Calm down baby, come..

I get her up and we go to her bathroom, I look for a kit and clean the cut trying to stop the blood then bandage it.

Me: You're okay..

She open her puffy eyes looking at her hand.

Me: Sorry hey.

She nods.

Ncedo: You should go, me and you will never happen I'm not one of those understanding women.

Me: Noncedo come on, you can't tell me you don't feel the connection.

Ncedo: Looks like you connect with many girls so I can't.

Me: Give me a chance I promise you will be my number one priority.

Ncedo: I don't want that.

Me: Then tell me what you want baby.

She shakes her head.

Ncedo: I don't want to change your lifestyle so just leave me alone.

Me: I can't leave you alone, I want you.

My phone rings again in the lounge.

Ncedo: Go..

Me: I will switch it off baby, I can't leave you alone while you're hurt, I want to bath you and feed you then tuck you in bed.

She giggles.

Me: Please.

She nods, I switch off my phone then cook for her, I feed her then get in next to her, we sleep the whole night I even forgot I switched off my phone.

I wake up and switch my phone on, I have plenty missed calls from different numbers i just switch it off again.

Ncedo wakes up.

Me: Hey, how is your hand?

Ncedo: It hurts a bit.

I make some breakfast then give her something for the pain.

Me: Maybe I should hire a helper for you because you will always hurt yourself if I let you anywhere near the knife again.

She laughs.

Ncedo: No I'm fine maybe I was just stressed about this whole moving thing, I'll be fine.

Me: Ok, I have to go, I will see you later neh.

She nods, I kiss her lips then walk out.

I get busy the whole day at work then after work I check up on Cindy she's fine but just missed me, I end up spending the night with her.

In the morning I wake up with my back hurting like someone was hitting me with a belt or something, I wear my clothes and go home, I should talk to Ntsoaki about these weird things I keep feeling these days, it's not normal at all.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 57

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SBANISETHU

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I just returned home from Cindy's house, i am looking for mom all around the house. I finally find her in her room she is sitting in bed looking down.

Me: Ma..

She raise up her hand still looking down.

Ntsoaki: Don't come in here with all this filth, get out!

I look at her confused.

Ntsoaki: Get out Sbanisethu.

I slowly step back and walk out, I keep looking at myself how am I filthy? What is she talking about.

I just take my jacket and drive to Ncedo's place, I walk in and find Letho sitting on the coffee table facing the other way.

Letho: I'm here for you like you guys been with me at my worst okay.

I hear sniffs, I clear my throat, Letho turns looking at me, Ncedo looks like she has been crying.

Me: Hi.

Letho: What are you doing here?

Ivy walk in from the other room.

Ivy: Uhm hey Sbani..

I nod, my eyes are still on the crying Ncedo.

Ivy: Baby I think we should take her to the hospital, this isn't normal, maybe it's an allergic reaction.

Ncedo: No, I feel fine after that ointment you put there.

Letho: Are you sure you're okay?

Ncedo: Yes I'm fine, thank you for coming.

Letho: You can call us anytime baby okay?

She smiles a little.

Ncedo: Thanks Kuhle, I know you stick to your promises.

He kiss her forehead and get up fixing his pants then stand in front of me, he gives me a stare then points outside with his head, I follow him out.

Letho: What's going on?

Me: With what?

He chuckles.

Me:: I thought your friends are my friends, I was checking up on her.

He step closer to me with his hands in his pockets, I can't get over how much he looks like me right now.

Letho: If I hear that you broke her heart I will break every single useless bone in your body, she is not one of your cheap sluts so brother thread carefully, I'm warning you.

Me: There is really no need for all that I am just checking up on her.

Letho: You've been warned.

He walk to his car and Ivy walk out of the house and say goodbye to me.

I walk in and close the door behind me, Ncedo is not in the lounge anymore. I go to her room and find her in bed.

Me: Baby..

She just look at me.

I sit in bed.

Me: What's wrong? You've been crying.

Ncedo: Why do you care?

Me: What to you mean? You're my woman so I should care.

She chuckles bitterly with a shaky voice.

Ncedo: Your woman you say.

Me: Babe..

Ncedo: Sbani, this is not working out so please let's not force things.

Me: But I want to be with you.

Ncedo: How many girls have you told that same lie?

I look at her.

Ncedo: I can't be with you, I don't even know what I was thinking sleeping with a player like you.

Me: What did I do?

Ncedo: You promised to come back last night, I called you and you never answered or returned any of my calls, so I'm stupid to you and now I woke up with this, this pain!

She shouts then tears stream down her cheeks.

Me: What pain baby?

She get up and face the other way moving down the gown, she has bruises all over her back. I quickly get up staring at them.

Me: Who did this to you?

Ncedo: I woke up like this!

I turn her around and hug her she screams in pain.

Me: I'm so sorry, I'm sorry.

I pull her to my chest she sobs so hard.

Ncedo: It hurts.

Me: Uhm maybe I should take you to the hospital.

Ncedo: No.

Me: Please you are in pain baby, I don't want to see you like this, come on please.

She finally agrees that I take her to the hospital, and she keeps clenching her jaws while sleeping in a hospital bed, the doctors have sedated her because she was crying so bad when we came in. I am sitting next to her holding her hand.

Me: you gonna be okay, the pain will go away soon.

She nods. She keeps blinking slowly then finally falls asleep.

I call Lethokuhle.

Letho: Yeah.

Me: Brother, we're at the hospital with Noncedo.

Letho: How is she? Is she okay? Which hospital?

He really cares about her I can hear some panic in his voice, I tell him the name of the hospital.

He walk in with his other half, they are always together their love is beautiful to watch really.

Letho: What happened after we left Sbani?
What did you do?

I am confused.

Me: What are you implying Lethokuhle? She was in pain when you left!

Letho: But she didn't want to come here, what did you do to her?

He is coming at me but Ivy step in front of him.

Ivy: Baby, calm down, she probably realised that she needed a doctor's attention.

Maybe I crossed the line here, I shouldn't have dated my brother's friend because he will be all over me with every single mistake I make, or even if it's not my fault he would still blame me.

She finally wakes up.

Ivy: Hey, how are you feeling now?

Ncedo: I feel better, thank you, I'm sorry that you had to stop doing some important things to come here.

Ivy: You are more important to us Ncedo, you know that.

Ncedo: Yeah I know, I'm special aren't I?

She says giggling.

Letho: And you deserve better, way better.

He says looking at me.

Ncedo: I know.

She says looking at Letho.

Ncedo: Can you guys give me a moment with him.

They nod and step out.

Ncedo: Sbani.

Me: Yeah.

Ncedo: I don't want to be with you anymore, what we did was a mistake it shouldn't have happened, I should be taking you like a brother just like Letho.

Me: But baby...

Ncedo: I'm serious, I want nothing to do with you.

Me: I know you felt it too when we made love don't fight it.

She shakes her head.

Me: I can't leave you.

Ncedo: Why?

I look at her.

Ncedo: I want to know why?

Me: Because I want to be with you.

She chuckles.

Ncedo: It's over, now go.

Me: Noncedo come on..

Ncedo: Or should I call Lethokuhle to throw you out?

I get up and walk past my brother and Ivy going to my car, I drive to Boniswa's place, I ask her that we take it to the bedroom no foreplay just straight to business.

I am now wearing my t-shirt after a long session of sex yet I didn't even cum, I couldn't.

Boni: Sethu..

I wear my shoes.

Boni: What's wrong?

Me: With what?

Boni: I noticed that you weren't even in it when we did it today, and the condom is empty.

I chuckle.

Me: So you check out condoms after we have sex?

Boni: No it's just that i didn't feel you cum today.

Me: I don't have time for this Boniswa mfethu, so I should explain why the condom is empty? You are issues lady.

I laugh a little, she sounds ridiculous.

Boni: Uhm am I the problem?

Me: Okay that's my cue, I'm gone.

I kiss her cheek and walk out the door driving home.

The minute I step in the room Ntsoaki grunts going on her knees.

Ntsika: Baby what's wrong? Do you see something?

Ntsoaki: Take this boy out of my sight now Ntsika.

Ntsika: Huh?

Ntsoaki: Sbanisethu!

She shouts, Ntsika quickly push me out of the room.

Ntsika: What did you do?

Me: To who baba?

Ntsika: My wife doesn't want you in her presence Sbanisethu so what did you do!?

He shouts.

Me: I don't know dad, I don't know, can you ask her for me? I'm sorry.

Ntsika: Why are you sorry?

Me: That mom isn't okay when I'm around I didn't mean for that to happen.

Ntsoaki: What did you think will happen if you go around sleeping with the whole community, you have no self respect! Now an innocent soul is tied to you and your dirt!

Me: Ma..

Ntsoaki: Futsek! Come to me when you are ready to talk but right now I am disappointed in you.

I look down as she walk away.

Ntsika look at me for a while then follow his wife.

Two days later I haven't talked to mom or been in the same room with her, I avoid her at all cost but today I just found her standing next to my car.

Me: Mme.(mom)

Ntsoaki: Keep ignoring me, you will be sorry.

She walk away, I get in my car and drive to Ncedo's place she was discharged later on the same there but haven't seen her after she told me it's over. I knock on her door, she opens the door and frown looking at me.

Me: Hey.

She push the door but I hold it so it doesn't close.

Me: I just came to check up on you.

She push it again, I knock for some time.

Me: Noncedo! Please open up.

She opens it angrily.

Ncedo: You are causing a scene just go already!

Me: I just need two minutes of your time then i'll leave.

I walk in, she sit opposite me.

Me: How is your back?

Ncedo: Fine.

Me: Look baby I'm sorry for not coming back the other day when I promised I would.

Ncedo: I don't care anymore.

I look down.

Me: okay.

I get up looking at her.

Me: Be okay neh.

She hold her head and her nose starts bleeding, I rush to her, she slowly close her eyes.

Me: Baby, hey open your eyes..

I take off my t-shirt and wipe her nose, that is a lot of blood coming from the nose, I take my phone to call Lethokuhle.

Letho: Hello.

Me: Can you bring my t-shirt to Ncedo's house I need to take her to the hospital.

Letho: What's wrong with her?

I drop the call, I don't have time to answer questions right now. I fetch a wet towel and place it on her forehead, she finally opens her eyes, I put her head on my lap.

Me: Hey.

Ncedo: Hey..

She look around.

Ncedo: Why are you naked in my house.

I chuckle.

Me: What's wrong with you?

Ncedo: I don't know, this never happened until recently.

I stare at her beautiful eyes.

Me: I care about you.

Ncedo: Sbani, no.

Me: I do, just give me a chance.

A door opens Letho walk in, he look at me,
Ncedo slowly get up.

Letho: Hey, What's wrong?

Ncedo: I don't know I just feel sick.

He gives me my t-shirt, I leave them talking
and go to the bathroom to freshen up, I go
back to the room, my phone is ringing.

Letho: Ma is calling.

He says giving me my phone.

Me: Ma..

Ntsoaki: You still don't want to talk?

Me: Ma?

She chuckles and drop the call.

Me: I have to go.

Letho: Okay, I'm gonna take her to the doctor.

I just got home and the elders are seated quietly in the lounge.

Ntsoaki: We are here to hear you out.

I sit down, why did she have to call everyone.

Ntsika: Khuluma..(Speak)

I look at them, I don't know what to say.

Ntsoaki goes on her knees and burn the incense, she tells me to kneel and ask me to blow on her ancestral bag of bones, she starts grunting.

She shakes her head and get up sitting on the couch leaving me still on the floor, I look down.

Nadia: Sbani..

Me: I lost a woman I loved, she was pregnant with my child..

Ntsika: What?

Me: She was 4 months pregnant I was happy and ready to introduce her to all of you, the

day I was supposed to come home with her, she called and told me she is not feeling well, I thought she was just getting cold feet so I went to her place and the security told me she left in an ambulance with her mother, I tried to call her number countless times but no one was answering.

I take a deep breath.

Me: When they called later at night, they told me that she is gone, both her and the baby didn't make it.

Ntsika: Sbanisethu, when did this happen?

Me: We were still in matric.

Ntsika: What!?! All these years and you've never said anything to anyone not even you're brothers.

I shake my head.

Ntsika: Why?

Me: I don't know, I was angry dad, she didn't even say goodbye, she took my child with her.

Ntsoaki: I thought in this family we talk about whatever is troubling us but..

She sighs.

Ntsoaki: You need to be cleansed.

Me: Cleansed of what?

Ntsoaki: Their spirit is hanging over you and the girl you love.

I chuckle.

Me: The girl I love? I will never love anyone mama.

Ntsoaki: Is it?

Me: Yes, so I won't be cleansed.

Ntsoaki: That's the thing Sbani, this is not just about you anymore someone innocent is getting hurt.

I get up and go to my room, I don't love anyone, those words I last told them to that girl that was selfish to die with my child.

There is a knock on my door, Sbonga walk in and sit next to me.

Sbonga: Sbani, you said you and Kele broke up and she moved away, why didn't you tell us she died?

I ignore him.

Sbonga: I'm sorry..

Me: it's been years I don't care anymore.

Sbonga: Or you have been in denial, you started to believe that Kele really moved away after breaking up with you.

Me: Are you a psychologist?

Sbonga: No but I know my brother.

Later we eat dinner in silence, Letho walk in and sit down.

Nadia: Are you okay?

Letho: No, I just came from the hospital Noncedo is in a coma.

I carry on eating but I can feel eyes on me, I look up ma is staring at me but I brush it off.

Letho: What confuses me is that the doctors can't find anything that might be the cause of all this.

Mom's eyes are still on me.

In the morning I am getting ready to go see Noncedo, Boniswa calls I drop the call switching off my phone.

I walk in Ncedo's ward and find her sleeping, the doctor walk in.

Doctor: She woke up yesterday but she looked weak, so i'm gonna check on her later see how she's doing.

I nod and sit next to her, I hold her hand then let go again.

Later she wakes up okay the doctor discharge her I drive her to her place.

We walk in and I take her to bed.

Ncedo: You're too quiet, are you okay?

I nod.

Me: I'm fine, I will order for you but Ivy is coming over.

Ncedo: Ok thank you.

I go home and find my brothers in my room.

Letho: Sbonga told us about Kele, why did you lie Sbani?

Me: I didn't owe you any explanations, or did I?

Lethu: So all the girls and the drinking you were numbing all this pain you've been hiding from us.

Me: Aniphume Kimi.(leave me alone)

Lethu: You need to be cleansed like mom said, you lost a girl that was pregnant with your child.

Me: What I need is for all of you to leave me alone in peace, that's all I need!

I am getting really angry.

Sbonga: I'm sorry we didn't see it Brother, I'm sorry.

Me: I want to be alone, please.

They walk out I get in bed and try to sleep but it's impossible.

In the middle of the night I find myself knocking on Ncedo's door, Ivy open the door after asking who is it.

Me: Is Ncedo sleeping?

Ivy: Of course she is Sbani it's 11:56 for fucks sake!!

Me: I'm sorry for waking you up, you can go to bed.

I take off my clothes and get in next to her, she turns looking at me with her sleepy eyes .

Ncedo: What are you doing here?

Me: I don't know.

Ncedo: You're not okay?

Me: No.

I feel tears burning my eyes, something that has never happened in years, I don't cry, I never cry when when I lost mom.

She moves closer I hold her to my chest and let the tears fall.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 58

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SBANISETHU

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I just woke up, my eyes are heavy, I look next to me Ncedo is not here, I sit up rubbing my sore eyes, the door opens she walk in holding a tray.

Ncedo: Hey.

I nod he at her, she looks beautiful in a red short nighty with a little gown over it.

She put the tray in front of me and sit down.

Ncedo: I thought I should make breakfast for you since you didn't sleep well at night.

Me: Thank you.

I really couldn't sleep I kept seeing Sizakele's face everytime I closed my eyes.

We eat together, she keeps looking at me.

Me: You want to ask me something?

She nods looking down shyly.

Ncedo: Uhm who is Kele? Is she one of your Uhm, girlfriends.

Hearing Kele's name put me off I just get up and go to the bathroom, I shower then get dressed, my t-shirt is clean the one that had blood so I wear it and my pants walking out.

Ncedo: Bunny..

I turn to look at her she gives me one of those puppy eyes making her look so cute.

Me: Don't call me that.

She gives me a naughty nod making me smile.

Me: I have to go home and change, I will be late for work.

Ncedo: Okay I'm going to work as well in an hour.

Me: That means we have time for a quicky mos.

She giggles shaking her head, I take my car keys and phone then hold her waist.

Me: Thank you for breakfast and allowing me to sleep in your bed.

She nods, I peck her lips then walk out, I greet a rushing Ivy and go to my car driving home.

I am at school but I can't work my mind is blank so I just give the kids some classwork and sit down at the far end of the class my phone vibrates in my pocket it's Ncedo, I walk out of the class.

Me: Baby..

Ncedo: Uhm hi.

Me: You good?

Ncedo: I'm sorry for calling you I know you are at work.

Me: Talk to me.

Ncedo: Uhm can I see you after work.

I chuckle.

Ncedo: If you have no plans of course, it's okay if you can't.

I smile.

Me: Your place?

Ncedo: Yes.

Me: Didn't you go to work?

Ncedo: No, I forgot that it's my day off today.

I drop the call and drive to her place right away, I get in she is still in her nightdress in the kitchen cooking, I stand behind her moving the silky nighty up, she jumps up turning.

Ncedo: Sbani! You gave me a fright! How are you here now?

Me: I drove here I couldn't wait to see you.

She smiles I hold her waist she step on my feet with her toes and kiss me.

Me: You smell good.

Ncedo: It's the food.

I laugh picking her up.

Me: I'm talking about you.

We kiss for a while its getting heated really quick, my t-shirt is off and so is her night dress, her pointy boobs are driving me crazy.

Me: Shit...

I ask her to switch of the stove then we go to her room, I remove the rest of the clothing on me and she get on top of me riding me so slow while her hands are on her boobs playing with her nipples.

Me: Fuck...yes baby..

She moves her waist till I cum, my knees are shaking.

She sleep next to me.

Me: That was good, you should call me all the time babe.

She giggles.

Me: So, you missed me huh?

Ncedo: I did, Uhm so what is going to happen between us and your Uhm your other women.

I clear my throat.

Me: Can we talk about us..

Ncedo: I want to know what i'm getting myself into.

Me: I will give you the respect you deserve I promise.

She nods.

Me: Thank you for giving me a chance.

She nods and snuggle up close I wrap my arms around her kissing her head.

We fell asleep but now I feel something wet in my chest I open my eyes, Ncedo is sleeping on my chest wet in sweat she is shaking, I quickly sit up.

Me: Baby..Noncedo!

She opens her eyes.

Ncedo: I'm cold..

Me: But baby you are sweating.

Her teeth are grazing each other obviously shivering, I take the bed cover and cover her, she is still drenched in sweat.

Me: Should I make tea for you?

Ncedo: No, please look for another blanket.

I do that and cover her she is still the same, my phone rings it's ma.

Me: Mama.

Ntsoaki: O batla hore a shwe? (You want her to die?)

Me: Ma..

Ntsoaki: Don't ma me Sbani okay! Bring her here now and stop being a fool!

I run her a hot bath and help her bath then look for warm clothes for her, we go to the car with a blanket, I drive home.

When I get in mom is already waiting at the door step, she slap me so hard causing me to let go of Ncedo's arm she collapse right there.

Ntsoaki: Pick her up and lay her on that couch.

I do that, my cheek is itchy from that slap.

Ntsoaki: Are you ready to be cleansed?

Me: No mah, I have been with a lot of women all these years why didn't they get sick if this is because of Kele?

Ntsoaki: Do all those "lot of women" make you feel the same way that she makes you feel?

I don't answer.

Ntsoaki: An angry spirit is not something to mess with Sbani, she won't wake up until you remove Kele's spirit from you! Or you will lose her just like you lost Kele.

Me: Was it my fault that she died because right now you make it sound like it's all my fault!

Ntsika: Hey don't talk to my wife like that!

Me: I'm not cleansing anything Kodwa.

Mom chuckles.

Ntsoaki: He thinks this is a joke Ntsika..

Dad look at me shaking his head.

Ntsika: Do it for this innocent girl, you are the one who hid something this big from us, we are here because of you!

Letho is standing there staring at me with an intense look.

Ncedo moans and start shivering again.

Letho: Sbani..

I look at him.

Letho: Don't be a selfish pig!

Me: You are talking to me?

He comes to me and throws a punch, I push him and punch him back, we fight for some time until I hear her calling me.

Ncedo: Bunny..

I push Letho away from me and kneel next to the couch where she's sleeping.

Me: Baby..

Ncedo: I'm leaving.

Me: To Where baby, you're not okay?

Ncedo: Dad is here to fetch me, I'm leaving with him.

I look at her confused.

Ncedo: He is right there.

She close her eyes.

Ntsoaki: Sbanisethu!

I realise what is going on.

Me: I will do it mama, I will get cleansed.

Ntsoaki: Hurry Letho call RJ now, he needs to come here.

I sit on the floor holding her hand.

RJ finally arrives, I am taken to the waterfalls and I have to get in naked, I get in this cold water and deep my head in for some time, RJ has some chickens and candles with him outside.

I finally step out and he gives me some other clothes then throw the ones I was wearing inside the river.

RJ: We are driving straight home, and don't look back as we go to the car.

I nod and follow him.

When we get home Ncedo is having a cup of tea on the couch still covered in a blanket but at least she's awake.

She look at me, Letho is sitting next to her.

Me: Hi.

Ncedo: Hi.

I feel light, like something heavy has been lifted off my shoulders.

Ncedo: Letho please take me home, I feel better now.

Me: Uhm, I can take you.

Ncedo: No I'm fine.

Letho help her up and she says her goodbyes.

Nkanyezi: Sbanisethu...sit down!

I sit down.

Nkanyezi: I don't like selfish people, what you did to that girl is selfish and when she wants nothing to do with you, you will learn never to take things like this lightly especially when it doesn't just affect you.

I look down.

Nkanyezi: You can go.

I go to my room and sit in bed staring into space, until my phone rings it's Cindy.

Me: Hello.

Cindy: Long time, you're still alive..

Me: Yeah I'm around.

Cindy: Wanna come over for some fun.

Me: I really need that right now so I'm on my way.

I drive out but stop at the gate, I need to talk to Ncedo more than anything not going to Cindy's.

I knock and walk in her room, she is alone, I sit down.

Me: Can we start over.

Ncedo: What is happening? Who is Kele?

I tell her the whole story.

Ncedo: So I almost died because of you?

I look down.

Ncedo: But why me? Why not all those women you sleep with?

Me: They are not like you, you are different.

She sighs.

Ncedo: So I won't get sick again?

Me: Yeah, you're okay now.

Ncedo: Ok.

Me: Can I hold you?

She nods, I sleep facing up she sleeps on top of me, I hold her.

Ncedo: Please don't hurt me..

She says so low I just hold her tight.

Later I wake up to my phone ringing she is next to me, staring at me, I take my phone and Cindy is calling, I drop the call, it rings again.

Ncedo: You can answer it.

She step out of bed going to the bathroom. I answer.

Me: Cindy..

Cindy: Are you still coming?

Me: No..

Cindy: Oh and you didn't have the decency to call and tell me?

Me: I will see you tomorrow Cindy stop acting like my wife okay..

Ncedo walk in looking all sad.

Me: Come here..

She straddle me sleeping on my shoulder.

Ncedo: Are you leaving?

Me: Do you want me to leave?

Ncedo: No, but you can go if you have to.

Me: I'm not leaving.

I kiss her neck, her hand goes to my dick and massage it, she take it out of my boxers then move her panty to the side, she slowly slide it in, I groan.

We do the deed till we cum then she wrap her arms around my neck.

Ncedo: I love you.

I am shocked, I feel goosebumps all over my body.

Me: I....I.

Ncedo: It's okay.

I haven't said those words in a long time.

She moves again causing my guy to get hard deep in her.

Me: You are killing me.

We take a shower together then we go out, I suggested it.

We sit down waiting for our order, a group of girls walk in making noise, I lift up my eyes Boniswa is standing there staring at me, they all stand behind Ncedo she is looking a bit scared.

Boniswa: We do lunch now huh Prince? We go out in public in broad daylight?

I just look at her.

Me: Let's go baby.

Boni: Baby?

I get up and take Ncedo's hand walking out, she doesn't wait for me to open the car for her, she just pull it and get in, I go to the drive through restaurant and order for us then drive to the apartment.

We eat then go to bed quietly.

Me: Baby..

She look at me.

Me: Uhm can you uh..can you stop the injection so you can give me a baby, please..

She widens her eyes.

Ncedo: What!?

Me: I want a baby.

Ncedo: No way Sbani! I was almost humiliated in public by your girls now you are telling me about a baby! Why don't you tell her to give you the baby, angihlanyi mina.(I'm not crazy)

Me: So having a baby with me is being crazy?

Ncedo: Yes! I don't even know where I stand with you and you ask me for shit! Are you even hearing yourself!

I get up and wear my clothes I won't sit here and let her talk to me anyhow, she will get used to it and do it even when we are around

people so it's better I just go. I take my stuff and leave.

Three days pass without us talking, or even calling each other I miss her but I guess pride is too much from the both of us.

It's the weekend I just decided to hit gym early, a whole week ended without seeing or hearing from Noncedo, different girls kept calling but I just ignored their calls, I blocked Boniswa I hate people who disrespect me.

I walk out of the gym room going to the kitchen to get water, I walk in and the ladies are here even my woman.

Miyah: Bunny stop showing off!!

I look at myself and laugh.

Me: I didn't even know you guys are here man I was gonna wear my t-shirt, I don't want people to drool at all of this.

I look at Ncedo who has been staring at me, she finally realise that I am looking at her she quickly look away.

Me: Sawubona. (Hello)

I say raising my eyebrow.

Ncedo: Hi..hi..

She clears her throat now everyone is looking at her.

Ncedo: What?

Miyah: Since when do you stutter?

Ncedo: I'm not..I don't..I..

They laugh at her, I just take water and leave the room.

I go to the liquor store to get a few beers then go back home sitting in the shade outside.

I see my girl walking out talking on the phone, I sit there watching her, when she moves her eyes she immediately removes the phone from her ear.

Me: Woza Kimi.(Come to me)

She stands in front of me.

Me: Ukhuluma nendoda? (you are talking to a man?)

She shakes her head.

Me: Mmmmh..

Ncedo: That was just a friend calling.

Me: A male friend?

Ncedo: Yes.

I nod.

Me: You would make a bad cheater shame, don't even try it.

Ncedo: Can I go?

Me: I'm sorry for cramping your style by asking for a baby, I will ask someone else.

Ncedo: Excuse me?

Me: I will ask someo...

She snatch the beer from my hand and throws it on my face.

Me: What the hell!

Ncedo: You are full of shit.

I wipe my face.

Me: That was a joke.

Ncedo: I'm not your friend Sbani! You know what, I'm leaving.

Me: But...what about your meeting?

Ncedo: Go to hell.

I chuckle.

Me: We don't have to fight baby, i'm sorry if I kind of disrespected you when I asked for a baby, forgive me.

Ncedo: You are apologising?

Me: Yes.

Ncedo: Ok.

Me: I feel you ntwana..

She giggles walking away. I continue to drink my brothers join me.

Lethu: You drink alone?

Me: I didn't think you guys talk to me.

Letho: I don't.

Me: I don't care.

Letho: Sbani, just promise me that Ncedo won't get hurt here, she is a good person I never thought a stranger would care so much like she did with me so I care about her.

Me: I won't hurt her.

Letho: Good.

We continue to drink until mom calls us inside to eat.

I take my baby to her place.

Ncedo: Sbani.

Me: Yeah babe..

Ncedo: Do you really want to be with me? Or I'm just one of those you know..

Me: I want to be with you.

She chuckles.

Ncedo: I don't believe you, I mean I'm just average compared to the girls you go out with, I've seen it from social media.

Me: Like I said, you're different.

She nods.

Three months pass with us dating I managed to ignore all the other women and focused on her I must say I'm proud of myself for letting go of that old life, for the first time in forever I am with one woman and it feels amazing, she is special and she loves me unconditionally.

I am going to a school camp in Grahamstown today, it's gonna be two days max, my brothers are gonna be there and other teachers from our school. It's three am and I am already dressed and I slept over at Ncedo's place.

She gives me my bag and kiss me.

Ncedo: I'm gonna miss you so much.

Me: I will miss you too baby but I'm coming back soon you know.

She nods and hugs me tight.

We have a long trip to Grahams with the school buses the kids are happy about this.

When we get there at night Ncedo calls.

Me: Mama..

Ncedo: Hey Uhm can you WhatsApp?

Me: Yeah...we just arrived I was about to call.

Ncedo: Check your messages..

Her voice is a bit shaky.

Me: Uhm is everything okay?

Ncedo: I don't know.

She drops the call, I quickly check my WhatsApp messages, my heart almost stops when I see a pregnancy test stick, I call her but she is not answering.

Me: Come on baby pick up.

I am pacing all around the room, she finally picks up.

Ncedo: Sbani..

Me: Noncedo is..is that what I think it is?

Ncedo: Yes, Miyah gave it to me today and I used it, I'm pregnant.

She breaks down.

Me: Please calm down okay Uhm..calm down I will call mom to fetch you.

I don't know, I'm nervous and excited, mixed emotions.

Miyah: Hello Bunny..

Me: Mom uh can you go to Ncedo's flat now please and fetch her, please she's not okay, she must stay with you till I come back.

Miyah: Oh ok I'm going there now baby.

I call her again, she is still crying.

Me: Mom is coming now okay, you gonna be okay.

She doesn't answer, I rush to my brother's room and find them together.

Lethu: Why are you opening the door like you are running from something?

Me: Noncedo is pregnant.

I give Sbonga the phone showing them the texts.

Sbonga: Wow that's great news, you look nervous.

I sit down.

Me: What if I lose her like I lost Kele?

Letho:: Don't be negative brother, this is good news, you are going to be a father.

I nod but I can't help but worry.

Mom calls.

Me: Mama.

Miyah: Hey daddy.

Me: Ma come on..

Miyah: I knew it, you are glowing these days!

Me: Me?

Miyah: Yes, both you and Ncedo, congratulations my boy.

Me: Uhm thank you, can you ask Nkosazana to check if everything is okay with her.

Miyah: I will do that, don't worry I will look after her till you guys come back.

Me: Thank you so much.

In the morning I call her, maybe she is a bit calmer now.

Ncedo: Babe..

Me: Yeah Uh Noncedo..

Ncedo: Yes.

Me: Ngiyakuthanda. (I love you)

Silence.

Me: I love you.

She drops the call, probably overwhelmed because it's the first time I actually say those words out loud.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 59

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SBANISETHU

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We are on our way back home, I am sitting quietly with my earphones plugged on, I am thinking about Noncedo, she hasn't talked to me from the time I said I love her, I tried calling her and even mom but didn't want to talk mom said she's fine I should give her some space to process everything, she is overwhelmed by this pregnancy but I can't wait to get home and see her.

We get home around ten at night, I go straight to my room and find my girl sleeping in my bed. I grab a chair and sit next to the bed, I remove hair from her pretty face she is sleeping peacefully. I kiss her forehead then go take a shower.

When I get back in the room, she is sitting in bed but quickly get up when she sees me and jump on me I hold her tight as she sobs on my shoulder.

Me: It's okay baby, it's okay.

She finally stops crying, I sit in bed with her on my lap, I wipe her tears.

Me: I missed you.

Ncedo: I missed you too.

Her voice is shaky.

Me: I meant it.

She looks at me with the glassy eyes.

Me: I love you.

She hugs me, I get her up and pull up her t-shirt staring at her tummy there is a little dark line but it's faint, I brush it a little.

Me: Thank you so much for this.

We make love all through the night, I really appreciate her for this, so much.

In the morning I wake up to a sweet scent all over my room, I sit up, she is wearing a short black dress, it suits her.

Me: Morning, where are you going so early?

Ncedo: I have an early appointment with your sister Nkosazana.

Me: Aw so you don't want me there?

Ncedo: uh I do.

Me: Then why didn't you tell me Noncedo?

Ncedo: It's not a big deal and I thought maybe you wouldn't want to come since it's still early, maybe you're tired.

Me: That was for me to decide if I want to come or not.

Ncedo: I'm sorry Uhm I will call and tell her I will be a bit late. You can go and shower so long.

Me: No, you can go.

Ncedo: Sbani..

Me: I guess you will tell me how it went.

Ncedo: Don't be like that baby please.

How can she not include me in this, I am a little disappointed.

I end up going with her, she does some check ups and they give her some supplements, I wait for her outside.

I see Darlene walking towards me, we went to the same University, she was a one night stand.

Darlene: Mr G...oh wow look at you!

I chuckle.

Me: Miss Daniels long time.

She laughs.

Darlene: Sbani.

Me: In a flash baby..

Darlene: I really thought it's Sbonga when I greeted but then I sensed the bad boy vibe the minute you opened your mouth.

Me: I'm not that bad anymore.

Darlene: Really?

I nod smiling.

Darlene: I can't believe you made me a one night stand, you are really bad, we should catch up sometimes, for old times sake.

We exchange numbers then she walk away just when Ncedo opens the door.

We grab some lunch then go home, she helps mom with the cooking then join me in my room.

Me: I can't wait for her to start kicking you know..

Ncedo: You hope for a girl?

Me: Yeah but a boy is also fine I'm just happy I'm going to be a dad.

My phone beeps, i check it out. It's a text from Darlene.

Darlene: "Hello.."

I put the phone away and continue to brush my baby's tummy, but it beeps again three

times in a row I check it out then gasp, the phone slips from my hand and falls on her tummy, I try to take it but it's already on her hand, she is staring at the pictures of Darlene, the first one she is showing her boobs but hiding just her nipples then the other one she is in a red lingerie and a text "You can still have it".

I don't even know what to say right now, her hands are shaking. She get up and fix her t-shirt.

Me: Bab..

I don't finish talking she throws the phone on my face with so much force I'm sure I have a red mark just next to my eye, she almost hit my eye.

Me: Fuck..

She goes to the closet I get up and hold her from behind.

Ncedo: I thought you said you are leaving that life behind.

Her voice is getting a bit deeper, that's how angry she is.

Me: I left it, believe me.

Ncedo: Then what the fuck is that?

Me: Uhm I met her today and we exchan...

She push me back then turn, she slap me I quickly hold her hands, I have never seen her so angry.

Me: Listen my love I...

She push me away and start packing.

Ncedo: So you were waiting for me to get pregnant so you can go back to that life! I am just here to carry your child, that's what you wanted right from the beginning, right? right?

Me: No of course not I..

Ncedo: I was a fool thinking that you have changed!

Me: I have changed sthandwa Sam(my love).

She take her phone putting it in her bag then walk out, I follow her.

Me: Ngiyacela unгахambi.(Please don't leave)

She walk past the cars going to the gate.

Me: Let me take you home then please.

She ignores me till we get to the bus stop, I have been following her like a crazy guy, she sit down tapping her foot, she is looking down, I stand in front of her I can see tears falling I feel really bad I shouldn't have exchanged the numbers with Darlene, why did I? What was I hoping to do with them.

She take out her phone and dial a number.

Ncedo: Bhuti (Brother)

Sniffs.

Ncedo: No I'm not crying, is mama around?

Silence.

Ncedo: I'll be home soon I will take a taxi home in 15 minutes, sure.

She drops the call then look around.

Me: You are going home?

She doesn't answer.

Me: You are going to leave me every time we have an argument Ncedo? Haven't I proven myself enough all these months? I admit I made a mistake by giving her my numbers but I promise I wasn't going to entertain her, I promise.

Ncedo: It doesn't matter.

Me: Don't even think of breaking up with me Noncedo.

She get up.

Me: Let's go back home and talk my love.

Ncedo: I'm going home.

She signals a taxi to stop, she hops on, then it drives away, I huff going back home.

I walk in and moms are here.

Ntsoaki: Hi Bunny.

Me: Sawubona ma.(Hello ma)

Ntsoaki: You don't Look too good what's wrong?

Me: Ncedo just left we had a little argument.

Miyah: Please don't tell me you went back to your old nasty life.

Me: I didn't, I would never not now mom, that person is carrying my child I wouldn't do something to stress her out I don't want to lose her like I lost..I was just stupid.

I sit down, ma sit next to me and check out my eye, it's a bit swollen where she hit me with a phone.

Me: I'm scared mom, what if something happens to her and I'm not there.

Ntsoaki: Nothing will happen to her, it's probably just hormones she will be alright.

Me: Can you call and see if she's okay?

Miyah: I'll call her.

She calls putting the phone on loudspeaker.

Ncedo: Hello Ma..

Miyah: Hey where are you?

Ncedo: I'm in a taxi going home, Sbani is..

She cries, people must be looking at her right now in a taxi, I feel like shit.

Miyah: Don't cry I will talk to him now okay.

Ncedo: Okay, I'm sorry for leaving without telling you and thank you for letting me stay with you.

Miyah: Anything for you and our grandchild, be okay neh.

Ncedo: Ok.

I go to my room and try calling but the number is not going through so I opt for a text. "I love you and my unborn baby more than anything, I don't want to lose you guys please come back, I can even fetch you tomorrow, Ngiyaxolisa (I'm sorry)".

I send it, I keep looking at the phone hoping she replies.

I sleep without talking to her, in the morning I try calling and my heart skips a beat as she answers in a low voice.

Ncedo: Hello.

Me: Hey, I couldn't sleep last night.

Silence.

Me:: Ngicela ukukulanda. (can I please fetch you)

I sigh as she still doesn't answer.

Me: I didn't mean to hurt you, I love only you, I swear on my mother's grave I am not cheating on you.

I drop the call because I am talking to myself.

My phone rings, it's her.

Me: Baby.

Ncedo: You want to fetch me?

Me: Yes..yes my love I do.

Ncedo: Ok I will send the location.

Me: Thank you so much.

I rush to the bathroom to bath then wear my clothes checking the location, it's an hour and a few minutes drive.

I finally pull up a few houses away from her house, we've been communicating via texts

Me: "Hey I'm here".

I wait for a while, I see her coming towards my car then a guy follows shortly behind her, I step out of my car and try to hug her but the guy move past her pushing me then throws a punch at me, I'm shocked, I look at Noncedo.

Me: What is this Noncedo? You agreed I come here to get me beaten by your friends?

She chuckles.

Me: You think this shit is funny? Fuck you!

I open my car but she grabs my hand.

Ncedo: You are leaving?

"Noncedo let's go". I chuckle looking at this guy with a bold voice he looks older than me, way older.

Me: You are doing this to me?

Ncedo: This is my...

Me: Is that even my child you are carrying?

She opens her mouth then close it again
looking at the guy.

"Uzithwele Nono?"(you're pregnant Nono?)

He looks so angry.

Ncedo: Bhuti I can explain..I..

I feel like crap for thinking that maybe this is
her boyfriend, it's her older brother Sonwabile,
I have heard her talking about him but it just
didn't cross my mind, maybe because of the
punch I got.

Sonwa: You came home crying because of this
boy yet you are pregnant with his child and
you didn't tell me!?

Ncedo: I'm sorry..

He gently move her away and come to me, he
tries to punch me again but I block it.

Me: Mfethu can we stop this and talk like
adults.

Sonwa: Why would I be talking to you? You knock her up and you don't even have the decency to show up at home.

I look down, haven't thought about that.

Sonwa: I am going to tell mom Nono.

Ncedo: Bhuti no..please don't tell her now.

He walk away with Ncedo walking behind him begging him, I sigh getting in my car.

The guy rushes towards my car again, I step out.

Sonwa: Let's go..

I follow him inside, I find a very pretty woman she doesn't look so happy, her eyes are on me, she looks young but old at the same time, don't know if I'm making sense.

"sit down". I nod sitting down.

"I'm Zinzile Mlotshwa, Noncedo's mother".

I nod and look at Noncedo who is crying sitting on the couch.

Me: I'm Sbanisethu Gumede.

She chuckles.

Zinzile: Gumedede, I had a friend who once worked for your family, you were still kids then, she was looking after Nkosazana, her brother and sister she stopped due to health reasons.

She has this awkward smile on her face.

Zinzile: So you got my daughter pregnant?

Me: Uhm yeah but we didn't plan it.

Zinzile: Oh, so what are your plans?

Me: We are going to raise the baby together ma'am.

Zinzile: Together as in like, together?

I look at her confused.

She keeps asking me questions about us, how and when did we start dating.

Me: I'm rushing to a meeting Uhm I have to go.

She nods, her stare is making me uncomfortable.

Me: Sthandwa Sam can I talk to you.

We walk out, I hug her tight.

Me: I'm sorry about what you saw on my phone, I met Darlene at the hospital that day, I didn't think she would do that.

She nods holding me.

Me: Let's go home.

Ncedo: Let me go freshen up and get my bag, you can come and wait inside.

I go with her, her brother is driving out.

In the lounge it's just me and her mom, she sit next to me with a hand on my thigh.

Zinzile: So you are the bad boy Sbanisethu huh?

Me: How come you know about us while your daughter knew nothing about us.

Zinzile: Like I said I'm friends with your former Nanny so I have been following news I must say your family is fascinating I wished to see all

of you in person, King Ntsika and Nkanyezi, Langa are so my type.

I squint my eyes staring at her, she starts moving her hand slowly on my thigh.

Zinzile: But since you're here and you look older now I might as well...Uhm have you.

Me: Ma'am Uhm this is inappropriate, I love your daughter and she's carrying my child..

She giggles.

Zinzile: You believe her?

I swallow spit..

Me: What does that mean?

Zinzile: Last time I checked she never broke up with Keith..she always go back to him nomatter what.

We hear the door opening she get up and stand at the passage.

Ncedo: I'm done.

Her mom takes her bag and we walk out. I open for her, she get in and we drive back to

Durban, she keeps trying to make a conversation with me but I can't talk I have a lump in my throat I don't know if it's from anger or the sadness I'm feeling, she even fall asleep.

We get to her apartment, I take her bags to her room then walk out.

Ncedo: Sbani..

I look at her.

Ncedo: You are leaving?

Me: Yeah.

Ncedo: Oh so you fetched me back home to leave me here alone.

Me: Why did you go back in the first place?

She stares at me.

Me: Why Noncedo? To see the father of your baby?

Ncedo: What?

Me: I can't believe I trusted you, I even changed for you and for what?

Ncedo: What..what are you talking about?

I'm so angry I'm gonna explode in here.

Ncedo: Sbani why are you so angry, what did I do?

She is crying and I love her so much I hate it, I step closer and hold her.

Me: Why are you hurting me?

Ncedo: Ngenzeni Sbani? (What did I do?)

I let go of her and walk out, I have been moving all around my room like a mad man.

I drive to Boniswa's place and knock, she widens her eyes staring at me.

Boni: Sbani!

I hear a male voice calling her, I step back and go back to my car I shouldn't have come here.

I go back home and find my family in the lounge with Ncedo next to Ma.

Ntsika: Sbanisethu.

Me: Gumede..

Ntsika: Sit down.

I sit rubbing my hands together.

Ntsika: What is going on?

Me: Ngani baba? (With what dad?)

He chuckles.

Ntsika: Uyayiphika lengane ayithwele uNoncedo?(you are denying Noncedo's pregnancy?)

I look at her she is wiping her tears.

Me: No.

Ntsika: What's wrong with you?

Me: Nothing, Noncedo I'm sorry for how I acted earlier i'm just not okay, sorry for taking it out on you.

Ntsika: I don't like someone who make excuses for trying to run away from his own blood.

Me: I would never do that dad.

I go to my room, my door slowly opens Ncedo walk in, standing by the door playing with her hands I just take off my clothes.

Ncedo: Sbani.

Me: Yeah..

Ncedo: Uhm I am setting you free, looks like you are not happy with me in a way that you keep accusing me of having another man as a father of this child, so you can be with someone you trust and makes you happy.

She stands there for a minute staring at me then walk out.

The whole day I am thinking, what if that woman was testing me, what if she wanted to see how much I love and trust her daughter.

I rush out going to the mall then drive back to Noncedo's house, I find her cooking in the kitchen.

Me: Hi..

She nods.

Me: Uhm..

I go down on one knee with a ring in my hand.

Me: I know lately I have been acting like a fool do forgive me my love, you know Noncedo I have realised that I want to be with you for the rest of my life, so, will you marry me?

She is shocked.

Me: I want to be tied down by you, I want you to tell me "awuyi lapho"(you're not going there)

She giggles.

Me: Please my love.

Ncedo: Oh my God.

Me: Say yes.. please.

Ncedo: Yes, yes baby.

I put on her ring it's a bit tight but we will fix that. I kiss her and tell myself that I will stick to what I believe in no matter what anyone else says, she is mine carrying my child and she loves only me.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

*

Insert 60

*

NONCEDO

*

To be honest I'm a bit scared of getting married to Sbani, I don't think he is husband material though he is trying to change his old life but something is still in there, he has a very quick eye, for example just a week back we were at the mall just doing some window shopping I saw his eyes moving with some girls who were passing by, that did hurt but I told myself that maybe it was just me reading too much into it but he keeps doing it, so I'm

really not sure about marriage but I do love him, a lot I just wish he was like his brothers, those people only see their partners I don't even think they have ever cheated on them.

Anyway, I am three months pregnant, my stomach is just slightly bigger than it was before but I still wear my old clothes just not crop tops.

My mother is coming today to see my new place, I haven't told her about the engagement so it will be a surprise when she gets here. Sbani walk in the kitchen topless, he looks good, the v-line, the packs I get why girls love him, women are attracted to men who knows their ways around the gym, I do too.

Sbani: Baby..

He pecks my lips then licks his, he just knows he looks good

Me: Morning, Uhm so will you be here when mom arrives?

Sbani: Uhm..I don't think so I have a meeting to get to.

Me:: Oh..Uhm that's okay you will come back after the meeting right.

Sbani: How about you guys come home tomorrow and eat lunch with us?

Me: That's okay, so I will see you tomorrow?

Sbani: Yes.

Me: Ok.

I always get nervous when he leaves, I get those what if he is going to another woman, I don't trust myself and I hate it, it has never happened before, I have never been insecure in my life like I am right now.

I watch him get dressed then take his car keys and phone, he look my way, I am just standing by the door.

Sbani: Are you ok?

Me: Yeah I'm fine.

He kiss my lips then my forehead and then brush my tummy.

Sbani: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

He walk out, I finish cooking then clean a bit.

Around 10 am mom calls asking for my address, I give them to her.

She comes in after fifteen minutes looking all good, you would say she is my older sister, and when we are with my brother people thinks we are all siblings, she just doesn't age and she knows it.

Zinzile: Come give mama a hug.

I smile and hug her.

Zinzile: My grandchild is growing I see.

I still feel embarassed by that, I disappointed mom by getting pregnant before marriage, she got married to dad first then got pregnant with Sonwa.

We sit and chat over a meal.

Zinzile: So where is Sbanisethu?

Me: He has a meeting.

Zinzile: Oh, couldn't he reschedule for his mother in law.

Me: I think it was important ma.

She nods.

Me: But he asked if we could join his family for lunch tomorrow.

Zinzile: That would be great!

She seems excited about it.

Zinzile: So, do they like you?

Me: Yes I hang around them a lot because of Ivy.

Zinzile: That's good, you have done well for yourself, look at this place, it's beautiful.

Me: Thank you mama, it's all you, you raised me well.

Later we go to bed, Sbani hasn't called so I just call him.

Sbani: Hello.

Me: Uh how did your meeting go?

Sbani: A meeting? Oh it went great.

Me: Ok, I'm sleeping now.

Sbani: Ok goodnight baby.

Me: You are home?

Sbani: Yes.

Me: Can I see you just a bit you won't come inside.

He chuckles.

Sbani: Ok, i'll call once I get there.

Me: Ok.

I huff, is this really the life I want to live the rest of my life, checking if he is really not with another woman, I don't think I want this but there is a baby on the way, it deserves a home, a mom and a dad.

He calls telling me he is outside, I walk out, he is already standing outside leaning on his car, I

stand on his feet and kiss him, I love doing that since he is taller.

He takes a paper bag in the car and give it to me.

Sbani: I bought two burgers for you and my Nana in there.

Me: Thank you so much.

We kiss and play around for a while until I'm tired.

Me: Let's go to bed mom is already asleep please.

Sbani: But...

Me: We won't do anything.

He agrees, I hold his hand and walk in, we find mom watching TV sipping on some wine, she has her legs crossed so her thighs are all out, I clear my throat looking at Sbani he is just looking down on his phone then he walk away.

Me: I thought you're a asleep already.

Zinzile: Came to get a glass then I'm out.

I nod and walk away. Sbani is already in bed, I sleep next to him my head is on his chest.

Sbani: When is your mom leaving?

I lift my head staring at him.

Sbani: I'm just asking don't look at me like that.

Me: I don't know, she just got here.

He nods.

Me: You don't seem to like her, you didn't even greet.

Sbani: You wanted me to talk to your mom while she had inappropriate clothes on?

I sit up.

Me: Inappropriate for who? You mean you even get turned on by older women? You just can't keep it in your pants huh?

I shut my mouth as he sit up and take his clothes.

Me: Sbani, I'm sorry I didn't mean to say that.

I know how much he doesn't like to be shouted at or accused of something without evidence to back it up, that's why he is leaving. He takes his cellphone and car keys, he stands next to me and put his hand on my tummy.

Sbani: I love you.

He walk out just like that, I don't even know if he was saying it to me or his baby.

I try calling him almost the whole night but he is not answering.

In the morning I go make breakfast, mom walk in and sit on the barstool.

Zinzile: Morning.

Me: Hi mom.

Zinzile: You didn't get much sleep huh?

She says giggling I just focus on breakfast.

Zinzile: Is Sbanisethu still asleep?

Me: No he left.

Zinzile: Already?

Me: He left last night.

She ask a lot of questions which I totally ignore.

Zinzile: Listen, if you're not happy then leave him, a baby grows up just fine without two parents together.

Me: But dad was there for you.

Zinzile: Your dad was not a cheater, wasn't seen with different women everyday.

I look down.

Zinzile: Keith was way better, I still don't get how you dumped him.

Me: I have to get ready for work, you gonna be okay alone?

Zinzile: Yes I'll cook your favourite.

I smile walking away. I get ready for work and look for my cellphone I can't find it anywhere.

Me: Ma you didn't see my phone.

Zinzile: No, you gonna be late go I will look for it.

I nod and rush out, I'm getting late.

I am at work but I keep getting cramps I think it's stress.

I end up knocking off early because I don't feel too good.

I see Sbani's car outside, I try opening the front door but it's locked.

I take out the spare keys in my bag and unlock.

Sbani: What are you doing?

I can hear him talking in my room, I get there and mom is half naked on top of Sbani. I feel like puking and I actually puke right there feels like a baby is moving around in circles.

Sbani: Baby...

Now I'm on my knees I can't seem to stop puking and it now hurts.

He tries to get me up but I push him away from me and go to the bathroom, I feel dizzy, my body is heavy I actually let go and hit the ground.

I feel him picking me up, my eyes are heavy, I can feel the car moving.

I wake up in a hospital bed, I move my hand to my tummy, I feel a sense of relief as I still feel the baby bump, I look the other way pretending to be asleep as the door opens.

Nkosazana: I fucken know you did some shit
Sbani I know it!

Sbani: I didn't sis I..

Nkosazana: Don't lie to me! You should have just asked her to abort if you didn't want this baby not risk their lives like this! Can't you grow up!

Sbani: Zana stop okay, I told you I didn't do anything.

She clicks her tongue then I hear the door closing.

I must have fallen asleep again I wake up and mom is sitting next to me and she is the lat person I want to see.

I stretch my hand to press the button, then a nurse rush in so fast.

Nurse: Miss are you okay?

Me: I don't want her here can you please throw her out.

Zinzile: Nono let me explain.

Me: I want her out.

The nurse walk out with her, later I am just not okay I want to cry out loud, just then Ivy and Letho walk in I just let it all out, ivy rushes to me and hold me, I cry for maybe a good 5 minutes none stop. When I finally stop she wipes my tears, Letho is standing by the window looking at us.

Ivy: This is not good for the baby Ncedo, you can't cry like this.

Me: Sorry I'm just..

I blink looking up.

Ivy: It's okay baby.

Letho sit next to me.

Letho: What happened?

Me: Uhm its..I was just too emotional that's all.

He squints his eyes, I know he doesn't believe me but how do you tell people that the father of your child was busy with your mom, I can't.

Me: When can I go home?

Nkosazana walk in and stand next to me.

Nkosazana: Do you feel any pain? Cramps?

Me: Just a little on tummy.

Nkosazana: Look, I think you should choose yourself and your baby, Sbani is not worth you loosing this baby or your life.

She look at the file.

Nkosazana: Your brother will never grow up

Letho: Now he is my brother?

Nkosazana: Is he not?

Letho: Is he not yours.

She shakes her head.

Nkosazana: I disowned him long time ago.
Uhm Ncedo I will let you go home only if you promise to stay away from stressful people.

I nod.

Letho and Ivy take me home and I find mom there.

Me: Can you pack your things and go back to your house please.

Zinzile: I'm your mother, you should hear me out.

Ivy and Letho go home, I hear a car pulling up Sbani walk in looks like he has been drinking.

Me: Why are you here?

Sbani: To tell you my side of the story.

Me: Which side? You know I was working why did you come here?

Zinzile: I..I called him when I found your phone, I told him to take it to your work place but he just took advantage and started taking off my clothes..

That is just disgusting, Sbani is laughing I wish I could hurt him with something.

Sbani: Hey I found you already naked ready to open your old thighs to me!

I slap him, how dare he speaks to my mother like that.

Sbani: Noncedo..

He sit down.

Sbani: I'm tired of having to prove myself that I have changed, if you believe your mother over me it's okay I won't sit here and defend myself when you've already made up your mind but what I know is I would never sleep with a woman that is old enough to be my mother, I found her already naked in here after she sent a text from your phone to come here I thought maybe you're sick so I rushed in only to find her naked in your bed.

I look at my mother and shake my head, I don't know who to believe so I just breathe to calm myself down then talk in a low but stern voice.

Me: Get out, both of you, now.

Sbani get up first and walk out the door like he was waiting for me to say those words for so long.

Me: Mom go home I don't want you here.

She pack her bags and walk out, I don't even know why she had to come here in the first place.

I order in and eat while watching my favourite series of The Vampire Diaries, it just never gets old there are some parts I keep repeating, I end up falling asleep on the couch.

I get the shock of my life when I wake up in bed the next day I run to the door and find it locked I am alone in the house but maybe I did wake up at night and went to bed I just don't remember.

Weeks pass Sbani and i talked and we called it quits, it was mutual from both our sides, he couldn't pretend to love me anymore and neither did I Because to be honest ever since

that day I caught them with mom I feel really disgusted by him.

6 months later, this is a scary month for me, my due date is in a week, Sbani and I don't talk, he does come to the appointments with me but we are like strangers I am slowly getting over him I think he did get over me a long time ago though I haven't heard anything about him being with a woman but maybe he is keeping it on a low.

I have stopped working just waiting for my baby's arrival we don't know the gender yet, wanted it to be a surprise and my mother we have been talking but things are not the same anymore.

The baby has been very active since from 3 am this morning and it's starting to hurt a bit and very uncomfortable because it pushes right at the abdomen.

I look at my hand I can't believe that I have won this ring even after our breakup I'm a fool aren't I. I sigh and take it off slowly putting it

on my coffee table. I go to the bathroom to pee, I see a brown discharge on the toilet paper I have been looking very closely these days any changes because I'm so afraid of those labour pains people always talk about. I quickly get up and look for my phone I dial Sbani's number, I'm not wrong for calling him I mean he is still the father of this baby.

Sbani: Hello.

Me: Hi, can you take me to the hospital i'm not feeling well.

Sbani: I'm on my way.

I go freshen up and wear my loose dress because I am feeling really hot, my hair is tied up loosely.

I sit in the lounge waiting for Sbani, he finally shows up looking great he was at work because he is wearing formal clothes. He look at me.

Sbani: Are you ready to go?

I nod.

Sbani: Where is the bag? I already called Nkosazana.

Me: Over there.

He looks at the bag then his eyes moves to the table, he stares at the ring for a while then look at me.

Sbani: Let's go.

He take my hand and look down at me, I missed the time when he would look at me like that and I would stand on his feet to kiss him.

Sbani: Are you nervous?

I nod.

Sbani: Me too.

We laugh a little.

Sbani: But we gonna be okay neh, I got you.

He takes the bag and we go to the hospital, I am admitted, Nkosazana walk in.

Nkosazana: You are not in labour when you still look this good.

I laugh, she checks me down there then chuckle.

Nkosazana: You have a long way to go miss, you can even go home and rest.

Me: Uhm so it's not time.

Nkosazana: Oh it is but not today probably tomorrow.

Me: Oh..

Nkosazana: On second thought I think you should stay.

I nod nervously, mind you it's only 11 am and she is talking about tomorrow.

Around 4 I feel some light cramps, I brush my tummy, Sbani is sitting a bit far busy on his phone.

Now I am groaning I feel the pain now feels like someone is actually cutting me with a knife on my abdomen.

Sbani: You're sweating.

Me: Yeah I think we should just consider c-section the pain is....

It comes again I clench my jaws and let out a scream, then it stops like it never started, tears are not coming out but I am crying I promise you.

Sbani: Nkosazana needs to get here soon!

He shouts in frustration, it's just the two of us and it's midnight.

After crying the whole night Nkosazana finally decides that it's time and its 5 in the morning, Sbani has her shirt rolled up now and the tie is off he is so messy than how he looked yesterday.

After a long pushing and cussing I finally hear a loud cry now I feel tears on my cheeks i'm happy and in pain. She put the baby on my chest, my baby girl.

They take her for a while, they clean me up and stitch me down there I don't feel pain but I can feel the discomfort.

I am now wearing clean gowns and the baby is wrapped up in a pink blanket Sbani is holding her carefully.

Me: Do you have a name?

He chuckles.

Sbani: I knew from the start that I am having a baby girl so her name is Esamilsipho.

I smile.

Me: Esami nice name.

Sbani: Uhm is it okay if she uses Gumede?

Me: Yeah it's okay.

Sbani: Thank you.

I watch him as he walk around the room, maybe a baby is all he ever wanted, not me but his gift that he is holding with so much care and love. There is no hope for us, I think he tricked me to get what he always wanted, a baby.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 61

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SBANISETHU

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I will try to be the best dad to my daughter, I want her to be proud to call me her dad because of my actions so I really have to change my ways.

I realised that having a baby girl changes the way you act especially towards women, you wouldn't do what you don't want your daughter to go through to another woman, you respect woman in a whole different level.

She's three weeks and we are taking her to the palace for her 'imbeleko' ceremony, she stays with me at home Noncedo takes her to visit

everyday and she's okay with that I heard she wants to go back to varsity to finish her studies, she is a university dropout.

I see Letho's old car driving in then she step out looking good, she has a black dress on then a blue and black headwrap that matches her high heels.

I walk towards her with a baby in my arms, she kiss the baby and take her.

Ncedo: Mommy missed you so much baby.

She is already a great mom that wants what's best for our child that is why she didn't fight when I explained to her that the baby will have to stay at home. She finally looks at me.

Ncedo: Hi Sbani.

Me: Hi.

She is glowing you won't even think she just had a baby three weeks ago and she is always smiling.

Me: You want to come in and greet?

She nods walking in, she greets and we walk out again and drive to the palace in different cars, the baby is with her, Letho borrowed her the car.

Grandma went all out for this ceremony, there are decorations a lot of food it's beautiful.

We slaughter a goat and introduce her to our ancestors in the rondavel, once we are done I go to my room where her mom is, she is not a wife so she chose to stay in my room. I sit in bed after putting Esami down.

Me: So how is everything going with the registration?

Ncedo: It's done my application is successful already I am resuming my studies so it was easy.

I nod.

Me: That's good.

I clear my throat I want to say something but I don't know if it's appropriate.

Me: I would have loved to see you with my brothers wives that side.

She giggles.

Ncedo: It didn't work out, move on.

I nod chuckling, she doesn't seem to care not even a little bit.

I get up and walk towards the door.

Ncedo: Your phone?

I look at her.

Me: Can you keep it for me, I'm going to get drunk so I wouldn't want to lose it.

Ncedo: Oh..ok, you are not switching it off?

Me: No, and you can answer my calls.

Ncedo: No, I'll pass.

I walk out and join my brothers.

Nqoba: Why do you look so grumpy?

Me: I just want to get wasted.

Sbonga: What's wrong?

Me: Everything, I messed up.

I say opening a beer and drinking it all up then open another one.

Later I go back to my room I feel really drunk but hey I can walk so I'm still good.

I find my baby and her mom already sleeping.

Me: Noncedo..

She sit up.

Me: Ngingalala la? (Can I sleep here)

Ncedo: You are drunk Sbani, so no.

I nod.

I sit on the couch and take off my shoes.

I wake up in the morning with a bed cover over me, my body hurts from sleeping on the little couch. Ncedo walk in with a towel wrapped around her body she just took a bath.

Ncedo: morning.

Me: Mmm.

Ncedo: Hangover?

Me: Mmmh Mmh.

She laughs.

Ncedo: Why were you crying yesterday?

Me: What?

Ncedo: You cried.

Me: Don't lie Wena.

She giggles.

Ncedo: You did it was so sad I even called Lethu and he also cried with you, you guys can't take alcohol really.

She keeps laughing I go take a bath then go back to the room, I find her dressed up.

Ncedo: Uhm since everything is done I am thinking of going back.

Me: Now?

She nods.

Me: Oh..ok.

I can see she is not comfortable here so it's not fair to keep her here.

Ncedo: Can you drop her off at my place once you come back please.

Me: Ok, let me wear my pants so I can walk you out.

We walk out, she gives me my phone.

Ncedo: Bye.

Me: Thank you for coming.

I hug her and open the door for her, she get in and drive out. I am standing in the same position until grandma stands next to me.

Ziyanda: Sawubona.(hello)

Me: Hello ma'am.

Ziyanda: She is beautiful.

I look at her.

Ziyanda: And a lot of men can see that.

I chuckle.

Me: Yeah I see.

She laughs walking away.

Later I drive back to Durban then take a route to Ncedo's place. I knock and she opens in her shorts and sport bra she is sweating a little.

Me: Hey..

Ncedo: Hey can I take a quick bath I'll be back now.

She walk away I guess she was working out, she looks all kind of hot.

She comes back wearing her gown then she takes Esami from me, we sit on the same couch she is playing with the baby not minding me at all.

Me: Uhm I have to go, you will drop her off later right?

Ncedo: Yeah, that's okay.

I kiss Esami's cheek and get up.

Ncedo: Sbani..

I look at her.

Ncedo: Is it okay if I introduce her to my friends?

Me: Friends yes but not your boyfriends.

Ncedo: I said friends Sbanisethu.

Me: I heard you, I was just putting it out there.

She nods, she is a very sensitive person i am getting to know the real her the little time we spend together.

Me: I'm sorry.

Ncedo: Let me walk you out.

I block her way, she tries to move to the side I block her again.

Ncedo: Stop..

Me: You need to voice it out when someone says something offensive to you, don't pretend like you're okay when you're not.

Ncedo: So you are testing me so that I can talk? Sbani I don't care about what you say to me you are just a father to our daughter but nothing to me okay!

Me: That's it, right there! You are angry
Noncedo.

Ncedo: I'm not!

She shouts then tears stream down her face, she quickly give me the baby and walk away, I go to another room and put my daughter to sleep giving Noncedo some time to calm down. After a while I go check on her, she is sleeping on the side holding a cushion to her chest, I sit next to her brushing her hair back.

Me: Talk to me.

Ncedo: I'm fine.

I nod, I guess she doesn't trust me.

Me: I will see you later, are you going to be okay?

Ncedo: Yes.. thank you for bringing her here.

Me: It's cool.

I walk out but realise I left my keys inside, I walk in and find her on the phone standing by the window looking outside.

Ncedo: I have to pretend as if I'm okay with everything Ivy, it hurts man, I hate it.

Ivy: Talk to him.

Ncedo: And say what? Hey Sbani please marry me so I can be with my daughter, Does that sound right to you?

Ivy: But Noncedo this is eating you up, you cry everyday.

Ncedo: I will get used to it I guess, bye friend.

I hold her from behind, she jumps turning to look at me, she blinks, I hold her waist we are still staring at each other, it's intense, she slowly step on my feet, we share a very slow kiss then she step back.

Ncedo: Uhm..I think ..Sami is awake I will go check on her.

She walk past me but I pull her back and kiss her picking her up, I slowly lay her on the couch kissing her neck talking off her gown. She takes off my t-shirt, then unbuckle my belt, she is in her panties only, Esami starts crying in the room, she push me away and take her gown rushing to the room, I sit on the

couch wearing my t-shirt, my dick is still twitching. After a while I go to them, she is changing her nappy.

We go to the kitchen, she gives me the baby, I feed her while she's busy cooking. I give my baby the bottle till she falls asleep then take her back to bed, Ncedo dish up for us we sit opposite each other and eat in silence.

I clear my throat.

Me: Noncedo.

She look at me a little then look down on her plate.

Me: I'm sorry, I wasn't trying to take Esami away from you.

Ncedo: I know, you explained everything to me Sbani I got it.

Me: I didn't mean to hurt you.

Ncedo: It's okay.

We do the dishes together, things are just awkward, my phone is ringing in the lounge.

Ncedo: It's late, you have to go.

I don't say anything but just pick her up and take her to bed, I take off my clothes and her gown then turn her around, she hold on to the bed while I come hard behind her, she is screaming my name while I groan grabbing her hair tight.

I am sweating, we're now in bed catching out breath.

Me: I want you back mama wengane yam.(mother of my child) please give me this one last chance.

She sleep on my chest closing her eyes, I kiss her forehead.

Later we wake up to a knock she wears her gown and walk out, I wear my pants and go to check on my baby, I find her awake just looking up.

Me: Hey daddy's angel.

I pick her up and walk out, I find a coloured guy standing next to Noncedo's mother, Ncedo looks defeated.

Zinzile: Sbani?

She looks at me like she is confused by something.

Me: Noncedo..

She turns looking at us.

Me: We are leaving.

I go to her room to wear my t-shirt and shoes , she comes in and stand by the door.

Ncedo: Sbani..

Me: If I could get millions everytime a person calls my name I would be a millionaire today you've been screaming my name baby.

She giggles looking down, now thats what I want to hear everyday, those giggles.

Me: So who is the guy?

Ncedo: Uhm..Keith..

Me: Your Ex?

She nods.

Me: Should I ask?

She laughs, like break out in a full blown laughter I end up laughing with her, I don't even know why.

Me: Uhlekani? (Why are you laughing?)

Ncedo: That woman never came to see my baby when she was born but now here she is with Keith claiming he is the father of my baby, now he wants to see the baby like how Sbani? How when I last slept with him like 4 months before Esami was conceived, you mean his sperms were in here all those months!?

Now she looks really amused it's funny.

Me: Baby..

I just love her even more when she talks like this, she is a lazy talker but her speech is very fast but so low.

Ncedo: Abantu bayahlanya Sbani
ungahleki.(People are crazy Sbani don't laugh)

Me: Should I go?

Ncedo: No, please stay.

I nod and take my daughter to the kitchen, I feed her she eats everytime that is why she is so big. I hear some noise coming from the lounge, I go to the room first to put my daughter down she is awake but I have to check if her mom is okay. I find her holding her cheek, her mom is staring at her with her face full of rage.

Me: Ncedo..

She rushes to me and cry on my chest, the guy is now sitting on the couch staring at me with the same rage, I look at Noncedo, she has a mark on her cheek, it's fingers I brush it a little I am falling for her harder than before I don't know what's going on.

Me: Do you want them to leave?

She look at her mom.

Ncedo: What is it you want from me? I am going back to school I just made one single mistake of falling pregnant before marriage but I am independent mom, I am trying to be a better person.

Zinzile: Just get back with Keith, you deserve better than him, he is going to hurt you, he tried sleeping with me your mother Nono!
I chuckle.

Zinzile: He doesn't love you and you know it that is why you broke the engagement, you saw it, he will never love you.

Ncedo looks at me and wipe her tears with the back of her hand.

Ncedo: Just go.

Keith: Can I see the baby?

Me: Which baby?

Keith: My baby.

I don't know what Noncedo's Mom told this guy because he sounds so serious, maybe she

told him the wrong age I don't know he is too confident that the baby is his.

Me: So you want to tell me that Noncedo carried that baby for almost 15 months no man, niyahlanya serious.(you are really crazy)

He get up and stand in front of me, he is trying to intimidate me but it's not gonna work, that is my child and my woman!

Keith: I want to see that child.

Me: And I am saying No.

Zinzile: Sbani just let him see the baby! What are you afraid of?

Me: You are really testing me old lady and I don't like it.

Zinzile: Oh yeah? Says you who sleeps with every woman you come across with.

Me: Yeah but still you won't get me, I see what you're trying to do, it won't work I love her and she is not going back to him, not while I'm still breathing.

She raise her eyebrow.

Me: They might have told you you look younger than your age but I have seen way better.

Zinzile: Noncedo are you going to let him speak to me like this?

Ncedo: I want you out of my house mama.

Zinzile: You call this a House! This piece of shit can't even buy a decent house for you and your daughter!

Ncedo: That's it I am calling the cops!

She takes her phone and dial a number, she then put the phone on her ear.

Keith: Let's go Zinzi, we will be back soon.

They walk out, I can see Noncedo's knees literally shaking I quickly hold her.

Me: It's okay baby.

I run my hand on her hair.

Me: You don't have to worry about a thing, I got you, I'm not going anywhere.

She step back and give me that giggle that always drive me crazy.

Me: Weren't you crying?

Ncedo: I was, but now I'm horny.

She push me to the couch then take charge, she is controlling everything, my body, my mind and my soul, my whole body tense up as I cum I am holding her tight, this girl is doing something to me.

I go back to bed with her in my arms, I don't think I want to let go.

A month later we are still in it, I am even becoming jealous as she just started attending her classes, i have never felt like this in my life!

I just pulled up at the gate to fetch her, I see her walking out with a guy, they are laughing I feel my armpits getting itchy, I step out of the car and wait for her. She look at me and give me a very gorgeous smile.

Ncedo: I'll see you tomorrow Kev.

This Kev guy pull her and hug her I look down shaking my head, I am leaning on my car she is wearing shorts and a shirt tucked in only in the front, she looks amazing I am checking her out and so is this guy she just hugged as she walk up to me, she does what she always do when she kisses me, step on my feet.

Me: I don't like that boy.

She turns looking at him, he is still looking our way.

Ncedo: He is just a classmate babe.

Me: Does he know that?

She kiss me.

Ncedo: He knows now.

We drive to her place. We cook together, our baby stays with my moms at home they look after her.

Me: Uhm so what kind of house do you like baby?

Ncedo: Uhm I don't know, maybe a three bedroom house, lounge and kitchen, with a lot of space since my baby is still gonna crawl and learn to walk and and...

I nod, what her mom said the other day hit deep, I can't have the mother of my first baby staying in a rented flat and also driving my brother's second her car, that's not it.

The following day I leave early in the morning to a car dealership, I managed to get to know what her favourite car is, she is not an expensive person but classy, once I'm done I call her.

Ncedo: Hello..

Me: Hey you're home?

Ncedo: I'm in your house with Esami..

Me: Oh ok.

Ncedo: Where are you? I thought I will find you here.

Me: I'll be home soon.

I get someone to drive my car while I drive hers home.

I hoot outside the house, my mothers come out first very annoyed I smile hugging them.

Miyah: Oh wow, new car?

I nod.

Miyah: Congratulations baby..

Me: It's not mine.

I take my phone and make a call.

Ncedo: Sbani.

Me: I'm outside can you come here a little.

She comes out with Esami in her arms.

Me: Uhm hey.

She nods shyly, I mean my mom's are making things awkward with the way they are smiling looking at us.

Me: Uhm I have something for you.

Ncedo: Why are your moms looking at me like this, they are making me uncomfortable.

She speaks through her teeth, I give her the car keys, she stares at them.

Me: This is for you, when a woman falls pregnant it's a matter of life or death, people don't understand that but I do, a lot don't make it out alive in that room, some lose the baby, you gave me this precious gift, you made me a father and this is just to say I appreciate you, I love you and our daughter please accept this gift.

Ncedo: You..you bought a car? For me?

Me: Yes..

She slowly take the keys while I take the baby from her.

She look at my moms she has tears in her eyes.

Ntsoaki: Congratulations!

Ncedo: Thank you, thank you so much.

Looks like she doesn't believe this.

She starts screaming and jumping like a kid going to the car.

Miyah: Sbani..

I look at her.

Miyah: I'm proud of you, you are really growing, I see it.

She is tearing up as well.

Miyah: Pamela would be so proud.

I hug her, she is so emotional but I am glad it's because she is proud not disappointments.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 62

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SBANISETHU

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I am a happy man raising a beautiful daughter with a loving and kind woman by my side. She is studying for her exams so I am trying to give her the space she needs so she can study.

It's Saturday I am taking my daughter to her mom for a very brief visit. I start by buying her favourite meal then drive to her apartment.

I walk in with my daughter and a paper bag, she is sitting on the couch with books scattered on the floor and coffee table.

Me: Baby..

She look up then rush to us hugging both of us in excitement.

Ncedo: I missed you guys so much, hey Sami..

She takes her from me sitting down, I can feel the love from here.

Ncedo: You're good?

I nod sitting next to her.

Me: i love you.

Her eyes lit up, up she loves hearing me say it.

We stay together till our daughter falls asleep, she takes her to bed then come back, we eat then pull her to my lap.

Me: I love you so much.

Ncedo: You've been telling me that for the hundred times today.

Me: That's not enough, do you see it?

She hug me tight.

Ncedo: I see it and thank you for loving me.

Me: Will you marry me? And this time for real please.

Ncedo: Uhm but..the ring, you took it back..

Me: Yeah I did an exchange for this..

I take the necklace from my pocket, it's in a box, she opens it and her eyes glow just like this piece.

Me: You want me to help you put it on?

She nods.

Ncedo: Thank you so much..

She whisper clearly emotional, I put her necklace then go on one knee taking out a new ring.

Me: Will you marry me?

She nods blinking the tears away.

Ncedo: Yes! Yes I will marry you.

I put it on.

Ncedo: The rock is even bigger than the last one.

I laugh.

Me: You deserve bigger things baby..

Ncedo: Yeah because I can handle them.

I raise my eyebrow, she laughs really hard.

Me: What..

She moves her hands from my chest down to my crotch I finally get it and start laughing.

Me: You're naughty!

She gives me the best sex I ever had then we take a bath.

Ncedo: So you guys are leaving now?

She says wearing her pjamas.

Me: Yeah you're writing tomorrow right?

Ncedo: Yes.

Me: I will take you to campus tomorrow morning then.

Ncedo: Ok, thank you for everything ok.

Me: And thank you for saying yes baby.

I take my daughter and leave.

In the morning I wake up early and drive to her place I find it locked, I use my own key to open, I find the lounge clean, her books are packed away.

Me: Baby! Noncedo

She doesn't answer. I search for her in the rooms and bathrooms but nothing so I take my phone to make a call but it sends me straight to voicemail, I leave a message.

Me: Baby, I told you I'm going to take you to campus, why did you leave? Call me Noncedo.

I am frustrated, why didn't she call, or maybe she wanted to do some revision. I go to work. Around 12 I try to call her again, she should be home by now but still it's on voicemail. I drive to her place and looks like she hasn't come back.

Me: Noncedo Kanti ukuphi? (Where are you?)

I call mom to ask if she's at home, she says no. I stay at her place the whole day and night waiting.

Two days later she hasn't been back I have filed a missing person report, I have never been so scared in my life, what happened to her, what if she was robbed and killed.

Me: Sbongakonke!

I shout knocking in his room, it's midnight. He opens the door on his boxers only, he was asleep and looks so annoyed.

Sbonga: Why are you shouting like a crazy man!?

Me: Please help me locate Noncedo's phone, where it was last used, please I'm sorry for waking you up.

He takes his cellphone and laptop we go to the lounge, he gets busy I am tapping my foot down.

Sbonga: Stop doing that!

I look at him.

Me: Can you find anything?

He focus on the screen then look at me, I stare at the laptop.

Sbonga: Her phone was switched off at 1 am close to this dam.

Me: No, no you think she would? She wouldn't..no.

Sbonga: We should give this information to the police but they shouldn't know it's me who hacked the phone.

I go to bed feeling really cold not because of the weather but thinking about what could

possibly be the reason why Noncedo would go to that dam at night.

In the morning I am in the police station they are taking a team to go search at the dam after giving them last night's information.

Police van drive out, I drive behind them. The dogs have been searching inside the water with the team, I don't even know what to do with myself, Landi's car parks next to me, she hasn't been home, she was travelling because of work.

We shoulder hug.

Nadia: What's going on?

Me: Maybe you should look into this Landile, Noncedo can't just vanish we have a daughter, I proposed again and she was happy.

Nadia: I will look into it.

She go to the detective incharge of the case. The team comes back with two cellphones inside the water.

When we go back they give me the phones and one of them is Noncedo's phone.

Me: What does this mean detective?

Him: We didn't find any body inside but there is a possibility that she jumped in, we will keep looking at the nearby to rivers she...

Me: She wouldn't, she has no reason to do that, no.

Him: We are searching for all the possibilities Gumede and also we need to contact her family, does she have anyone?

Me: Her mom and brother.

I give him the contact numbers.

I refuse to believe that Noncedo would just jump in the dam like that, she wanted to graduate so bad, she loves me and our daughter so there's no way she would commit suicide, no way!

Her mom just arrived she she is throwing a tantrum I am so annoyed with her.

Zinzile: Where is my daughter Sbanisethu?

I don't have energy for her I haven't slept in three days.

Zinzile: I knew you were not good for her!

Me: Who was I good for? You?

The police are looking at us, she is causing a scene.

Zinzile: What did you do to my daughter?

I just rest my head on the wall looking up, what did I do that she would want to leave? Was I abusive but didn't see it? I have a lot of things going on my mind, but I never raised my hand on her.

Sonwa arrives later and literally beat me up and like I said I don't have any energy left in me to fight so I just let him until Sbonga comes in and fight with him, the cops run in and pull them apart.

Sonwa: You will tell me what you did to her! I warned her about you rich people, maybe you sacrificed her!

He is spitting fire while wiping his bloody nose.

They are now questioning me and by the looks of it I am now the suspect in this case.

3 weeks gone but still, there is no sign of Noncedo, I have even neglected my daughter because I want updates everyday, Noncedo's brother lives in a rented flat here, he left his work to search for his sister. I drive to his place I know we are not in good terms but I just need to talk to him.

He opens the door staring at me.

Me: Hi, I didn't come here to fight, I just want to talk to you.

He make way for me to get in, I sit on the chair, he opens the fridge and give me a beer then take one for himself and sit down.

Me: I want to ask about her relationship with the guy, Uhm Keith? How was it?

Sonwa: You're here to ask me about my sister's ex, really?

Me: I just want to know.

He wipes his face.

Sonwa: That is my little sister man, I vowed to protect her after our parents died.

He shakes his head.

Me: Your parents?

Sonwa: We were adopted..

Me: What?

Sonwa: Noncedo doesn't know, we promised dad that we won't ever tell her.

Me: I don't understand.

Sonwa: She was still a baby when mom and dad passed away so we were taken to the orphanage, a couple came looking for a boy to adopt so they chose me but I wasn't gonna leave my sister behind but a woman wanted just a boy, me. Her husband begged her to

take the both of us, I didn't want anything to separate me from my sister.

He sighs.

Sonwa: They took only me, I was 6 years old and when I was in a car I memorised every building we passed so I can go back to my little sister, two weeks I kept going back and they would fetch me until the lady agreed to take the both of us.

Me: You are talking about Zinzile?

He nods.

Me: So she didn't want Noncedo?

Sonwa: She just wanted one child, a boy child.

Me: Was she good to your sister after all that?

Sonwa: Yes, she took care of her like her own child, like she did with me.

Me: Did you know that they were not in good terms ever since our daughter was born?

Sonwa: Yes because she was disappointed that she had a baby before marriage.

Me: No, it was more than that, she even made up a story that my daughter is Keith's and she came with him to Ncedo's place.

He chuckles.

Sonwa: you're lying.

Me: Why would I lie about something like this.

Sonwa: To save your own skin! You are the last person she was with and I don't trust you and your family, you did something to her, can you please give me her body so I can bury her at our home please man.

I can see tears in his eyes.

Me: I wouldn't hurt the mother of my child man, I didn't do anything to her that night.

He get up and walk out I follow him after a while and find him smoking.

Me: Look man I know this won't sound right to you, but I don't trust your mother, she and Keith planned this whole thing.

Sonwa: Show me proof not theories.

Me: Help me find proof please, help me find the mother of my child.

Sonwa: How am I supposed to help you?

Me: Follow your mother, keep tabs on her, I will give you a car so she won't see anything.

Sonwa: That's crazy.

Me: Think about your niece man, she needs her mom.

He nods.

I go home with him then give him my old car.

He has been following his mom for a week now but he hasn't found anything out of the ordinary.

I am home with my daughter, it's around 9 at night my phone rings it's Sonwa.

I answer the call.

Me: Hello.

I hear him breathing heavily.

Me: Sonwabile..

Sonwa: She is..she is..

I hear gunshot that cause me to sit up immediately.

Me: Hello..

Sonwa: Save...my sister..

The line goes off, I am sweating if something happens to him then his blood will be in my hands, I should have done this by myself Noncedo won't forgive me for this.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 63

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SBANISETHU

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Lethu has been driving for 30 minutes, I keep checking the watch I feel like he has been driving too slow.

Sbonga is still on his laptop tracking Sonwabile's phone.

Me: Can you drive faster?

Lethu: Brother you need to calm down.

I chuckle.

Me: Calm down? My woman's brother is out there probably dead and you want me to calm down!

It's the four of us in the car, I know Lethu is driving as fast as he can I am just frustrated and scared of the situation I put Sonwa in.

Sbonga: It's moving, Lethu step on it man.

The car is flying on the road, we are not so far from the red dot now, which is Sonwabile's phone.

Sbonga: Stop the car!

He step out first, we follow him. I can see my car from a distance. Letho takes out his gun as we get closer to the car. I open the driver's seat, Sonwa has his hand on her shoulder, he was shot his hand has blood.

Me: What happened?

Sonwa: Ncedo's is at Keith's house, hurry before they move her.

Me: What? So who shot you?

Sonwa: It was him, you were right my mother is in there, Noncedo was screaming for help.

He grabs my hand.

Sonwa: Please help my sister.

I nod.

Me: Lethokuhle you will drive Sonwabile back to Durban, Sbonga and Lethu will come with me to get Esami's mother.

Letho: Ok,be safe.

We move Sonwa to the backseat and Letho drive away, we drive behind Letho. Sonwa

shows is the house then they drive back to Durban. We are standing outside the gate there is a pitbull inside and he has been barking, I see a curtain moving.

Me: Take cover.

We move to the dark corner and hide there.

Me: Do you have a plan Boh?

He nods and go back to the gate, he punch the buzzer, it breaks causing the alarm to go off inside. We see people running to the car then the gate slides open. Lethu shoots up twice causing the dog to run into hiding, I run to the car and open the door, I grab Keith out and push his head down to his car hard he bleeds immediately.

"Sbani".

I let go of Keith and look at Noncedo, she is standing next to another car her mom is behind her with her hand around her neck and a gun in her hand. She is crying.

Me: Baby..

Ncedo: They shot my brother, he is dead
Sonwa is dead.

Me: Zinzile, why are you doing this? What did she do to you?

Zinzile: I always get what I want Sbani and if I have to do things the hard way I do just that.

Me: Just let her go.

Zinzile: Why would I?

Me: Kanti what is it that you want?

Zinzile: That would be me revealing my secrets to you if I answer that.

A gun goes off, Sbonga just shot Keith on the knee.

Me: You are outnumbered, let her go now.

We see a blue light.

Me: The cops are here there is nothing you can do.

She let go of Noncedo, she runs to me I hold her tight.

Me: It's okay baby, you're safe now.

The cops arrive and tell us they got a call from a neighbour, they take both Keith and Zinzile in while we drive back to Durban, she falls asleep on the way.

We get home, I pick her up taking her to my room, looks like she haven't slept in days, her eyes are puffy.

I take our daughter and put her next to her then leave them. I find my family sitting in the lounge, I take a seat.

Ntsoaki: Is she okay?

Me: I don't know mom, I don't know.

Letho walk in with blood all over him, it's probably Sonwabile's blood.

Letho: Nkosazana is taking care of him, he is gonna be fine.

I heave a sigh of relief.

I go back to my room only to find Ncedo awake but looking into space there are tears in the corner of her eyes.

Me: Baby..

She wipe her tears looking away.

Me: Hey, look at me my love.

She shakes her head, I sit in bed and hold her tight.

Me: I'm sorry, I should have been there to protect you.

I wipe her tears but they keep falling.

Ncedo: I thought I won't ever see you guys again.

Me: I won't let anything happen to you again, I promise.

She look at our daughter and take her, she hold her to her chest.

Ncedo: Sonwabile? Do you know where he is? I heard mom talking about him.

Me: He is okay just a little hurt.

She nods.

Me: Why did they take you?

Ncedo: Apparently mom owes Keith something and I was the price she was willing to pay with, how can she do that to her own daughter!?

I look down.

Ncedo: Uhm is it okay if I stay here for a while I don't think I want to be alone, I didn't even write my exam.

Me: I will talk to Nkosazana about that.

She nods.

Ncedo: I love you Sbani.

Everytime I hear those words coming from her, my heart skips a beat.

Me: Marry me this weekend, I don't wanna wait anymore.

Ncedo: But..how? That's too soon.

Me: I will make it happen just allow me to make you officially mine this weekend.

Ncedo: Ok.

Me: Thank you, I need to talk to my family I will be back soon, are you gonna be okay?

Ncedo: Yes, I know I'm safe with you around.

I look at her and think you myself, how the hell did I get so lucky, she is a whole package, beauty, brains and very respectful.

Me: I will be back soon.

I walk out and talk to my fathers about getting married this weekend.

Langa: This weekend? What about doing things the right way, like paying Lobola?

Me: Uhm..I will talk to her brother about that baba.

Langa: The brother that is in the hospital?

Me: But he is going to be okay.

Langa: Ok, let us know how it goes then.

I drive to the hospital and find him with a nurse, she is bandaging his wound, I sit down

waiting for her to finish, Nkosazana walk in and stand next to me.

Zana: Hi brother.

Sonwa look at Zana then at me.

Sonwa: Oh you guys are brother and sister I did see the resemblance when doc came in earlier.

Zana: Yeah he is my brother.

Sonwa: So I can go home right? I need to see my sister.

Zana: Yes you can go home, sister Mkhize here will give you your medication then you are good to go.

He nods staring at Nkosazana a bit too much, I clear my throat, he finally moves his eyes away.

Zana: Brother I will see you at home, Mr Hlophe get better okay.

She touch his shoulder and walk out.

I drive him home, he is too quiet on the way looks like he is worried about something.

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SONWABILE

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Growing up I made a promise to dad, I was six years old and that was to never tell Noncedo that we were adopted I think the old man thought he was going to stick around till we get older but it never happened, he passed away when Noncedo was in Grade 7, she was Daddy's princess they loved each other but now I am about to mess up those memories by telling her we hid the truth from her all those years with dad.

Sbani: We're here.

I look around, we are at his house and I didn't even notice.

Sbani: You look worried.

Me: She has to know the truth, I don't even know how she will take it.

Sbani: She will understand, let's go.

We walk in and greet his family then he shows me where Noncedo is, I knock and walk in, she literally jumps on me hurting me in the process but I hug her anyway.

Me: I was so worried about you.

She is crying clinging onto me.

Me: it's okay Nono, stop crying now you're safe.

We sit down holding hands, she reminds me of our mom, she looked exactly like her I still see her smile through my sister.

Ncedo: I hate mom Sonwa, how can she kidnap her own daughter to settle whatever she owes Keith.

Me: Uhm Nono, I need to tell you something.

She nods holding my hand tighter.

Me: Uhm... Zinzile is not our mom.

She stares at me blankly.

Me: Her and dad adopted us.

Ncedo: Uhm Sonwa are you okay?

So she thinks I am crazy.

Me: Our parents died when you were still a baby, I was six and..

Ncedo: Uhm did you bump your head? We should take you back to the hospital and..

Me: Noncedo! I'm serious mom is not our biological mother they took us from the orphanage!

I shout, she shakes her head.

Ncedo: That's not true.

Me: I promised dad that I won't ever tell you but now mom has been doing all this reminds me how much she didn't want you.

Ncedo: What?

Me: She wanted to adopt just me but I didn't want to be seperated from you so they were forced to take the both of us.

Ncedo: All these years Sonwabile! I have been living a lie! Are you even my brother?

Me: Of course I am your brother Noncedo, you've always wondered why we had Xhosa names while mom and dad are Zulus, dad was Xhosa and he married a Zulu woman.

She sobs.

Ncedo: How can you lie to me all these years!

Me: I'm sorry, you were okay I didn't want to ruin your life.

Ncedo: Get out..

Me: Nono..

Ncedo: Get out!

I slowly walk out and sit outside, I am feeling pain on my wound but most of all I feel emotional pain, I was young when the police came home and asked to talk to our nanny, I overheard them talking about the accident that took our parents, I heard her calling our mom's family, they came in numbers for the

funeral, promised to take care of us but after the funeral they all left except her sister who acted like our guardian then dumped us to the orphanage home the following week.

"Hi".

A voice says behind me, I look at her.

Me: Hi Doc.

She chuckles.

Zana: You can call me Nkosazana or Zana when I'm outside of work.

I nod.

She sit a bit far from me with a book in her hand, it's a bit chilly here and it's getting late. She is staring at her book with her glasses on not minding me at all. I get up.

Me: Bye Nkosazana.

Zana: You're leaving?

Me: Yes, it's getting late.

Zana: Ok.

I walk out the gate to catch the local taxi.

I get to my flat and go straight to bed, at least Ncedo is safe even though she hates me for hiding the truth from her.

In the morning I wake up and pack my clothes, I don't even think I still have work since I didn't report to my boss that I am leaving, I work for a construction company and we were still busy with a project of building some community hall.

When I am about to leave, Noncedo walk in with Sbani, we stare at each other for some time.

Me: Hi Nono..

She blinks.

Ncedo: How did she look like?

She says in a shaky voice.

Ncedo: Our mom? Do you remember her face?

I step closer to her.

Me: I was young but I see her in you, you remind me of her.

We sit down and I tell her what went down.

Ncedo: Thank you for not leaving me behind bhuti.

Me: I wasn't gonna leave you, you are the only blood family I have left and I want you to be happy.

Sbani: Then please accept Lobola this Friday so we can get married.

I look at him.

Me: This Friday?

Sbani: Yes I want to make her my wife but I have to start there.

Me: You want that?

I ask Noncedo.

Ncedo: Yes.

Me: Ok but now I have to go report back to work I left without saying anything, maybe I am already fired.

Ncedo: They can't do that, you will show them the bullet wound and you can't work in your condition.

Me: I just want to report.

She nods.

Ncedo: I love you.

Me: I love you too, take care of her okay, we will talk on the phone.

I hug her and go to the site since it's still early and Sbani gave me back the car so I can go home and take my own rusty old car.

People are working moving up and down. I see our manager walking my way and I know I am in shit.

Ngwazi: Nice seeing you remembered us.

He says with a sarcastic chuckle.

Me: I'm sorry man I was involved in a..

Ngwazi: Save it! I don't work with excuses you will get your money for this month but that's it you are fired Hlophe..

I swallow hard nodding.

"Ngwazi". I hear a familiar voice calling out behind me, she talk to Ngwazi not acknowledging my presence at all.

"hey aren't you supposed to be working?" She ask I am still staring at her she didn't greet me.

Ngwazi: Oh no I fired him, he is incompetent and very rude.

She just nods and walk away, I run behind her.

Me: Nkosazana.

She turns and look at me shocked.

Me: Uhm I'm sorry but are you the one who owns this construction company I heard it was a lady but didn't think it was you, aren't you a doctor?

She stares at me then chuckle nodding.

"I am Qhawekazi".

I widen my eyes, so that family has twins all over, I was sure this is Nkosazana.

Me: Oh sorry Sisi I thought you are the doctor.

She nods and turn to walk away again I guess she doesn't talk much or maybe she doesn't talk to workers. I follow her to her office and take off my hat as a sign of respect.

Me: Uhm Miss Uhm ma'am can I have my job back please, I was shot and Uhm I am Noncedo's brother.

She look at me.

Qhawekazi: Oh you are the brother?

I nod.

Qhawekazi: ok but I can't give you your job back Mr Ngwazi is responsible for hiring and firing so I'm sorry.

She is very dismissive I don't know if she's rude or its how she is. I walk out and sit outside, this is how I make a living man and it's hard getting a job these days.

I am unemployed so I decide to drive back to town and go to the hospital hoping I find the doctor free, I ask the nurses and they show me

her office, I knock and walk in I find her looking at the files.

Me: Hello.

She turns looking at me.

Zana: Oh hello Uhm Mr Hlophe what can I do for you?

Me: Uhm my name is Sonwabile.

She nods and sit down showing me a sit.

Me: Uhm I just came to check up on you?

She stares at me.

Zana: But you are the patient and I don't get it, we don't know each other like that.

Me: I know, Uhm I was working for your sister but I lost my job today because of not showing up to work.

Zana: Oh sorry to hear that.

Me: Uh..Uhm I know I am asking for too much since we don't really know each other but can you talk to her for me.

She chuckles and stare at me with her blue eyes I shift uncomfortable on my chair I don't know why.

Me: Uhm...look forget I said anything I'm gonna go.

I get up.

Zana: Look Uhm Sonwa right?

I nod standing by the door.

Zana: My sister and I are on different fields and I know nothing about her work so I can't help you.

Me: I understand.

Never have I felt so intimidated by a child like this, I mean she is literally my sister's age but she just gives me some feeling I can't explain.

Me: Are you busy? Can we grab a cup of coffee?

She sit back on her chair I want to run out of here but man no I'm not gonna do that, she is just a child.

Zana: My lunch is about to....

Just then a male doctor opens the door holding paper bags, she get up smiling.

Zana: Doc thank you so much I owe you one I am starving!

They talk for a while, he walk out.

Zana: You can join me if you don't mind.

I sit down and stare at her as she take out the food.

Me: Are you dating each other in this hospital?

Zana: What do you mean?

Me: You and that doctor, are you a couple?

Zana: Just because I said we should share my food you think you can get up and personal with my business?

I chuckle and get up.

Me: Bye Nkosazana.

She calls out my name but I am already out the door , I won't be disrespected by a child just because she is doctor.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 64

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SONWABILE

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Today it's Friday, a big day for my sister, the Gumedes are coming to pay Lobola for her,we are at home and it's just the two of us, I go to her room with a tray and find her looking out the window.

Me: Morning.

She turns looking at me, her eyes are glassy.

Me: I made breakfast.

She sit in bed, we eat together in silence I can see she is so emotional.

Me: You are going to have a new family and I can tell Sbani loves you so don't be sad today is a great day.

Ncane: I feel lonely Sonwa I never imagined this day would be just you and me I thought mom would be here rejoicing that her daughter is getting married.

She wipe her tears, I take a photo in my pocket and give it to her, it's old but you can clearly see the faces.

Ncane: Is this...?

I nod.

Me: That's our mom and dad on their wedding day, that's the only picture I was allowed to take in our house I held on to it till this day.

I hold her.

Me: They are here in spirit, we are not alone, we will never be alone.

I wipe her tears and kiss her forehead.

Me: Now let's go to the kitchen so I can help you cook before your in-laws get here.

She giggles and get up.

We cook together, she seems okay now, the uncle from next door comes I asked her to sit in on the negotiations I didn't want to be alone.

We hear them calling out clan names outside.

Me: Go to your room okay, I will handle this.

She nods nervously walking away, I ask them to come in, we sit down not saying a word to each other, Langa who I believe is Nkosazana's dad because of how much he looks like her starts counting about ten thousand, I see uncle shaking his head and lean next to me.

Uncle: Imvulamlomo yentombi enhle njengoNoncedo iqala kuR18 000

kwenyukela.(The first money they should pay for a beautiful girl like Noncedo starts at R18 000 upwards)

I clear my throat staring at him but he just nods I don't want these people to think I am ripping them off. So we sit quietly after that money and still not say anything, Langa again kneel and count another ten thousand, uncle clears his throat and greet them I guess he is happy with this.

Uncle: Sanibonani.(Greetings)

They greet back and start talking about cows calling them with their names and I don't know shit about it I did good by asking our neighbour.

They pay more money for the cows the uncle demanded then they ask we write down the gifts but it will come after the wedding tomorrow since Sbani is in a rush to marry my sister. They ask to see Noncedo then she serves them at least it's just Four people. We walk them out after Noncedo wrapped up two

plates that they used to put money, it's tradition that they leave with them to show the groom that they indeed arrived.

We go back inside and Ncedo gives uncle R300 to thank him but he refuses it.

Uncle: I was just helping since I know your father.

We nod.

Uncle: You look like him Sonwabile.

I nod again.

Uncle: I knew you were his son ever since you moved this side as a young boy, uLuzuko..

Me: You knew my father?

He nods.

Uncle: You don't remember me but I used to be your neighbour at your old house too but moved this side before your parents passed away then I was happy when I saw you close to me again, I saw you taking care of your

sister from a young age, you are a brave young man.

I nod shaking his hand.

Me: Thank you for today sir.

Uncle: My pleasure.

Later I drive my sister back to Durban, she deposit the money in a bank because you can't walk around with that kind of money.

Ncedo: So what are you gonna do about work?

Me: I will look for another one around here?

She nods.

Ncedo: Thank you for everything Bhuti.

I smile nodding, she get off and I see her hugging Nkosazana who just came out of the house, I step out of the car and go to her.

Me: Hi.

She look at me and nod.

Me: Can we grab breakfast before you go to work?

She look at me like she is sizing me and I look at mysel checking if there is something wrong with me.

Zana: Uhm no thanks.

I nod as she get in her car, I open her passenger door.

Zana: Man I have lives to save can you get a hobby!

She seems frustrated.

Me: I will get a hobby I just want to tell you that your tyre is flat.

I walk back to my car.

Zana: Uhm Mr Hlophe i'm so sorry for being rude I just..it's supposed to be my day off but I am called in at work I thought today I will just spend time with my nieces and nephews you know.

I lean on my car looking at her as she explains herself, she is beautiful but too young.

Zana: So does your offer still stand? But I have only 30 minutes.

She says looking at her watch, I nod.

Me: I will drive behind you I don't really know Durban much.

Zana: Or we can just go together.

She drives to a coffee shop next to her work place, we sit down and order muffins and coffee.

We talk about general stuff until her cheeks flushes I look where she is looking a young man is walking in with hands in his pockets, he looks confident and very clean, wearing expensive suit and shoes.

I stare at Nkosazana she is blushing so hard my heart aches.

Me: Uhm I think I should get going.

What am I doing here with a little girl who is still crushing on every good looking man who comes around.

Zana: Uhm okay thank you for coffee.

I nod and she picks up her bag and rush out, I chuckle and pay, when I walk out she is still here.

Zana: Uhm I remembered we used my car, you can take it and leave it at home, I will request an Uber when I knock off.

Me: Or you can just call me I can pick you up.

She nods and we exchange numbers. I go back to my flat and start cooking then go freshen up then wait for her call.

Around 7pm she calls.

Me: Hello.

Zana: Uhm hi Mr Hlophe Uhm I don't know if you can still fetch me at this time or I should call my brothers.

Me: I have your car so I'm on my way.

I drive to the hospital and call her, she comes out taking off her coat, I step out and open the door for her.

Me: You look tired.

Zana: Hungry and tired, it's been a long day I didn't even have time for lunch.

Me: sorry, do you mind eating at my apartment, I cooked.

She nods closing her eyes, she looks really tired.

I park inside the gate and call out her name but looks like she fell asleep, I pick her up walking inside, I put her in my bed then go chill in the couch watching TV.

She wakes up later and stand in front of me rubbing her eyes like a little girl she is.

Zana: Hey I'm so sorry for falling asleep in your bed I guess I was too tired.

I nod.

Me: You can sit down I will warm up the food for you.

She looks around first then slowly sit down, I warm it up then dish up for us, I give her the

plate she stares at the food then eat it, it's nothing fancy just good old rice and chicken I am sure she prefers yellow rice and a lot of salads but hey I tried here.

She eat a little then say she is full.

Zana: Thank you, I have to go now.

I nod.

Me: I can drive you to your house.

Zana: No I'm okay thanks again.

Me: Ok.

I get up and open the door for her, she moves past me I pull her back, she gasps looking rather scared.

Zana: What..what are you doing?

Me: I'm sorry for scaring you, it's just that..

I pull her waist I can feel her breathing heavily and she is shaking.

Me: You think I want to hurt you?

Zana: You won't?

Me: I wouldn't.

Zana: I....I want to leave.

Tears make their way out of her eyes I guess she has never been this close to a man before the way she is so scared. I let go of her waist she runs out, I rush after her, she is trying to open her car.

Me: Nkosazana.

She types so fast on her phone.

"Hello".

Zana: Dad...i'm...i'm

She sobs now I am panicking.

"Nkosazana ukuphi?(where are you?) Why are you crying?" The man says on the line clearly panicking.

"I'm on my way I will track your car right now, Langelihle! WeLanga!(he shouts) Princess don't drop the call okay dad is coming".

We stay in silence she is looking the other way with her forehead on the car, she is still crying.

I see a car flying then it stops at my gate, they open it so fast rushing in, it's Langa and Sfiso I know them because they were part of my sister's Lobola negotiations and I also know they are married.

Langa doesn't ask anything he grabs me and punch me so hard with his left hand I feel my jaw cracking, literally.

Langa: What did you do to my daughter!?

Me: sir I didn't do anything I..

Now it's Sfiso throwing punches at me all I can do is block them but it's useless these people are angry. They finally stop and take their daughter to the car and drive off, Langa get in Nkosazana's car and follow them. I walk inside, my face is burning up.

I sleep on the couch facing up, it hurts.

In the morning I wake up worse my eyes are swollen my vision isn't clear I even slept on the couch.

I hear a knock, I slowly get up and open the door, she blinks rapidly looking at me.

Me: What do you want?

Zana: I..I..

Me: Just go I don't want any trouble okay.

Zana: Uhm I have...

Me: I said leave.

I close the door on her face I mean she stood there and watched her fathers beat me up for absolutely nothing.

She knocks again I open the door.

Zana: I just want to help you

Me: I don't need your help I'm fine.

Zana: But...

Me: Nkosazana you are really getting on my last nerve little girl.

Zana: I panicked okay I thought you wanted to hurt me I'm sorry but I told dad that you didn't do anything to me, Ngiyaxolisa,(I'm sorry).

Me: Fine I hear you now go.

She shakes her head.

I just leave her at the door and go back to the couch facing up. I hear the door closing then warm hands on my face I open my eyes.

Zana: I'm so sorry.

She opens the little box she was carrying.

Zana: Can I use your kitchen?

I nod, she plug the kettle then come back with hot water in a bucket I feel it touching my face I jump sitting up.

Me: What the fuck!

She giggles.

Zana: I'm trying to help you.

Me: By burning my skin, isn't it enough that your dads fucked me up.

She look down.

Zana: I'm really sorry, let me help you then I won't bother you again you'll pretend like you've never seen or heard of Dr Nkosazana.

Me: Doctor Nkosazana?

She laughs, I let her do her thing till I can be able to open my eyes.

Zana: The swelling is coming down a bit
She uses some ointment that is so soothing.

Me: You have a calling of being a doctor huh?

Zana: You think so?

Me: Yeah.

She smile so innocently.

Zana: So have you eaten anything?

Me: No.

Zana: Can I take you out for breakfast it's all on me.

Me: Did you see how bad I look?

Zana: Uhm okay I will order in.

I nod and she does exactly that. Minutes later she opens the door to get the food then sit next to me. We eat in silence.

Me: So you are not working today?

Zana: Yeah.

Me: Ok.

We watch a movie she ends up falling asleep, she works hard that's why she just sleeps whenever she gets a chance. I sleep and pull her to my chest, I remove her hair from her face and kiss her forehead,. A beautiful young thing she is.

I feel soft slaps on my face, I open my eyes and I am welcomed by blue beautiful eyes staring at me.

Zana: You like it when I sleep in here huh? You didn't wake me up again.

Me: You work a lot so I thought I should let you sleep.

Zana: Ok how did the movie end? Did they end up falling in love?

I chuckle, I wasn't even concentrating.

Me: Uhm yeah yes they did it was so sweet.

I want to laugh so bad because I fell asleep too before it ended.

Me: What about you? Ever felt in love?

She shakes her head.

Zana: Not really but I do have a little crush on one of the Doctors at the hospital, he was once my tutor.

I clear my throat I don't think I like this conversation anymore.

Me: Does your dad know you're into your tutors?

I ask a bit louder, she blinks then look down.

Zana: Uhm I..no he would kill me, I was just joking.

Me: Mmm.

Zana: You look better now I have to go.

I nod.

My phone rings, I answer, it's Sbani..

Me: Hello.

Sbani: Sbari(in-law) can you come to our house right now.

Me: Oh..ok sure

He drops the call he seems so cold maybe this is about Nkosazana.

Me: I am being summoned at your house yet you said you told your dads I didn't do anything to you.

She widens her eyes, I get up and leave the room to go get dressed, I walk out she is still in the same position.

Zana: Don't go..

Me: Why?

Zana: What if they hurt you again?

I walk out and she follows me..

Zana: Let's go together.

Me: No thanks.

I get in my old car and drive to her house, I knock and walk in, I find her brothers sitting down its only them. The blue eyed brother get up and stare at me.

Zana: Qhawe..

She shouts behind me.

Zana: Bhuti(brother) why did you guys call him here?

Qhawe: To talk to him man to man?

He has a deep hoarse voice, his eyes are the same as Nkosazana's.

Qhawe: So why was she at your place in the first place?

Zana: I already explained to dad!

Qhawe: I didn't buy it I want him to explain.

Me: I'm leaving but to make things clear I didn't do anything to your sister I just helped her with her car that's all.

I walk out, having to be questioned by a group of angry young boys is not for me.

Ncedo: Sonwa..

I turn to look at her.

Ncedo: What's going on? I heard your name being called yesterday and it wasn't a good call.

Me: It was just a little misunderstanding.

Ncedo: Oh, Uhm you wouldn't mess things up for me right? I mean I don't want to end up having to choose between you and Sbani's family.

I chuckle.

Me: Because you would choose them right? I mean I literally have nothing, no job and no place to stay because I will have to move out of the flat soon and I can't go back to Zinzile's house after what she did.

Ncedo: I'm sorry but if I had to choose I will always choose you like you chose me when I was a baby.

I look at her, she has grown, I open my arms for her.

Me: I love you and I won't mess things up for you.

We hug and I go back to my place.

The whole week ends with me taking my CVs to everywhere, even hospitals since there was cleaning posts, I can't be choosy time is not on my side. I would talk to Sbani about talking to Qhawekazi about getting my job back but I don't want favours.

I haven't had any contact with any of the Gumedes the past week even Nkosazana and I'm good with that.

I just received a call from the office number I quickly take it.

Me: Sonwabile Hlophe hello.

"Mr Hlophe, good day sir".

I greet back in anticipation, she goes on to tell me about why she is calling, they are from the hospital and are calling me for an interview tomorrow.

The next day I am preparing for my interview then I drive to the hospital and walk in while asking around for the management office.

I am interviewed for about fifteen minutes then I walk out after saying I will hear from them soon, it's promising.

After three days I have already given up but they call again saying I got the job and i am starting the following month which is in a week at least I will be able to pay rent and buy food, thank god I don't have a baby right now because I can't afford one.

I have started working and it's not that bad, I clean the offices while others clean the wards I haven't seen Nkosazana ever since I started and I'm good with that, I guess she stayed

away ever since her brothers called me to that meeting.

I am busy with my work at the office she walk in giggling.

Zana: Hi..

She greets but her eyes are glued on the phone, I nod and carry on cleaning looks like she doesn't see that it's me not that she even looked my way twice she is busy on her phone, also I have a mask and work scrubs on. I walk out for a while then go back to her office I find her with her crush, he has her pinned on the wall, I slam the door he step away and walk out immediately, I remove the musk and stare at her, she is looking at me in shock.

Me: So imina islima Neh?(so I'm the fool) you panicked when I was that close to you but you were squirming like a sick cat just a minute ago with that doctor!?

I am angry I don't even know why?

Zana: What are you doing here.

Me: I work here!

Zana: You are a cleaner?

I don't answer that, I mean it's pretty obvious.

Me: Does it upsets you that I am way below your standards?

Zana: Why would it?

She has gain some attitude now.

I chuckle.

Zana: Mr I think you should just do your job and leave me alone okay..

Me: Oh?

Zana: Yes.

Me: Acting all innocent while you know you fuck colleagues in here.

She gasp.

Zana: What?

Me: Did I stutter?

She looks so angry her face is turning pink her eyes are glassy.

Me: Did I hit the nerve.

She step closer to me and try to slap me I grab her hand and pull her closer to my chest then wrap my arms around her.

She stays there for a while then quickly push me away, we stare at each other for a while till I can't hold myself I pull her to me again and kiss her she seems shocked, she isn't kissing me back I take a step back then go take the things I was working with and walk out leaving her standing in the same position.

During lunch time I see that doctor going to her office again I just walk out to eat.

When I come back I go straight to her office and sit opposite her.

Me: Nkosazana.

She nods moving her eyes around.

Me: Are you in love with that guy?

She doesn't answer.

Me: It's okay if you don't wanna talk to me but be careful that you don't become just an office girlfriend, there may be many of you falling for his charms.

I get up and go continue to do my job but I am worried about her because this won't end well for her.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 65

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NKOSAZANA

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I am getting frustrated with working on the same environment as Sonwabile Hlophe, this

guy is all over my business, I can't even breathe I don't know what's his problem with me.

I am in my office working, he comes in and just go straight to cleaning, he doesn't even greet me I'd say I'm happy about him ignoring me but I'm not.

I clear my throat.

Me: Hi.

He doesn't reply, I get up and stand where he is cleaning, he stops and stare at me pulling down the musk.

Me: Uhm Hi.

Sonwa: I'm working.

Me: I can see that, Uhm I was hoping we could talk.

Sonwa: I'm busy Nkosazana.

The way he calls my name if he wasn't such a nuisance I was gonna get charmed.

Me: I won't take much of your time.

He sit down tapping his foot down, I sit on my chair looking at him.

Me: Uhm okay so I was thinking about talking to my sister to give you your job back.

He starts chuckling then laugh, I feel like a fool. He clicks his tongue and get up taking his stuff and walk out.

I take my phone and call my sister.

Kazi: Nkosazana.

Me: Hey, are you busy?

Kazi: I always make time for you, so you can talk to me baby.

I giggle, my sister always makes me feel special.

Me: Uhm so there is a guy that....

She screams before I could finish talking.

Kazi: You finally have a real boyfriend.

I laugh shaking my head.

Me: No, can you listen to me.

She laughs.

Me: This guy was working there and got fired, can you take him back please.

Kazi: Uhm who is this guy? And what are you with him?

Me: Sonwabile Hlophe, he is always on my case now that he works here please take him back sis.

Kazi: Oh Uhm ok tell him to come to my office tomorrow around 12 then we'll take it from there.

Me: Thank you so much.

I drop the call then rush out to look for him, I find him eating his lunch in his car.

Me: Hey.

Silence.

Me: My sister says you can come by her office tomorrow so you can get your job back.

Sonwa: I am so tempted to slap your pretty face right now, hlukana nam.(leave me alone).

Me: But that job pays more than this one.

He quickly get up I step back from him.

Sonwa: Ngithe hlukana nam.(I said leave me alone)

I nod and walk away from him, he looks angry.

Later I go to my car I feel hands on my waist and I can't help but smile.

Me: Max..

He turns me around then pin me on my car, I had a crush on him from when I was still a student and he was my tutor for a month, he is a very good looking man. We haven't done anything he recently showed interest in me, that day Sonwa interrupted us in my office, I was so happy that he sees me, I didn't think he would I mean I know the ladies would die to have his attention.

Max: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

He kiss my neck grabbing my ass.

Max: How about we go back in the office just a little.

I nod, he walk in first and when I'm about to go as well someone grabs my hand and drag me back to my car throwing me in the passenger seat like I am some sack of potatoes, then he get in the driver's seat.

Me: What the hell is wrong with you!?

I shout at him and try to open the door he locks them and start the car driving away in speed, I am holding my breath I am kind of scared of this guy, he parks at his place and leave me in the car. I go inside and find him topless looks like he lifts weights.

Me: Why did you bring me here?

He slowly walk up to me and grab the sides of my waist.

Sonwa: Stop what you're doing with that guy Nkosazana, please you will get hurt.

Me: Who are you to tell me that?

Sonwa: I care about you!

I remove his hands and walk back to my car.

Sonwa: Nkosazana.

I ignore him and get in my car driving back to the hospital, I rush in to his office I find it locked but there are sounds inside,. I haven't had sex before but I know how it sounds when people have sex, so I just go back to my car maybe it's the other doctors using his office for doing the nasty. I drive home and go to bed.

In the morning I am the first to wake up and take a bath then rush to Sonwabile's place. I knock for a while he comes to open the door topless once again, he frowns.

Me: Uhm I came to remind you about your meeting with my sister Uhm and I can take you there.

He just walk away, I slowly walk in and close the door. I sit on the couch, he comes to the room.

Sonwa: Come to bed.

He says walking back to his bedroom, I go to him and find him sleeping facing up.

Me: I am leaving you will call me when you're ready.

He doesn't say anything.

Sonwa: Get in, I want us to talk.

I sit next to him, he pulls me to his chest.

Sonwa: Can I ask you something?

I nod.

Sonwa: You're still a virgin?

Me: Yes.

Sonwa: How much do you pride yourself with that? I mean you've been a good girl for this long.

Me: I'm proud.

Sonwa: So you will be careful with whom you give your pride to right?

Me: Yes.

Sonwa: Ok, I believe you will make a right choice.

He look at me for a while then get up,I sit in bed looking at him.

Sonwa: I have to go to work.

Me: But what about your previous job.

He shakes his head.

Sonwa: I'm good with working at the hospital.

Me: What!?! Look, not to offend you or anything but you pay for a flat and buy groceries petrol how much are you left with after that? Cents? How would you even take care of your woman?

He squints his eyes looking at me.

Me: No, I'm asking you for real.

I am really desperate I want him to leave I know he earns enough to take care of his needs.

Sonwa: I'm not leaving my job Nkosazana and if you don't want to see me that's okay I will

ask one of the guys to swap with me so I can work at the clinic.

Me: Oh..ok.

He chuckles.

Sonwa: I'm out, please lock up.

He says walking out, I just throw myself in bed huffing.

I fell asleep in here and I woke up sweating because it's hot, I wake up and look at his closet, I take one of his t-shirt and go to the bathroom, I bath then wear the t-shirt. I go to the kitchen and cook because I am hungry.

Once I'm done I hear the key turning, he walk in and stop by the door looking at me obviously stunned.

Me: Uhm...hey I fell asleep when you left and woke up sweating and hungry so I took a bath and cooked I hope you don't mind.

He put down his keys and a bag then walk up to me.

He stands behind me and touch my thighs moving his hands all the way up to my hips.

Sonwa: Fuck...you're not wearing a panty.

His voice is deep he is talking on my neck it tickles.

Sonwa: Are you tempting me?

Me: No, I didn't know you will be back so soon I didn't even check the time.

He kiss my neck sending electric shock all over my body I hold on the counter.

Sonwa: My God..

He whispers turning me around and pick me up, we are looking at each other, I don't know why I am not stopping him or maybe I am just curious to find out what he is going to do next.

He kiss me then put me on the kitchen counter I try to close my legs but he just put one on his shoulder then pull me close, he is staring at my lady part up close then he sniffs it, when I try to push him it's too late his tongue is already

doing things in there I balance my hands behind me throwing my head back, the sounds that comes out of my mouth are so weird, he keeps groaning. I feel some warm feeling deep inside my pussy I let it go my body becomes stiff then it shakes , I release a scream breathing heavily that felt so good and its the first time ever.

I finally come back to the real world he is looking at me, his eyes are different, he looks like he is staring at his prey.

He picks me up and go to the bedroom with me, he takes off the t-shirt I am wearing and make me sleep on my tummy, I feel his hard penis on my ass I try to get up.

Sonwa: I won't penetrate.

I feel it moving on my butt just between my butt cheeks, he moves faster then he stops I feel my butt cheeks getting wet, he is making sounds cussing, he wipe my buttcheeks. He sleeps next to me, I close my eyes I don't think

I can look at him, he brush my hair not saying anything.

I wake up when it's dark outside, he is sitting on the couch looking at me.

Me: H..hi.

I am still shy about what he did to me.

Sonwa: Hey, your phone was ringing it's right there.

I take it, Max was calling my heart melts I find myself smiling, this guy is beautiful, not handsome but beautiful!

Sonwa: Uhm are you going home?

Me: Yes.

He nods.

Sonwa: Thank you for cooking it wasn't that bad.

I laugh.

Me: Wasn't that bad?

He chuckles but it's a very cold one.

Sonwa: I'm kidding, it was good.

Me: Thank you.

My phone rings it's Max calling, I clear my throat answering.

Me: Hey.

Max: You're off today?

Me: Yes.

Max: Can you come early tomorrow I want to spend some time with you.

Me: Oh ok Uhm I will see you then.

Max: Sure.

I drop the call I feel hot all over my body I even forgot Sonwa is here, he is still looking at me

Me: Uhm..I have to go.

Sonwa: Nkosazana.

I look at him.

Sonwa: Remember you can't bring back your virginity once it's gone and also you can't change the person who you give it to.

Me: What are you talking about?

Sonwa: I am just saying.

I wear my jeans and keep his t-shirt on.

Me: I will bring it back tomorrow.

He nods.

In the morning I wake up early and rush to the office I find Max already in my office sitting on my chair.

Max: You came.

I nod smiling.

Max: Come here.

I go to him, he pulls me to his lap. His hands are on my ass, he makes me grind him I can feel he's hard.

Next thing my legs are all opened the panties are off Max is unzipping his pants but the door is pushed open causing me to jump up, we forgot to lock the door.

Max: What the fuck! Don't you knock!

He says fixing his pants, I look at Sonwa he looks disappointed I look down.

Sonwa: I knocked, countless times.

His voice is different, I don't know if it's too deep today.

Max: You are disrespectful I am talking to your superiors later, you should pack your trash already and get the hell out of here because I'm sure you will be fired! Nx..

He clicks his tongue and walk out pushing Sonwa out of the way. He looks at me then his eyes moves to the table where my panty is I am so embarassed and ashamed.

Me: I...Uhm..I...

I don't even know what to say, he hold the door handle.

Me: Uyaphi? (Where are you going?)

I don't even know why I am asking that, he just raise his eyebrows.

Sonwa: I'm out of a job remember.

Me: No I will talk to him.

Sonwa: You are better than this... he is using you! You don't know him outside these premises, he wants to sleep with you right here? You really want your first time to be at the office?

I shake my head.

Me: Sonwa I wasn't gonna sleep with him.

Sonwa: Yeah right..

He walk out I wear my panty and go look for Max, I find him in his office.

Me: Hi.

Max: Hey.

Me: Uhm about Sonwa please don't get him fired,he is family.

Max: He is disrespectful Gumede, he has to go

Me: Please.

Max: For your sake I will let this slide, just this once.

I nod.

Me: So Uhm when are we going to your place?

Max: Huh?

Me: When am I visiting you?

Max: Uhm my house is being renovated I am crashing with my cousin and it's a small space.

I nod.

Max: Can we continue where we left off?

Me: How about we wait until the renovations are done.

He chuckles.

Max: Ok, look I am still busy with something can I...

I nod and walk out going back to work, back to saving lives what I came here to do.

Later I drive to Sonwabile's place and knock, I open because he isn't answering. I find him sleeping on the couch, I shake him, he opens his eyes.

Me: Hey.

He close his eyes again.

Me: Why are you sleeping here?

Sonwa: I was watching soccer.

He answers with his eyes still closed.

Me: I just came to tell you that your job is safe.

Sonwa: I thought you didn't want me there
why didn't you take this opportunity and get
your boyfriend to get me fired.

Me: I changed my mind.

Sonwa: Ok.

Me: Bye.

Sonwa: Ngicela ungiphekela.(please cook for
me)

I chuckle.

Me: Why don't you do it yourself?

Sonwa: Ever since I ate your food I don't think
I want anyone to cook for me other than you.

I giggle.

Me: Come on.

I cook for him while he continues to sleep, he looks really tired.

I wake him up once I'm done, we eat then he takes my hand pulling me up, he gently lay my head on his chest, it's quiet I can only hear his heartbeat.

Sonwa: Nkosazana.

Me: Mmmm.

He is stroking my hair.

Sonwa: Can you spend the night with me.

Me: Why?

Sonwa: I just want you close to me tonight.

I nod.

We go to bed, we are silent, he takes off my dress then help me wear his t-shirt then we get in bed.

Sonwa: Good night.

Me: Goodnight.

I snuggle close to him.

I never thought it would feel this good to be this close to him.

In the morning I wake up to him looking at me.

Sonwa: You sleep like a baby.

I smile covering my face.

Sonwa: Look..

He hold my hands.

Sonwa: I know I'm not your "ideal" kind of man but can you give us a chance, I like you a lot and I want you in my life.

I want to say yes so bad but I remember Max, I want to give him a chance.

Sonwa: Please.

Me: But I have Max and..

He just nods and go to the bathroom.

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SONWABILE

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I don't want to call Nkosazana childish because well, she is still young so I understand but what she is doing with that Doctor really makes me angry and uncomfortable because I have developed feelings for her but I won't push her to be with me when he prefers to be with Max.

I just came out of the bathroom I find her wearing her dress.

Zana: I'm leaving.

Me: Why did you agree to spend the night with me?

Zana: Because you asked nicely.

I shake my head.

Zana: Bye but this was the last time coming here I don't think Max would like this.

I laugh.

Me: I don't think he would even care baby.

Zana: What?

I wear my clothes as she grabs her bag and storm out.

I get to the hospital and go straight to my job, I see Max with a female nurse getting it on in the steps, I shake my head walking away, what kind of man have sex in public spaces like this, he doesn't care about his reputation I am getting really worried about Nkosazana she really likes this guy.

I knock off at work and go to my place, I take a bath then eat last night's left overs while watching TV. My door swings open a crying Nkosazana walk in, I quickly get up walking up to her, her cheek is turning blue like she was hit with something really hard.

Me: What happened to your face?

She just sobs louder, I pull her to the couch and hold her tight.

Once she is calm she wipe her tears.

Zana: My dads can't see me like this they will want to know what happened.

Me: I want to know.

Zana: Two female nurse came into Max's office I was with Max they started insulting me and throwing stuffs at me.

Me: Do you know why?

Zana: They want him obviously!

I touch where she is bruised then squeeze it she screams in pain.

Me: Stop acting like a fool! He sleep around with nurses I saw him, they wouldn't just fight because they want him! He is sleeping with them.

Zana: You are just jealous because I turned you down you're not even my type.

I chuckle and pull her up.

Me: Get out of my house right now.

She stands there not moving.

Me: Phuma Nkosazana, angizwani neslima.(Out, I hate fools)

She blinks.

Me: I guess you can't have it all, you're just book smart but very slow and naive on the other parts.

She slap me.

Me: Still won't change the fact that you're a fool!

She is so angry her blue eyes are glassy, she turns to the door but I hold her from behind she turns and wrap her arms around me crying.

Me: It's okay.

I take her to bed and take off her shoes then cover her with a blanket.

Late at night she wakes up, I look at her cheek it looks worse than before, she light skinned that's why, they bruise easily.

Me: You still look like an angel, your scar matches your eyes.

She punch my chest playfully, then she look at me for a while.

Zana: I trust you.

I look at her confused she moves sitting on my lap then start kissing me, she moves my hands to her ass.

Me: Zana..

She take off her dress then unhook her bra, her boobs are so erect.

I break the kiss looking at her.

Me: I don't want it like this, just because you're hurt I don't want you to regret this later so No Nkosazana.

I get her off me and walk out going to drink some water, she walk out wearing her dress and has a bag in her hand, she can't even look at me.

Zana: I'm leaving.

Me: Ok..

She walk out, I huff, if her first time is with me then I want her to give it to me willingly and I

want her to be sure but most of all I want her to be in love with me.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 66

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SONWABILE

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I am now working at the clinic because I couldn't bare seeing Nkosazana flaunting her "relationship" with Max in my face, I chose to walk away. I haven't seen her ever since I turned her down.

Working at the clinic has been peaceful I just do my work and I don't even have friends I just

do lunch by myself then go home when I knock off.

Today is no different, I am cleaning the passage when I see nurses and doctors rushing up and down, people who are badly injured are coming in looks like it was an accident. I see her walking down the passage wearing her white coat she looks like she is in a rush probably rushing to save lives. I am now looking at her as she walks towards me, she then pass me like she has never seen me in her life, I'm hurt but i'll live.

The whole day the doctors and nurses are busy both the clinic and hospital I heard it was a bus that collided with two vehicles so it's full that is why Nkosazana is here today. After work I go to my car, I see her walking to hers I breathe then go to her, I mean I miss the lady.

Me: Nkosazana, hi.

She look at me once then open her car.

Me: I just wanted to ask, how are you holding up?

Zana: Was I sick?

I nod and decide to just walk back to my car.

My sister calls and ask me to be her plus one at a concert she is going to and there will be dinner after, she is now a married woman Sbani did everything they had a beautiful wedding, I heard that her husband and brothers are back home in the village to check up on things there.

I am now ready for this concert and I am not looking forward to it, I really don't like being around a lot of people especially strangers.

When I get to the venue, my heart breaks as I see Nkosazana with Max then her sister Qhawekazi.

I get to my sister and hug her kissing her cheek.

I hug Qhawekazi as well but when I try to hug Nkosazana she just hold on to her boyfriend's arm looking away.

Me: Let's do this.

Ncedo: I'm sorry bro I know how much you hate places like this I just thought it will be a good space to catch up since we don't get time anymore.

Me: It's okay.

We walk in and the place is buzzing I am uncomfortable the whole time, Max and Zana are seated just opposite us. My sister and Qhawekazi seem to be enjoying the whole thing while I am just sitting there looking around since I don't want to look at the lovey Dovey couple in front of me.

I see Max whispering something to Zana then walk away now that it's just the two of us my sister is dancing with Kazi a bit far from us.

I see her getting up and walk out, I sit alone for a while then go check on her, she is standing outside looking up at the sky.

Me: Hey.

She look at me then back at the sky again.

Me: You're not cold?

She doesn't answer, I take off my jacket and put it over her shoulders.

Zana: Thank you.

I am shocked that she finally said something, she wears it right.

We stand in silence.

Me: Uhm we should go back they are probably worried.

she nods, we walk in and we are welcomed by max dancing with a lady his hands are on her ass, Nkosazana has stopped walking staring at them then she rush to them pulling them apart. There is noise and people are minding their business. Next thing I see Nkosazana

slapping the girl then Max I pull her outside she is shaking in anger.

Me: Calm down.

She is breathing heavily.

Me: Hey.

She just sit down and bury her face on her thighs.

Me: Do you want to go home?

She nods still her head down.

Me: Ok let me tell my sister that we're leaving.

I rush in to tell Qhawekazi and Ncedo that I am taking Nkosazana home and I assure them that she is fine. I walk out and find fists flying, it's the girl and Nkosazana, Max is rushing to his car leaving his mess behind. I grab Nkosazana kicking and screaming and take her to my car and drive off, now I am also angry at her.

I step out of the car and drag her inside, I am looking at her fuming as she is sitting on the couch taking off her shoes.

Me: What you did there was disgusting!

She stares at me.

Me: Fighting for a guy? Really? A guy who doesn't even care about you! He gives zero fuck about you! He went there with you but left you right there to enjoy the night with someone else! Where are your morals! The self respect!

I am shouting, If she wants to act like a baby then I will treat her like a baby.

Me: You disappointed me today, I thought you are a mature lady who respects herself but I was so wrong.

I walk to my room take off my clothes and get in bed.

I hear her walking in.

Zana: Uhm can I take your car, I want to go home.

Her voice is low and shaky.

I wake up and take my keys throwing them at her then go back to bed.

I feel her getting in next to me then the sniffs starts, I sigh turning to her, I hold her tight.

Zana: I'm sorry.

I wipe her tears.

Zana: That is not me, I just...I lost it, I...

Me: It's okay, it happens.

She looks at me I want to look away, I feel like her eyes are hypnotizing me.

I find myself on top of her, we are both naked I pin her hands above her head.

Me: I want you to love me so bad, I am desperate, I need that love Nkosazana, I want you to see only me as your man

She flap her eyelashes, I get off her and wear my shorts walking out, I sit on the veranda, she walk out and sit next to me wearing my t-shirt. She rest her head on my shoulder.

Zana: You love me?

I sigh.

Me: I love you.

Zana: But I have been an ass to you lately.

Me: Yeah I know.

She giggles.

Zana: Can I be honest but please don't be offended.

Me: Everything you've been doing offends me Nkosazana so go ahead do it one more time.

She smiles then look down.

Zana: I do feel something for you, It's been a while but I thought Max is best suited for me because Uhm...

She doesn't finish her sentence.

Me: Because he is a doctor like you.

She nods still keeping her eyes down.

Me: And I am just a cleaner, so what about now?

Zana: I think I was wrong for looking at the status, my dads taught me that love knows no status, they told me that when they met daddy was a petrol attendant and later lost his job while Daddy was from a rich family but that didn't stop them from falling in love.

I nod.

Me: But you didn't think so.

Zana: I was wrong, I'm sorry.

I nod.

Zana: I almost made the biggest mistake of my life today.

She huffs.

Zana: We had planned that after the concert we will go to a hotel that he booked specially for us, I was willing to sleep with him.

We stay in silence for some time.

Me: Come on, let's go to bed it's getting cold.

We go back to bed and she get on top of me and sleep, I keep stroking her hair.

Me: I feel like you just admitted to cheating on me after that confession, that you did feel something for me.

She giggles.

Zana: I'm sorry.

Me: Sure.

Zana: So uhm...what happens now? Are we dating?

I chuckle.

Me: Yeah it looks that way.

We both chuckle.

Me: Sleep maGumede.

She smiles looking at me.

Zana: It's actually Langa.

I smile.

Me: Oh yeah I thought since Sbani uses Gumede that you're also a Gumede, sorry Langelihle.

She smiles so bright, I am winning her heart here.

She sleep on my chest again, she falls asleep after a while.

Me: Thank you God.

I whisper, feels like I just got everything that I have always wanted and more.

I wake up in the morning she is not next to me, I can hear the music playing. I find her in the kitchen, I stand next to her kissing her cheek, she just put everything down and give me one hell of a deep kiss.

Me: Wow..I could get used to waking up to that kiss everyday.

She smiles.

Zana: Morning.

Me: Hi baby.

Zana: I made breakfast.

Me: Thank you.

I sit down and pull her to my lap, we eat on the same plate my dick is twitching I mean her bare ass is on my dick.

Me: Are you working today?

Zana: No.

Me: You are not going home?

Zana: My sister called she wants to see me and make sure I'm okay.

Me: You'll see her later, please.

She nods.

I get up with her in my arms and hold her tight.

Me: I love you.

I really do and I feel like she is still going to hurt me because she is still young, she will want to date other people, that's my fear but I will do my best to keep her.

Zana: I don't have anything to change into, my panty is wet in your bathroom.

Me: Let's go back to bed I will take you home later.

We cuddle the whole day, her phone keeps ringing.

Later her phone is ringing, she sit up I keep my eyes closed.

Zana: What do you want Max?

Max: Can we meet I want to explain.

Zana: No i'm good you can go to hell.

Max: Come on baby, one single mistake and you're out.

Zana: I was never in baby.

I chuckle opening one eye, such a fierce little girl, she drops the call and sleep on my chest.

Me: Hi baby.

Zana: Sox unjani?(how are you?)

I laugh looking at her.

Me: Sox?

She giggles.

Me: I want us to go out to a late night movie at the cinema, so let me take you home to change.

Zana: Wow okay.

I drive to their mansion, I have never seen such a big house.

Me: What if your father sees you in just a man's t-shirt.

She is still wearing only my t-shirt but it's big.

Zana: I will just go straight to my room, they won't see me.

I nod, she get off and walk in.

She comes out after a while looking beautiful.

Me: You look great baby.

Zana: Thank you.

She choose the movie then she get us popcorns. I have never been here but I have heard about the place so I thought why not do our first date here.

She chose romance and she is concentrating, I guess she loves these type of movies.

After our movie we go to eat, she frowns looking behind me.

Zana: I feel like that guy has been following us, I have been seeing him since we got here.

I look behind me the guy is wearing a cap looking down.

Me: Are you sure?

She nods, she looks uncomfortable.

Me: You want us to leave?

Zana: Yeah.

We get up and walk out, but when we get to the car, we hear click sounds I turn and there are four guys pointing guns at us, I pull Nkosazana to me.

Zana: What do you want?

One of them points with his head, they grab Nkosazana I try to go to her but they shoot my

left foot, I groan going down, she is screaming for me to help her.

Me: What do you want?

I get up, the pain is excruciating.

I feel another bullet on my shoulder.

Zana: Sonwa!

I can hear a lot of noise but my eyes are heavy.

I wake up and look around I am in a hospital I try to get up but the pain in my shoulder stops me.

The door swings open and Langa walk in, he punch straight where the bullet went in.

Langa: Where is my daughter you bastard!
Where is she!

He is angry, sweat is dripping down his face.

Me: I don't know where...

He punch me again harder than before, I groan in pain, he squeeze neck until nurses rush in pulling him away from me.

Two days pass I am still kept here, no one has come to see me but on the news they said Nkosazana is still missing, I am so worried and scared of what they might be doing to her.

It's late in the afternoon, I see the Gumedes I slowly sit up, it's the King talking to a journalist.

Ntsika: Yes the princess is back home safe though she is still traumatized by the whole thing but the police are still investigating.

They all walk away, I sigh at least she is home safe.

The door is kicked open and two gentlemen wearing the military pants and black t-shirts walk in and grab me on my bed, I don't even have energy to talk or ask anything, my shoulder has started bleeding all over again, my foot is worse.

They drive in the Gumedede house, there is a lot of them outside, I am dragged inside again, I am in only my pants, blood is all over my chest.

Looks like all these people have been waiting for me to arrive, Sfiso charges at me and beat me up till I am down, all I can do is breath but I can't move, the guys grab me and make me sit on the couch, my blood is everywhere I can barely keep my eyes open.

I see Nkosazana walking in with her twin sister, she has tears in her eyes.

Zana: I trusted you.

Me: Zana.

Zana: You planned everything from taking me out so you can have me kidnapped.

I slowly shake my head.

Zana: Don't deny it! The police found a lot of money in your house, which was part of the ransom that was asked from my family, usislambi senja!(you are a hungry dog)

Me: I...I... wouldn't.

She walk away, I see my sister crying so painfully.

Me: You... shouldn't...have...done this...in front of her...you Sbani... wanted...my sister to see you guys doing this to me?

He look away.

Me: You obviously don't consider her feelings.

Ncedo: He does actually...

She says wiping her tears.

Ncedo: I wasn't safe too mos if you'd do this to Nkosazana you would do it to me and ask for money from him.

I look at her in disbelief.

Me: Money changes people.

Langa: You thought you had all your tracks covered huh? Getting your buddies to shoot you to make it look real.

Me: Can..I talk to Nkosazana please.

Sfiso: No.

I nod.

Me: So..what now?

Langa: We will teach you a lesson you will never forget.

Me: While doing that find the real culprit to keep your daughters safe because you got the wrong guy.

The guys grab me, I don't care about pain anymore, I look at my sister.

Me: Remember I told you this, that you would choose them over me.

She wipe her tears.

Me: But I love you still.

I am taken to a flat but it's empty, it looks like it's being renovated, I am tied up.

After a week I am still tied up and no one has came in ever since I guess they want me to die on my own, I have tried calling out for help but no one came.

I hear the door being unlocked then the heels clicking, Nkosazana stands there looking at me, my mouth is dry if I cough right now I'm

pretty sure I'd die. She take out a knife from her bag.

Me: I..love..you.

She cuts all the ropes, I thought she wanted to stab me so I'm shocked.

Zana: I hate what you did but I can't let you die, I'm not a monster I know you probably needed money.

Me: I didn't do it believe me.

Zana: Leave, go far away before Nadia arrives from overseas, she will kill you.

I nod.

Me: What was I thinking? Falling in love with a rich kid while I'm broke, if anything happens to you I'm the suspect.

Zana: Bye.

She step back and walk out, I can hear her sob outside the door. I slowly get up and walk out I find her gone. I start drinking a lot of water on the tap I don't even know where I am nor do I

have a taxi fare. I hike my way to my flat I find it turned upside down like someone was trashing it, it must be when they got that money they were talking about.

I pack my bags, I don't have a phone and my wallet that had bank cards I don't know what happened to them.

Just then Nkosazana walk in again with my stuff, cellphone, wallet and many t-shirts.

Zana: I sent enough money to start over somewhere else.

Her eyes are puffy.

Me: Reverse it, I don't need your money! I kidnapped you remember so I have all the money in the world.

Zana: But the police took it back.

Me: I don't want your money Nkosazana.

My tummy hurts from not eating all this time, my foot as well as my shoulder I am a mess.

Me: Hope everything works out for you princess.

I take my bag and walk out, I limp all the way to the nearby ATM and withdraw money then call an ambulance for myself I can feel the energy that was left leaving my body little by little.

It's been a week since I was admitted I feel fine now, I am doing much better, the bullet on my foot fortunately didn't hit any veins just on the side of my foot so it wasn't that bad even on my shoulder, it didn't cause any serious damage it just needed attendance.

Now I am good to go, I take my things and walk out, I don't even know where my car is. I take a taxi back home, it's time I take back what belongs to me, my father's home.

I hope I remember the house but growing up I would write things down often so I don't forget so I still know where was it from when I was 7 years old.

I walk in the yard and find kids playing.

Me: Hi.

They stop playing looking at me.

Me: I am looking for Nonzwakazi Maxhanga.

They look at each other then point inside, I walk in there and stand by the door knocking, she opens and stare at me with her mouth opened.

Me: Molo Auntie.

She looks like she's gonna faint any minute from now.

Me: Remember me?

Nonzi: Soso.

I smile.

Me: The one and only.

I chuckle.

Me: I will make this very quick and easy...

I breathe looking at her.

Me: Pack your shit and leave MY HOUSE right now.

Nonzi: What?

Me: LEAVE MY HOUSE!

I put some emphasis on My house because, it's mine.

A man comes out and look at me.

Me: You have extra hands to help you that's great, I will sit over here while you pack.

I go sit down under the tree that has been there for years because I remember it, my mother used to sit under that tree when it was hot. I have noticed that if something bad happened in your childhood no matter how small it was it kind of forces you to remember certain things and I am glad or I wouldn't have remembered how my sister and were robbed of our home.

And the situation that happened between Nkosazana and I made me realise that I need to be a man and stand up for myself or people

will walk all over me. It's time I take back all that was stolen from me.

I see them coming out, the man is holding a stick.

He tries to hit me but I grab it staring at him.M

Me: I wouldn't do that if I were you, because I can call the cops on you for trespassing.

I look at them shaking my head.

Me: Your brother's kids auntie, you dumped us like trash at the orphanage. I will come back tomorrow and I want to find you gone or you should provide a title deed that states that you're the owner of this house if not...

I walk out and go check in the nearby BnB, I'm done with everyone, I want a peaceful life.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 67

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NKOSAZANA

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I am still a bit shaken by everything that happened to me three weeks ago though those people didn't hurt me in any way but the whole ordeal was traumatizing. I still can't believe that all along Sonwabile was trying to get close to me so he can milk my family, how can he do this to me!?

My fathers still don't know how he escaped and who helped him and I am not planning on ratting myself out. Auntie Nadia was going to kill him but I couldn't let that happen, I have seen his good side he probably was desperate for money.

My father takes me to and from work, so I am waiting for him to call and tell me he is outside, just then the call comes through its him.

Me: Dad you're here?

Sfiso: Yes Princess, daddy is here.

Me: Ok I'm coming.

I walk out and find him leaning on his car, I hug him then he kiss my forehead.

Sfiso: You're okay?

I nod.

Me: But I still feel like someone is watching me.

Sfiso: We are still searching for Sonwabile, he won't get away with this.

I nod and get in the car, he drives home and walk in. I go to my room and take off my clothes wrapping a towel around my body. I sit in bed and look at his number for some time before calling it, it rings unanswered maybe five times I keep calling, he finally answers.

Sonwa: Hello.

Me: Are you having me followed?

Sonwa: Who is this? And what are you talking about?

Me: Don't try to act smart with me Sonwa! I feel like I am being watched everywhere I go!
He heaves a very deep sigh.

Sonwa: I am trying so hard to live a peaceful life Nkosazana, I'm alone with no family! Even my sister turned against me, I don't need this, please.

He is speaking like he is crying judging from his shaky voice.

Me: I want you to change your number, my fathers will track you down using it.

Sonwa: What do you want from me? What does your family want from me Zana?

My heart breaks as he asks that is a very low voice. I just drop the call and get in bed wiping my tears because to be honest, I miss him, the way he would hold me but he put my life in danger I should stay clear of him.

I wake up late at night and go to the kitchen to warm my food up since I skipped dinner, I find Qhawekazi watching TV, I sit next to her, she pulls me and lay my head on her lap brushing my hair .

Kazi: Princess.

I don't answer as I am holding myself from crying out loud.

Kazi: What's wrong?

Me: I miss him.

Kazi: Who?

Me: Sonwa, I know he did me wrong but still I can't stop thinking about him.

Kazi: Nkosazana.

Me: Mmm.

Kazi: Do you really think he did it?

Me: Of course he did everything points at him, he was too good to be true, too gentle and rejected any sexual advances I made on him, he had a mission!

Kazi: Then don't worry Langa's baby, you gonna forget about him and find someone better, your safety should be the number one priority.

I nod.

Kazi: Be honest with me, yeah?

Me: Ok.

Kazi: you helped him escape?

I don't say anything.

Kazi: I know you like the back of my hand sis.

Me: Please don't tell dad.

Kazi: Why did you do it?

Me: I was scared for him, Auntie Nadia was going to kill him.

She nods.

Kazi: Eat your food so you can come sleep with me.

Me: I'm not hungry anymore, let's go.

We go to her room and sleep.

In the morning I go to gym just to get my mind off things, I find Ncedo there sitting on the floor staring in one direction.

Me: Hi.

She look up and nod.

Me: Are you okay?

Ncedo: Yes.

Me: Uhm...

Ncedo: Why did you date my brother?

I look at her confused.

Me: Excuse me.

Ncedo: When I married Sbani we practically became family, why would you date my brother Nkosazana, you ruined everything, my husband is distant all this wouldn't have happened if you had stayed away from my brother.

She shouts, I frown looking at her.

Ncedo: You got him killed because I don't believe all the bullshit that he escaped, that is just a cover up.

Me: It is huh?

She get up stepping closer to me.

Ncedo: You should have closed your damn legs and stopped being a bitch who sleeps around, where was your Max huh..

Yhooo! I lose it and start beating the hell out of her she is hitting me back but I was trained to fight from a very young age so I am showing her flames, I am punching her and kneeing her on her tummy, that's her weakest point I can see it drains her energy. Someone grabs me from behind, it's Sbani he looks so angry.

Sbani: All this noise Noncedo in my grandfather's house? Is this the hood huh? Aren't you the wife here, where is the respect?

Ncedo: She started it!

She says almost out of breath.

Sbani: Did I ask you that! You fight in the house where you are married to?

She just cry limping out, I feel a very hot slap from the back of his hand.

Sbani: Ungijwayela amasimba Nkosazana.(you're full of shit)

Me: Bhuti.(brother)

Sbani: Futsek!

He shouts pushing me out of the way and storm out. I go back to my father's house and take a bath, I didn't even do what I went there to do.

We eat breakfast together as a family.

Ntsika: Noncedo.

Ncedo: Baba.(dad)

Ntsika: What happened to your face?

She looks at me.

Ncedo: Nkosazana and I had an argument and..

Ntsika: An argument?

She nods looking down.

Ntsika: Nkosazana.

Me: Ungithukile baba.(She was cussing at me)
angangikhokhela inkomo ngalento
ayishilo.(she would pay a cow from what she
said)

They all stop eating and stare at me.

Ntsika: What?

Me: Yes, she said I opened my legs for her
brother, singaphindela ekhaya (we can go
back home) so I can get my virginity tested,
she will have to pay for degrading me.

Now they are looking at her, see, we might be
city girls but we know our roots, back at my
father Sfiso's home, our grandmother used to
have our virginity tested so if someone starts
telling me I sleep around while I am still a
virgin then that person pays a fine, which is a
cow!

Ntsika: Nkosazana that is your brothers wife.

Me: Then she should watch how she address people, she is defaming my character.

Ncedo: All for being a virgin? We were all there once sweetly and it ends in just a day unless you want to be a nun.

Sbani: Noncedo! Not here.

Ncedo: Sbani we were arguing she said what she said and I said what I said, why should I pay?

Sbani get up and walk away, I know how much he doesn't want to be disrespected especially by his wife in front of people, he hates it.

He comes back after a while and stand behind me.

Sbani: You are slowly losing the respect for me and my family Noncedo and I am saying this in front of my family, you should leave and come back once you know how to respect your in laws, I can't have a wife that speaks any how

with my sisters in the presence of my fathers,
the king.

Ncedo: Sbani..

Sbani: You are leaving my child behind.

He walks away again, Ncedo get up and follow
him.

Silence.

Too much silence so I just get up and walk out
sitting outside. I see Noncedo walking out
dragging a suitcase she is crying.

She look at me angrily then go to her car Sbani
bought for her after their wedding, she drives
out.

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SONWABILE

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I managed to get those people out of my
father's house, though it was a hassle but I
came back the following day with the police
they asked my aunt to provide the tittle deed

and it was stated that the house belongs to Luzuko Maxhanga, I am still yet to prove that I am his son though because when we were adopted they changed our surname, so I have to go back to the orphanage and ask for help, it's a long process really.

I recently got a call from Nkosazana which left me emotional, I miss her and to think that she strongly believes I had a hand in that kidnapping saga breaks my heart and to think I will get peace here now I learnt that they are still looking for me.

My phone rings as I am just sleeping in bed which is the only thing I have been doing lately, I mean, I don't have a job.

I look at the screen it flashes Nono, I watch it ring, she probably wants to tell me the same thing Nkosazana said, that their family is looking for me. She keeps calling till I decide to answer.

Me: Nono..

She sobs, I listen to her till she calms herself down.

Ncedo: Sonwa you're still alive!

I chuckle.

Me: Surprisingly, Yes.

Ncedo: Where are you?

Me: Why would I tell you Noncedo!

Ncedo: Bhuti.

Me: Don't call me that Noncedo, I stopped being your brother the day you accused me without facts, the day you said you are not safe from me!

I am getting really angry.

Ncedo: I'm... where are you I want us to talk please.

Me: All these years, I looked after you, put my life on hold for you, I didn't even go to varsity because I worked for you to finish school and put food on the table for you and Zinzile, I took you to the best schools mntakaTata(my

father's daughter) with the little I had but you, you turned against me, you looked me straight in the eye and told me you were not safe because of me.

She cries.

Me: Stay with your family Noncedo, they are better men than I would ever be, they are loaded they will take care of you.

Ncedo: Sonwa please I need to...

I drop the call and switch off my phone.

I stay up the whole night, I really need to change my number I hate these calls but I don't care about the Gumedes finding me, I really don't care about any of them anymore.

In the morning I switch on my phone and it's buzzing with messages from Noncedo I view one of them.

Ncedo: 'Sbani chased me out of the house I don't have anywhere else to go' the second one is 'Please Sonwa, I need you'.

I sigh and call her.

Ncedo: Bhuti.

Me: You didn't sleep well.

I can tell by the sound of her voice she probably didn't sleep at all that's how much I know her.

Ncedo: I slept in the car.

Me: I will send you the address.

I drop the call and send the address to her.
After two hours I hear my phone ringing.

Me: Hello.

Ncedo: I am outside the house, Uhm should I come in?

Me: Yes.

I open the door for her she throws herself in my arms but I can't hug her back I still feel betrayed by her.

We sit down, she is looking around.

Ncedo: I'm sorry.

I nod, she kneels in front of me and cry on my lap.

Ncedo: Ngiyaxolisa kakhulu.(I'm really sorry)

I get up and go stand by the window looking at my parents graves.

Me: Come here.

She slowly come and stand next to me looking outside I can tell she is confused.

Me: That is mom and dad's graves.

She look at me shocked.

Ncedo: This is our parents house?

I nod.

Ncedo: But how did you get it back?

Me: I had to grow the fuck up and stop letting people dance on my head, people have taken so much from me Noncedo, I sacrificed a lot for people but all I got in return was betrayal, they turned their backs on me, I had the first bullet wound because of you when you went missing, I have two more bullet wounds

because of Nkosazana but nobody sees me, no one cares!

She look down.

Me: You disappointed me Noncedo, you were the only family I had but now I have no one.

Ncedo: But I'm here.

Me: No, you are just waiting for Sbani to calm down then you will go back running leaving me like a piece of shit that I am!

I see her holding her head then her eyes rolls back I am quick to catch her before her body hits the floor, I take her to bed and sprinkle her with water on her face, she slowly open her eyes.

Me: Hey.

She nods.

Me: Where does it hurt?

Ncedo: I don't know, my tummy.

Me: You want me to take you to the hospital?

She shakes her head.

Me: You hate hospitals?

She quickly nods I smile pulling her up then hug her tight, she is still my little sister.

Ncedo: I'm so sorry.

Me: It's okay.

I look at her face closely.

Me: You have bruises, what happened?

Ncedo: Nkosazana and I had a fight.

I nod, I would ask what happened but hearing that name upsets me really bad.

She flinch moaning in pain.

Me: Hey are you okay?

Ncedo: Yeah just cramps but it's nothing serious.

I nod.

Ncedo: So the house was it like this when you were young?

Me: It's still pretty much the same house but a lot has changed, the furniture and everything inside.

She nods.

Ncedo: You probably connect with this house.

Me: I do, a lot.

Ncedo: So aren't they going to take what belongs to them in here?

Me: No unless they provide slips as proof that they bought everything.

Ncedo: Shame.

I chuckle.

She sighs.

Me: So Sbani chose his sister over you?

She blinks looking at me.

Me: He taught you a valuable lesson sis, you don't turn your back on family, your own blood, it's thicker than water, they are solid nobody can break them up, pity I can't say the same about you.

She look down.

Me: But I still love you.

Ncedo: Uhm Sonwa.

Me: Yes.

Ncedo: I have a job interview tomorrow do you think I should go?

I smile.

Me: I'm happy for you and yes you should go, you know why?

Ncedo: Why?

Me: So that you won't sleep in the car when things don't work out between you and Sbani, so you can have a backup plan, you don't stop working on building yourself just because you married a rich man because at the end of the day people change.

She nods.

Ncedo: Thank you.

I dish up for us then I go to bed.

In the morning I feel light slaps I open my eyes she is staring at me smiling.

Me: What?

Ncedo: Please drive me to Durban.

Me: No.

I cover my head, she pulls it.

Ncedo: Please, I don't feel too good I will be driving really slow I might miss this interview.

Me: That has nothing to do with me.

Ncedo: Please... please.. please.

I sigh.

Me: Ok.

She smiles then get up she walks away and stand by the door holding her tummy.

Me: Noncedo what is it?

Ncedo: Just those cramps they come and go they are not that serious.

I nod but I am getting worried.

I drive her to Durban, I stop at the building where she is taking this interview, when she step out of the car I see blood on her seat, I step out and rush to her side, she looks weak.

Me: What's wrong?

She screams in pain, I take her back to the car and speed to the hospital. They take her in immediately and ask me to wait outside, I see Nkosazana rushing to her ward I look the other way so she doesn't see me. I see her rushing out again then another doctor and nurses go back there, I hear a lot of footsteps running then the Gumedes show up, it's a number of them Sbani is ahead of everyone. They go straight to the ward, I see Nkosazana going in as well, I stand by the door, as much as I don't like being around these people but my sister is in there and it looks like they haven't noticed me at all.

The doctor clears his throat.

Doc: She is having a miscarriage looks like she was hit hard on her abdomen, I'm sorry sir ..

She keeps talking Nkosazana rush out pushing me out of the way, I walk out looking at her, she is running up the stairs, I run after her, I find her on the rooftop crying, she is taking off her heels then stand at the edge.

Me: Nkosazana! What are you doing?

I shout, she turns looking at me.

Me: Step down..

I see some people waking towards us and start taking out their phones, they are probably taking pictures, that's what they do in crisis like this.

Nkosazana is crying so hard still up there.

Zana: I'm the one who hit her, I didn't know she was pregnant! I'm the one who hit her.

Me: Zana come on don't do this, step down come on we can talk about this.

She shakes her head.

Zana: I killed my brother's baby I want to die, how can I do this to him, how...

More people are coming out, I hear someone is doing a live video about this I don't understand human beings sometimes.

Me: Princess please.. Ngiyakucela Nkosazana (I'm begging you)

She step back once I hold my breath, tears make way out of my eyes, I have never been in this situation, I am scared out of my mind.

Me: Please..

I slowly climb up and manage to hold her tight.

Me: Ungayenzi lento kmina Nkosazana.(Don't do this to me)

I go down with her then hold her in my arms until someone pull her from me, it's her brother Sbani, she sobs in his arms, her whole family is here. I go back to my sister and find her asleep, I hold her hand.

Me: I hope you heal from this, I love you.

I put her car keys next to her and walk out, I go to the taxi ranks and take a taxi back home.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 68

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NONCEDO

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I'm going through the most and I don't think anyone understands the kind of pain I am feeling. I feel like the world has turned on me so bad that I don't even know who to turn to.

Everything was going so well next thing I am in the hospital bed, doctors telling me I lost the baby that I didn't even know I was carrying.

I am alone in my ward, I look at the time it's 8:01 am I slept the whole night.

The whole day the doctors keep doing scans to see if all the clots are gone it's a painful process for me emotionally because I am going through it alone without my husband I don't even know where he is I last saw them yesterday and then they rushed out just like that.

It's day two and the doctors said I am safe to go home I don't even know who is going to fetch me or I should request an uber.

I am sitting in bed staring down at my feet as I think about my life here on. I hear the door opening and there stands my husband's brother Lethokuhle.

Letho: MaHlophe.

I nod.

Letho: I came to take you home.

I get up and follow him to his car, he drives home and I find everyone here but not Sbani nor Nkosazana.

Ntsika: Makoti.

I nod sitting down.

Ntsika: We're sorry for what you're going through trust me most of us in this room know how it feels like to lose a baby.

I nod and get up walking to my room, I find Sbani in bed I chuckle, so he is still alive. I take my suitcases and start packing all my clothes in silent I see him sitting up he looks so bad, he even have eye bags.

Sbani: Noncedo.

I ignore him and continue to pack.

Sbani: Ngiyaxolisa. (I'm sorry)

He tries to get up but sit back down really fast.

Sbani: Where are you going?

Me: I don't know.

Sbani: Please don't go.

Me: Why Sbani? This isn't my home anymore you chased me out.

Sbani: I'm sorry my love I was just angry. we just lost the baby Noncedo we should be together, grieving.

Me: No, I should be with someone who cares about me Sbani! You don't care about me.

Sbani: I do baby, I do just... please.

Me: I want a divorce.

He shakes his head.

Sbani: No MaHlophe, ay Sthandwa sam(no my love)

I take my small bags first and walk out with them loading them in my car then walk back in to take the rest of them after saying goodbye to my daughter. Once I am outside I look around and tears fill my eyes I thought this was my forever home I guess it was just too soon, I open the car...

Ntsika: Makoti..

I turn to look at them, Sbani is sitting down he is looking really sick.

Ntsika: Asikhulume njengomndeni.(Let's talk like family)don't leave.

I shake my head.

Me: I'm not one of you, you made that very clear.

Sbani: Baba anikhulume naye ngiyacela.(Dad please talk to her)

I get in the car and drive out leaving him shouting my name, God knows how much I love him and our daughter but his loyalty is with his blood, I mean so little to him.

I stop on the side and call Sonwa.

Sonwa: Nono.

I just cry really loud he let me cry until I'm calm.

Me: Can I please come stay with you?

Sonwa: Why?

Me: I'm divorcing Sbani..

I wipe my tears.

Me: It's over.

Sonwa: Calm down first, don't drive while you're crying. Woza ekhaya.(come home)

Me: Ok.

I drive home and walk in throwing myself in his arms.

We sit down my head is on his shoulder.

Sonwa: How are you?

Me: I don't know, I feel alone I wish mom was here.

He wraps his arms around me.

Sonwa: It's okay I'm always here sis.

Later we clean the house together, it's Christmas tomorrow but it doesn't feel like it.

We go to bed after eating the food he cooked.

In the morning I wake up first and clean then cook for the two of us with my heart aching would be cooking for Sbani's family right now for our first Christmas together but no.

I see Sonwa walking in looking so sad I sit next to him.

Me: Bhuti.(Brother)

Sonwa: Yeah.

Me: Do you remember anything you used to do with mom and dad during Christmas?

He nods.

Sonwa: The last Christmas we had was when you were born, we decorated the Christmas tree while you were sleeping under it, you were our Christmas present that year.

He says then drop his eyes.

Sonwa: I miss them everyday I still don't understand why we had to lose the both of them, you were so young Nono, you needed mom and Dad, you still need them, I need them.

Hearing how shaky his voice is brings me to tears.

We eat lunch together quietly until he clears his throat.

Sonwa: So what happened between you and Nkosazana I heard her saying it's her fault you lost the baby.

Me: We fought and she was kicking me in my tummy countless times.

He nods.

Sonwa: I'm sorry.

I look at him.

Me: You're still in love with her?

He wipes his face.

Sonwa: I'm old now I want to settle down, she was too young for me and besides she only cares about herself and no one else, she won't build this home with me.

I nod.

Me: I hate everything connecting me with the Gumedes except my daughter of course.

My phone rings it's Sbani I answer.

Me: Hello.

Sbani: Mkami. (My wife)

Me: Sawubona Sbani.(Hello Sbani)

Sbani: Please come home.

Me: I am home.

Sbani: Ngiyaxolisa Sthandwa sam please...

Me: Bye Sbani.

Sbani: We have to go home MaHlophe for cleansing.

Me: You can do that cleansing without me.

I drop the call breathing out loud, I will stop loving him eventually.

It's around three in the afternoon, my brother and I are watching TV we hear a knock at the door.

Sonwa: Go open the door Nono.

I get up and go to the door, I find a man and a woman standing nervously by the door the woman is even crying.

Me: Uhm...hi.

The wife sobs.

Sonwa: Who is at the door Nono!

He shouts walking towards me but stops on his track staring at the couple.

"Sonwabile" a bold voice of the man at the door says.

Sonwa: Tata.(Father)

I look at him, he looks like he has seen a ghost.

Sonwa: Mama..

I am so confused as my brother push them out of the way and run out, I let them in they are looking around but mama and Tata how?

The woman is still crying I offer them juice and sit there staring at them, the man is the older version of my brother.

The door opens and Sonwa stands there.

Sonwa: Get out!

He shouts he has sweat running down his face.

Sonwa: Get out now!

"Let us explain Soso". The man says causing my brother to lose it, he charges at him and start throwing punches at him so hard he ends up on the floor the woman is screaming I grab Sonwa pushing him back I have never seen him this angry.

Me: What is going on? Who are these people?

Sonwa: I want them gone Noncedo right now.

Me: Uhm can you leave please.

The man get up wiping his bloody nose his wife is helping him.

I hold my brothers hand and go to his room with him.

Me: Who are they?

He sit in bed and cry so bad this I have never seen in my life, Sonwa crying? I start crying with him.

"Can I explain please".

Sonwa get up but I push him back down.

"Nono".

I look at him.

Me: You know Me?

He chuckles looking down.

"Yes, I named you, I am your father".

I look at Sonwa.

Me: How is that possible?

Sonwa: Mom and dad are dead Noncedo I was there when they were buried, I had you in my arms that day crying for them to wake up because you needed them, I ...

"We were taken into hiding because your mother was a witness of some serious crime so they wanted us dead, some people helped us fake our own death and move overseas".

Sonwa chuckles.

Sonwa: You should have taken us with you Dad, you should have taken at least Noncedo with you she was so young, 25 years! 25 years of

misery yet you were out there living your best life!

Dad: I know son but there wasn't enough time and leaving with you was going to raise suspicions.

Sonwa: so you left us to suffer here, you left me alone with a baby at the age of 6?

Dad: Your aunt was there.

Sonwa: uNonzwakazi! Don't tell me that shit wena! We ended up in a home because of that bitch!

Dad: What?

Sonwa: Please leave us in peace Luzuko before I get angry again.

Dad walk away, I get up and rush out, I find them outside.

Me: Dad..

They both turn I go to them and hug dad tight crying.

Mama: I'm sorry Nono.

I hug her.

Me: I need you..

I feel someone grabbing me away from them.

Sonwa: Don't do this to yourself, they will leave you again, you have me you don't need them.

He takes me inside now all the pain is coming back, not having parents to losing the baby it's all coming back.

Sbani calls again at night.

Sbani: Baby..

Me: Mmm.

Sbani: Are you okay? I had a bad dream you were crying.

Me: I'm fine.

Sbani: Losing the baby was my fault I know my sister hit you bad that day I should have taken you to a doctor but instead I sent you away, I'm so sorry.

Me: It's fine, it's over now I just want you to start the divorce process.

Sbani: You are my wife Noncedo and it will stay that way forever.

Me: I want nothing to do with you or your family, your sister killed my child.

Sbani: She didn't know, Nkosazana wouldn't kill my child on purpose.

Me: You are always defending her it's disgusting.

He sighs.

Sbani: Can we at least meet tomorrow.

Me: No.

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SONWABILE

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People are cruel! How can you leave a 5 months old baby with a 6 year old boy by faking your own death, I don't understand how they thought it was okay to leave us

behind with no one to take care of us. 25 years without them and they even have the audacity to show their faces! They should have stayed dead!

I am in bed my phone has been ringing but I don't have energy to answer it.

I end up answering because it's irritating me.

Me: Hello.

Sbani: Sbari.(in law)

Me: Yeah.

Sbani: I need your help man, Noncedo wants to divorce me.

Me: Do you blame her?

He sighs.

Me: You can't ask help from me after treating me like a dog saying I kidnapped Nkosazana.

Sbani: We made a mistake.

Me: A mistake? But I didn't hear anyone apologizing.

Sbani: I'm sorry.

I chuckle.

Me: Just give my sister a divorce then the only tie we will have is my niece.

I drop the call and think about Nkosazana, I wonder how she's doing after everything but she is none of my business.

The next day my parents are here and I can't help but get angry seeing their faces here.

Dad: Sonwabile.

Me: Luzuko.

He looks at my mother then at me.

Dad: I understand your anger towards us, it's justified but please let us in your life.

Me: Why? You left when we needed you the most and you are here talking about letting you in? As old as I am?

Noncedo is sitting quietly looking down.

Mama: Nono are you okay?

She finally looks up, her eyes are filled with tears.

Ncedo: My marriage failed and I lost the baby recently.

Mom gasps.

Mama: You were married?

She nods.

Mama: Oh umntanami(oh my child)

She sit next to her and they hug.

Me: Why did you come back now?

Dad: The gang leader that we were running away from is dead so we are free from them.

Me: You should have called or made contact Dad.

Dad: I know but we couldn't risk getting you guys killed.

I shake my head, I can't believe this.

Me: We are okay as you can see but I would like you guys to leave and never come back here again.

Mama: Sonwa..

Me: Please, you are dead to us so please stay dead, Nono is better off without people like you.

I get up and open the door.

Me: I don't ever want to see your faces ever again or I will kill you.

They get up walking out.

Ncedo: Bhuti let's give them a chance.

Me: A chance!you don't know what I went through with you Noncedo while those people were living their best lives! I had to grow up for you! It was hard especially when you cried, you needed them and they weren't there, they are selfish!

She nods and walk away, I can see how desperate she is to have mom and dad in her

life but I don't trust them they might leave again hurting her in the process so she is better off without them.

The whole week ends without our parents making contact and it's affecting Noncedo really bad I don't know what to do.

Me: Sis.

She is standing outside looking around.

Me: Let's go to Durban for a mini holiday so we can see Esami.

She nods.

We pack and I drive to Durban, she is so quiet I hate seeing her like this. We book a hotel then she calls Sbani to bring Esami, I leave them talking going to my room.

Later I receive a call from Nkosazana.

Me: Yeah.

Zana: Uhm hey I heard you are here in Durban can we meet.

Me: No.

Zana: Please.

I brush my face.

Me: Ok.

I send address and wait for her to get here, I didn't even tell my sister that she is coming.

I hear a knock, I open the door, she stands there in black tracksuit and white sneakers, her curly afro is tied up, my heart is beating so fast as she looks at me with those eyes.

Zana: Hi.

I move away from the door sitting in bed, she walk in closing the door behind her. She sit next to me playing with her keys.

Me: So why did you want to meet?

Zana: Are you angry at me for what I did to your sister?

Me: Yes.

She look down.

Zana: I'm sorry I don't even know how to face her, I don't know what to do I haven't been able to sleep well ever since.

We talk for a while then she get up.

Zana: Uhm..I have to go now.

Me: Ok.

I get up as well, we are staring at each other, I find myself holding her waist kissing her, she is kissing me back the kiss is very slow, I unzip her jacket taking it off. We move to bed we are already naked I am on top of her. I wrap her leg around my waist and push the tip of my dick in, I can feel that she is still sealed.

Me: Do you want this Zana?

Zana: Yes.

She whispers sending shivers down my spine, I kiss her hard then find my way in her pussy I finally break that hymen, she let out a very low scream, I make slow passionate love to her, she keeps telling me she loves me and I am doing the same because I really do.

I finally cum and get off her going to the bathroom and come back with a towel, I wipe her and she sleep on my chest. We are quiet both deep in thoughts until I hear a knock on the door. I wear my pants and go open the door, my mind comes back as my sister walk in with Esami in her arms.

Ncedo: Say hi to uncle Sami..

She stops and stare at Nkosazana who is now sitting up in bed covering her body.

Ncedo: Sonwabile.

Her eyes are filled with tears as she stares at me clearly hurt.

Nkosazana get up and wear her clothes.

Ncedo: How could you? After everything she did to me.

Me: I'm sorry it was just a moment of weakness and I...it didn't mean anything...

I close my mouth as I hear a low chuckle from Nkosazana, now I am caught between my

sister and her. Zana finally walks out wiping her tears I can't follow her because I have to comfort my sister who is crying but I shouldn't have said that about Zana, what we had was special, she told me she loves me but I might never get a chance to be with her again after what I said.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 69

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NKOSAZANA

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I am sitting in my room staring at myself in the mirror, I don't recognize this person I don't even know who Nkosazana is. I go to bed and

sleep facing up. I thought Sonwa loves me that I even gave him my virginity but he told his sister that i was a moment of weakness that it was a mistake sleeping with Me, I'm crushed I guess we will never work because he will choose his sister and I won't blame him they are family.

He calls me and I answer.

Me: Hello.

Sonwa: Nkosazana.

My name always sounds different every time he calls it.

Sonwa: Uhm look, uhm what happened today was amazing I loved every minute of it but we can't go on you know that..I have to consider my sister's feelings.

Me: Yeah, I understand.

Sonwa: I'm not doing this to hurt you Zana.

Me: It's okay.

Sonwa: I think it's better we don't call each other again.

Me: You got what you always wanted so I don't see any reason why you would ever call me.

Sonwa: Nkosazana, it's not like that and you know it, I turned you down before. if I just wanted to sleep with you I would have long time ago, I had a lot of opportunities.

I wipe the tears that has fallen down my cheeks.

Me: Then why sleep with me now only to dump me the next day?

Sonwa: I didn't plan it I'm sorry.

I drop the call and change into tracksuit then run out, I jog down the streets and it's late at night the streets lights are on. I jog until I stop on the bridge I look down, I take my phone and call Sonwa.

Sonwa: Mmm.

Me: I love you.

Sonwa: Zana where are you?

Me: I'm at the Berea bridge.

Sonwa: What? A bridge at this time? What are you doing there! Nkosazana don't do anything stupid please.

He drops the call, I continue to stand there looking down I feel dizzy.

Langa: Nkosazana!

He says running towards me then hold me tight.

Langa: What are you doing?

Me: I just needed some air dad, how did you find Me?

Langa: That boy called your brother and told him you're here.

Me: He didn't have me kidnapped Dad, we need to apologize to him.

Langa: How do you know?

Me: He loves me he wouldn't.

He sighs.

Langa: Let's go home.

We walk home holding hands, I love my dads so much they did a lot for us to be who we are today.

I walk in and they take turns hugging Me, Sbani's phone rings.

Sbani: Sbari..

Sonwa: Did you find her? Is she okay?

Sbani: Yeah she is back home safe, thank you so much man.

I go to my room, my dads walk in and sit on the couch looking at me.

Langa: What were you doing there Nkosazana?

Me: I was just sad dad so I needed some air.

Langa: You know your dad and I have lost two daughters right?

I nod.

Langa: So you want us to lose you too? You want to kill yourself?

Me: I'm tired of living dad and I don't...

Next thing dad Sfiso is on his feet whooping me with a belt all over my body I am screaming in pain dad is trying to push him away but it's not working.

Langa: Sfiso stop!you are hurting her.

Sfiso: This is your fault Langelihle! You don't want us to discipline these kids when they do wrong! You are raising spoilt brats!

Dad looks down.

Sfiso: I will beat her up until she gets it together I'm done listening to you concerning how I raise them, come here.

I shake my head.

He grabs me and beat me up again this time it's even worse than before, he is so angry.

Langa: Sfiso it's enough now! Shaya mina ke(beat me instead) uyamlimaza.(you are hurting her).

He swings the belt again I tightly close my eyes but it doesn't hit my body, I open my eyes dad is standing in front of me they are staring at each other. Langa turns looking at me looks like the belt hit him in his face because there is a red mark across his face, it looks bad.

Langa: Pack your clothes and..

Sfiso: Langa!

Langa: Go tell Qhawe and Qhawekazi that we are leaving.

I stand there looking at them.

Langa: Nkosazana!

He shouts I go to my sister's room and tell her.

Kazi: Where are we going?

I shrug.

Me: I don't know.

We hear shouting and things falling, we rush out, Qhawe is here as well watching as our parents argue it has gotten do bad that Langa is thrashing the place, we are just standing there.

Kazi: Baba!

They stop, looking at us.

Kazi: What is going on?

Langa: We are leaving, go and pack.

Kazi: To where?

Langa: Just go and pack dammit!

Kazi: I'm not leaving.

Langa: Qhawekazi.

Kazi: We are leaving because you are always defending Nkosazana's spoilt brat tendencies?

I look at her.

Langa: What did you say?

Kazi: If dad tries to discipline her you always get angry, I am not leaving with you Langa.

Langa: Zana, Qhawe go and pack.

Qhawe just sit down and play with his phone.

Sfiso: You want to divide my kids Langelihle.

Langa: Did you see what you did to my face

Sfiso?

Sfiso: That was a mistake and you know it.

He walks out banging the door, dad looks my way.

Sfiso: You can go pack and leave with your father I'm done with the both of you.

I look down as tears stream down my face.

Me: I'm sorry dad..

Sfiso: I lost my daughters in tragic ways and you want me to re-live that pain again by wanting to jump in buildings and bridges!

I wipe my tears.

Me: I won't do it again.

He walks away, as dad walk back in his eye is almost closing that belt really hit him hard.

Me: Can I have a look at your eye.

We sit down and I put some ointment there,
dad sit next to me looking at him.

Sfiso: Langelihle.

Silence.

Sfiso: I'm sorry I didn't mean to hit you.

Langa: So it was supposed to be my daughter?

Sfiso: No, I wasn't gonna hit her face Langa.

Langa: So you were aware that it's me you are
hitting that's why you aimed for the face.

Me: Dad please don't fight because of Me, I'm
sorry.

Langa get up and walk away, I can't even face
my dad.

The week ends with my parents sleeping in
different rooms, they are not talking to each
other but it's better than leaving our home.

I find them eating breakfast in silence, I sit
down.

Me: Hi dad.

They both nod, dad's cheek is now dark where he was hit with a belt.

Sfiso: Sthandwa sam.(My love)

He ignores him.

Sfiso: I'm really sorry baby please forgive me.

Langa: So I have been raising our kids the wrong way and you are only telling me now.

Sfiso: I didn't say that.

Langa: You did Sfiso and it hurts to know that I wasn't doing it right for so long.

Sfiso: It's not that Langa it's just that you are too soft on Nkosazana that is why she does as she pleases you always bail her out, you don't call her out if she's wrong.

Langa: I'm sorry then.

I look down as they speak about me as if I'm not here.

Langa: Her growing slower than her siblings made me treat her like she's younger I guess.

Growing up I looked younger than my brother and sister but eventually I grew up just like them.

Langa: It's not like I have favourites, I love all my kids.

Sfiso: I know Langelihle and I am sorry for questioning your parenting skills, you have done great with them, you taught them good values and principles if one doesn't use them it's all on them.

He says looking at me, I feel bad.

Sfiso: I love you.

Langa: I love you too.

I wash the dishes.

Sfiso: We have a meeting with Sbani's wife and her brother today.

I nod.

Sfiso: Your father says you want us to apologize to him for thinking he kidnapped you.

I nod.

Me: I know he didn't do it.

He nods.

Me: Dad.

He looks at me.

Me: You still love Me?

Sfiso: Of course I love you, you're my daughter, hitting you didn't mean I love you less I was just being a parent.

I nod.

Sfiso: Don't ever question my love for you, I love you.

Me: I love you too dad.

Noncedo and her brother are here, he looks so good wearing all black, so clean too.

We sit down dad clears his throat.

Langa: Uhm Makoti and you Sonwabile we would like to apologize for everything, starting from when we accused you of kidnapping

Nkosazana and when you had a fight that caused you to miscarry.

Sonwa: Is that it?

They look at each other.

Sonwa: So is that supposed to make us feel better?

He says staring at my father in the eye.

Langa: No, we know it may take time but please do find it in your hearts to forgive us.

Sonwa chuckles shaking his head.

Sonwa: This is not an apology, I want you to beg for it, you humiliated me beat me up like a dog and you gonna sit there and say you're sorry?

Langa: What do you want me to do?

Sonwa: I want every single one of you to kneel right here and beg for my forgiveness.

He looks dead serious his eyes are cold .

Ntsika: That is just ridiculous.

Sonwa: Is it?

I see Sbani going on his knees In front of them holding Noncedo's hand.

Sbani: My love I'm so sorry for chasing you out and Sonwa I am sorry for the humiliation you suffered at the hands of my family.

Sonwa get up and stand there staring at each of us, his eyes stops at me for a while.

Sonwa: Apologize to my sister Nkosazana.

He says staring at me.

Me: I'm sorry Noncedo.

He shakes his head and look at Sbani, I slowly kneel next to him and apologise to Noncedo who is in tears.

Me: I didn't mean to hurt you like that, I didn't know you were pregnant I shouldn't have fought you at all I'm sorry.

She nods I get up and sit on the couch.

Sonwa: From now on we will stay away from your family unless we want to see Esami but nothing else ties us to your family, thank you.

Sbani: Noncedo please.

She get up and walk out first, I follow her.

Me: Ncedo.

She look at me.

Me: I'm sorry for getting between you and my brother please forgive him, he really loves you.

Ncedo: Sometimes love is just not enough.

She get in the car, Sonwa walks out and pass me like I'm invincible. I watch as his car drives out then walk back in.

I spend weeks taking extra shifts at the hospital just so I won't stay at home and mop around.

It's been a while since I got my periods I thought maybe it's the stress I have been under but my stomach feels bloated and for some reason I sleep a lot.

I just stopped at the pharmacy to buy pregnancy test then drive home. I go to the bathroom immediately and follow instructions. I wait for a while then look at the tests, they are both positive, I don't even know what to do, I mean I haven't heard from Sonwa since the day of the meeting and we only had sex once, what am I going to say to my dads. I am losing my mind all I am thinking about is having an abortion, no one will know I can get the pills easily.

I take my keys and drive to the hospital, I get the pills then go back home. Now the hardest part is using them, I don't think I can do it, I take my phone and look at Sonwabile's number then call it holding my breath.

Sonwa: Hello.

Me: Hi.

Sonwa: Yeah?

Me: Uhm are you busy?

Sonwa: Say what you want to say Nkosazana I don't have the whole day.

Me: Uhm ok...uhm I just found out that I'm pregnant.

Silence.

Me: And I only had sex with you.

Silence, I look at the phone thinking he dropped it but no.

Me: Okay...

I drop the call and get in bed, I'm so embarrassed I shouldn't have called him.

My phone rings an hour later, it's him.

Sonwa: So you are keeping the baby right?

Me: Yes.

Sonwa: Okay I guess I will see him once he is born because I am in Gauteng I just started working.

Me: Oh..ok.

Sonwa: Your parents knowd?

Me: Not yet.

Sonwa: Ok let me know if they want to talk to me, I won't deny anything I know that's my baby.

Me: Ok.

I drop the call, I didn't even hear any excitement in his voice I'm sad and he is far away.

We are eating dinner with my family but I have a lump in my throat I just want to cry.

Langa: Princess.

I look at him.

Langa: You're not eating your food.

Me: I'm not really hungry.

He nods.

Langa: You'll warm it up later.

I go to my room and scroll down my phone I see Sonwa has a girl on his status and a caption "Uzovusa umuzi wakithi" (she will rebuild our home).

I call him immediately.

Sonwa: Is this how things will be now? You will call me every time?

Me: No.. I'm sorry.

Now I know how it feels when he doesn't give a fuck about me.

Me: I don't think I want to keep this baby anymore.

Sonwa: Why?

Me: I am sure you'd want your woman to be the one to carry your first child.

Sonwa: You want my attention so bad huh?

Me: Why are you being so mean?

Sonwa: It hurts you that I no longer tip toe around you? That I moved on?

Me: But I am carrying your child, you should be with me.

Sonwa: A baby is not a ring, you're smart you should know this.

I just cry dropping the phone, my dad walk in.

Sfiso: You're crying.

Me: I'm sorry dad.

Langa: What's wrong?

Me: I'm..I'm pregnant I'm sorry.

They look at each other then back at me.

Langa: Who is responsible for the pregnancy?

Me: Sonwa.

He sighs.

Langa: Does he know?

Me: I just told him today, he is in Gauteng.

Langa: It's okay, we will do this together okay,
a baby is a blessing.

Sfiso: Don't worry we will support you.

Me: Thank you.

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SONWABILE

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I just received a call from Nkosazana telling me she is pregnant I don't know if I should be happy or what because when my sister and I relocated to Gauteng I was so sure that nothing will tie me to Nkosazana ever again but now there is a human that will need me to be there, I want to be the best dad to my child something my own dad failed. Noncedo and I decided that it's best mom and dad stayed away from us and she also divorced Sbani. We get to see Esami on some weekends when Noncedo is not working she flies down to Durban to get her, it was hard at first for her to adjust to these arrangements but she is getting there, it hasn't been long anyway.

We are both working and staying together in the rented apartment. I am with someone who is my age, very matured I believe and I am sure she would be able to help me building my home and make it warm, she is also working and her and Noncedo get along.

Now I have to tell her that I am having a baby because I am serious about her and I don't plan on keeping secrets from her, I am too old for playing games now, I want a wife.

She just walked in and I am off from work, she has her own apartment but half the time she is here.

She sit next to me after kissing my cheek.

Nsindiso: Hi.

Me: How are you?

Nsindiso: I'm great, you look tired.

Me: Yeah uhm..I have been thinking.

She nods.

Me: These coming holidays my sister and I will spend it at home since she wants to see her daughter so how about you come with us so you can see my home.

She smiles.

Nsidiso: I'd love that baby.

I nod.

Nsindiso: Are you okay?

Me: I need to tell you something.

She nods.

Me: Uhm so I received a call uhm...from the ex telling me she's pregnant I...

I look at her she is staring at me i can't read her emotions.

Nsindiso: You believe her?

Me: Uhm yeah I mean she wouldn't lie.

Nsindiso: What if she just wants you back, how did you guys break up?

I look at her, maybe she is right.

Me: But if it's true? Then what? Are you going to stay with Me?

Nsindiso: If you want me to stay, I wouldn't leave you because of your past as long as it doesn't threaten our future.

I pull her to me and kiss her.

Me: Thank you I promise I won't let it affect our future.

She nods and go to the kitchen to cook since she is sleeping over, now she gave me something to think about, maybe Nkosazana is just lying to get my attention, it took me a while to get over her and now that I finally did she is pregnant with my child, how am I going to handle that.

I stay awake the whole night imagining how my child would look like with a mom as pretty as Nkosazana, those girls are beautiful and she is giving me my first child, now the idea of having a baby soon is sinking in and I am getting excited. I get off bed with my phone and walk outside sitting down, I call Nkosazana.

Zana: Mmm.

She must be sleeping.

Me: Hi, uhm so you are like three months and a few weeks pregnant right?

Zana: Really! Did you see the time?

Me: I'm sorry Its just sinking in now that I am going to be a dad in a few months.

Zana: You are happy?

Me: Yeah I mean.. it's my first child.

Zana: I'm scared, I will be going through this pregnancy thing alone and it's my first child too.

I sigh.

Me: I'm sure your family will be supportive, I will too but in a distance I don't want to disrespect my woman.

Zana: Ok I understand that.

Me: Thanks.

Zana: Bye.

Me: Bye.

We stay in the line for a while with no one dropping the call.

Zana: Uhm Sonwa?

Me: Yes.

Zana: Am I childish?

I chuckle.

Me: A lot.

She giggles.

Zana: I guess I have a lot of growing up to do since I'm going to be a mom soon.

Me: I guess you do.

She heaves a deep sigh.

Zana: Have a goodnight.

Me: Thank you.

I drop the call then go back to bed, maybe she will grow up now that there is a baby on the way, maybe I gave up on her too soon I should have helped her grow but it's too late now I am with someone else whom I believe will build with me.

It's the Easter holidays and we are already packing for our trip back home. I go to Noncedo and sit in her bed as she packs

quietly, I haven't told her about Nkosazana's pregnancy.

Me: Hey.

Ncedo: Hi Bhuti.

Me: You know I love you right?

Ncedo: Yes I know and I love you too.

Me: Uhm so..I am going to be a dad soon.

Ncedo: Sis Nonsindiso is pregnant?

She asks excitedly I look down.

Me: No, it's not her.

She frowns looking at me.

Me: Nkosazana is pregnant with my child and Nonsindiso knows.

She doesn't say anything.

Me: It won't change anything Nono I love Nsindiso and she knows that.

She nods.

Ncedo: We promised to stay away from these people.

Me: Yah but we can't stay away from our kids so we have to compromise.

Ncedo: I guess, congratulations bro.

Me: Thank you, I'm excited you know, only wish it was a different mother.

She shrug her shoulders.

We just arrived to Durban we booked a hotel we will be driving home tomorrow, Noncedo just called Sbani and told her so we are waiting for him to bring Esami. We hear a knock on the door, Ncedo opens and there she is holding little Esami in her arms and a bag, I keep my eyes down as I feel Nsindiso's eyes on me.

Zana: Uhm hi, Sbani asked me to drop her off since he has extra classes.

Ncedo: Thanks.

She takes the baby from her then continue to look at her.

Ncedo: So you are pregnant?

Zana nods a little.

Ncedo: How nice, you kill my baby then get to have yours huh?

Zana: I'm...I'm sorry Noncedo I'm sorry.

Ncedo: You don't deserve to be a mom, a spoiled brat mom like you, I feel sorry for this baby.

I want to reprimand my sister but I know it will look like I am defending Nkosazana.

I look at Nkosazana as she drops the bag and run out. I look at Noncedo she is just playing with the baby.

Me: Can I talk to my sister please.

Nsindiso nods and walk out.

Me: You want her to lose the baby Noncedo?

She ignores me.

Me: You know that is my child right?

Ncedo: How sure are you that it's yours? She was busy with Max .

Me: I was her first Noncedo that is my baby, so you want to kill my child for revenge?

She shakes her head, this is going to be hard, I guess Nkosazana really has to stay away because this pregnancy opens up old wounds for my sister.

I walk out and I hear a little scream down the steps, I go there and find Nkosazana sitting down I rush to her.

Me: What happened? Are you okay?

Zana: I sprained my ankle, it hurts.

Me: Why were you running what if you fell and hurt the baby.

She looks at me with her glassy eyes.

Zana: I don't deserve this baby Sonwabile, not after I killed your sister's child.

Me: But you didn't do it on purpose Zana, Noncedo is just hurt don't take it to heart.

I take off her shoes and massage where it hurts.

Zana: How long are you staying?

Me: Just a week.

She nods.

Zana: You should go, I am sure your girlfriend is wondering where you went.

Me: Yeah, are you going to manage to go to your car?

She nods and get up, she is limping I scoop her up and go down the stairs with her, she wraps her arms around my neck and kiss me so unexpectedly.

Me: Don't do that.

Zana: I'm sorry.

I take her to her car.

Me: Bye.

Zana: Sonwa.

Me: Yeah.

Zana: I have a doctor's appointment in two days, would you like to be there?

Me: I'll see.

She nods and start her car. I go back to the room and find Nsindiso sleeping in bed but she is awake.

Me: Hey.

She nods.

Nsindiso: I am going back to Jozi.

Me: What? Why?

Nsindiso: I saw you holding that girl in your arms Sonwabile, I was getting a charger from the car, the way you look at her.

Me: She was just hurt I was helping her that's all.

Nsindiso: Don't lie. I am leaving tomorrow morning.

I go to the drawer and take out the ring.

Me: I was planning to do this when we get home, I know it's been a few months together but I know you're the one I want to marry, please marry me.

She blinks clearly shocked.

Me: Please my love.

She finally says yes and I put the ring on it, I want a home and every home needs a woman's touch and I believe she is a perfect woman for me.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 70

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SONWABILE

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It's been two days since we came home it's been wonderful being here with my woman and my sister, they have been cleaning the house and moving the furniture it looks

different in here, I'm just happy they get along, it's already 1 pm.

My phone vibrates in my pocket it's a message from Nkosazana.

"I thought you were gonna make it to our first appointment but it's okay".

Noncedo snatch the phone from my hand smiling.

Ncedo: Food is ready brother, no phones allowed on the table.

I eat but I'm not really hungry I feel bad for doing this to Nkosazana, I didn't forget the appointment I just didn't want Nsindiso to feel some type of way, I can't leave her while I'm the one who asked her to come home with me.

Nsindiso: Are you okay?

She ask touching my hand, I fake a smile kissing her hand.

Me: Yeah I'm fine baby.

There is a knock at the door, Ncedo opens the door and come back with mom and dad, I sigh as they sit down.

Dad: Hello, uhm we saw the car outside we thought we should come and greet, we rented a house close by.

Noncedo serve them I am just quiet.

Dad: Uhm who is this beautiful woman?

He says smiling causing Nsindiso to blush.

Ncedo: That's bhuti's wife to be.

She says excitedly, mom and dad looks at me smiling.

Mama: You are getting married?

Me: Yes.

Mama: Congratulations Soso.

I nod.

Dad: Can we talk please?

We walk out and stand next to his car, they drive expensive cars I guess they have money yet they couldn't contact us all these years.

Dad: I'm proud of you.

I am just playing with my watch I don't have time for small talks my mind is occupied with a lot of stuffs.

Dad: Are you planning on paying lobola? I can help you with that.

Me: What gives you the impression that I want your money or help Luzuko?

He sighs.

Dad: My boy, you need to let go of all this anger please I want my family back.

Me: You left Me with Noncedo! I was a young boy Auntie Nonzwakazi took everything then shipped us off to a home, I had to watch them take me away from my sister but I couldn't let that happen, I would walk everyday back to that orphanage just to be with her and take

care of her, you were living your best lives out there!

Dad: I'm sorry son, we thought we were protecting you at that time but now I see we only made things worse for you, Please forgive us.

He touch my shoulders.

Dad: One day you will have a son or a daughter that you will want to protect with your all, you will see it one day.

Me: That day is coming soon I guess.

I can't help but smile.

Me: I am going to be a father soon.

Dad: Your wife is pregnant?

I look down.

Me: It's not her, her name is Nkosazana Gumede, she is the one carrying my child.

Dad: Oh..

Me: It was before I met Nonsindiso.

He nods.

Dad: You love her.

I look at him and shake my head.

Me: I love Nonsindiso.

He squints his eyes I look away.

Dad: Please give us a chance.

Me: Can you call Noncedo for Me, I need to speak to her.

He nods and walk in, Noncedo comes to where I am standing.

Ncedo: You called for me.

Me: How do you feel about mom and dad?

Ncedo: I hate the fact that they left us but I want us to give them a chance I would like to get to know them.

Me: So is it okay to let them stay here?

Ncedo: Yes I'd love that.

Me: Okay.

We go back inside and we tell them about moving in to this house and they are happy about it, Noncedo and Nsindiso leave with them to help them pack up, my sister is happy about all this.

I take my phone and call Zana.

Zana: Hello.

She says in a low voice.

Me: How are you?

Zana: I'm okay.

Me: Uhm...and the baby?

Zana: They are okay.

Me: They?

Zana: Yes, I found out today that there is two of them.

Me: What!?

I ask standing on my feet.

Zana: Yeah..

Me: Wow! Shit! Wow.

Zana: I'm busy can you call some other time.

She says dropping the call, I am still standing, she is hurting that I couldn't be there with her I can tell by the sound of her voice.

Me: Twins, Wow!

I call her again.

Zana: But I said I'm busy Sonwabile.

Me: Look, I'm sorry for not coming to the appointment something came up, I'm really sorry mama.

Zana: Ok.

Me: Uhm so are they okay?

Zana: Yes.

Me: Ok thank you.

Zana: For what?

Me: Carrying my kids, that is just a blessing thank you so much.

Zana: It's fine, though I know you prefer your woman than me to carry them, I saw Noncedo's status, you proposed.

Me: I am not getting any younger I need a matured woman by my side.

Zana: I'm happy you found her.

Me: Thanks.

Zana: Just know that you can't get married before paying inhlawulo (damages) for our kids)

Me: What?

Zana: You have to do right by them before taking a wife, they were conceived before her so it's only fare you do this for them, I don't care about myself you don't have to pay damages for my virginity just my kids so they can take your last name.

I am shocked, I wasn't expecting this talk from her at all.

Me: They will take my last name?

Zana: They are boys Sonwa I want this for them only if you're okay with it though.

Me: You are carrying boys?

Zana: Yes.

Today is definitely my lucky day.

Me: I guess you are giving me lucky charms there Princess, all these good news in one day, two baby boys?

Zana: I have to go.

I have never been so happy yet confused in my life! Paying inhlawulo for the kids to take my last name is the same as paying lobola and it's the two of them that means Nsindiso and I will have to wait a little with the wedding and all, I don't know how she will feel about all of this.

They come back later, we eat dinner together and her, mom and Noncedo move to the lounge they are looking at the magazines, they all seem to be getting along.

Nsindiso: I think I like this one better, baby come see.

I go look at the magazines, it's the wedding gowns.

Nsindiso: This one looks beautiful don't you think.

Me: Yeah.

I am trying to act all excited but I am worried, I take a walk while calling Nkosazana.

Zana: Hello.

Me: Look I want to ask you something please just keep an open mind.

Zana: What is it?

Me: I want to start by getting married first then I will do things right for my kids I will just have to make sure it happens before they are born.

She chuckles.

Zana: Oh.

Me: Please.

Zana: You want that?

Me: Yes, ngiyacela I don't mean to disrespect you or your family I am just asking to give me time.

Zana: Okay though I don't know how my dads will feel about that but I will make them understand.

Me: You will?

Zana: Yes, we haven't talked about damages and all I was just telling you what I feel but I guess we don't see things the same way and that's okay.

Why is she acting all matured and all right now or it is just an act? I go back home and go to my room where Nsindiso is.

Me: Hey.

Nsindiso: Hey, uhm you don't mind if we have a winter wedding right? Your mom thinks a summer wedding is better though.

Me: Whatever makes you happy I'm going with it.

She smiles kissing me.

Nsindiso: I just think summer is too far.

I nod.

We get in bed, she is excited about this and wants it to happen soon so I guess we should meet with her family soon.

The week ends without me going to Durban now we have to go back to Gauteng we will first drop Esami off, we do just that. We had planned that in two weeks my dad will ask any of his friends so they can go and pay lobola for Nsindiso.

The day of the lobola finally comes dad and one of his friends went down to Nonsindiso's home for negotiations, she is also home. I look at my WhatsApp which I hardly use and check people's statuses since I'm alone and bored my heart almost stops when I see a picture of

Nkosazana in the hospital bed I dial her number immediately.

Zana: Sonwa..

Me: Nkosazana are you okay? You are at the hospital?

Zana: Yes, I was admitted yesterday they are saying my Blood pressure is all over the place, yesterday it was too high today it was too low but I'm gonna be fine.

Me: What is the cause of all this?

Zana: I don't know, they say it's stress.

I sigh, Noncedo and sharing everything about Nonsindiso and I must be the cause, I saw her status written "Tomorrow you will be my sister in law by tradition" I know she saw that.

Me: Nkosazana.

Zana: Mmmh.

I can hear she is crying and I am worried she is going to lose these babies, I should have waited.

Me: Ngiyaxolisa. (I'm sorry).

She sobs, I brush my head in frustration.

Me: I'm sorry.

"Sonwabile" a deep voice says on the line.

Me: Yebo.(yes)

Langa: I don't know what to do anymore, I don't want to lose my daughter but with the way she is stressing and crying I will lose her or it's gonna be the babies even both.

You can hear concern in his voice.

Langa: She is not strong like her sister, she is fragile I don't know.

Me: I would come there but I'm afraid to give her false hope, she might think I'm still in love with her but I am getting married soon, coming there might make things worse.

Langa: I understand.

The line goes off, I sit down shaking my head, I don't want to lose my babies before even meeting them, so I run to my room to pack. I

get a bus to Durban I will get there in the morning.

When I get to Durban I go to the lodge to book a room, I bath and change my clothes. I call Sbani to tell me the name of the hospital since Nkosazana's phone isn't going through anymore, I have missed calls from my sister, dad and Nsindiso but I have been ignoring them.

I get to the hospital and ask for her ward, I walk in and find her fathers there with the doctor, Zana is sleeping.

Me: Hi.

They turn to look at me.

Langa: You came.

I nod, he gives me his hand, I shake it and do the same to Sfiso.

Me: How is she?

Langa: Her blood pressure is back to normal but only because she has been asleep for a while now.

I nod.

They walk out with a doctor promising to come back soon. I sit down holding her hand, she moves opening her eyes, she then look at me.

Zana: Sonwa?

Me: Hey.

Zana: How are you here? Shouldn't you be with your wife?

Me: I came to check up on you.

Zana: I'm fine.

Me: But you're here Nkosazana.

Zana: I was just stressed but I'm really fine now.

I help her sit up and hold her hand tight.

Me: Your fathers are worried Nkosazana, why are you doing this to yourself, we didn't work

out, none of us even tried harder, let it go please so we can have healthy babies.

Zana: So you want me to pretend as if I don't love you.

Me: Just tell yourself that it wasn't enough please, you deserve more.

I see tears falling.

Me: You will find someone who loves you and will do anything to be with you, I am just a loser I didn't deserve you. You are a princess a very beautiful princess, you will find the best than what I can ever offer you.

Zana: But I love you.

Me: I love you but like I said, it's not enough.

She nods.

Me: Just promise me you gonna be okay.

She wipe her tears then giggle putting her hand on her tummy.

Zana: I'm gonna be okay.

I touch her tummy, there are movements in there, tears are burning my eyes this is a priceless moment right here. I sit in bed and hold her tight.

My phone rings in my pocket, I take it out, it's dad.

Me: Hello.

Dad: Where are you? We are at your apartment.

Me: I'm in Durban dad.

"Durban?" That's Nonsindiso's voice.

Me: Uhm yeah but I will be back tomorrow.

I drop the call and sit on the chair.

Zana: I'm sorry for causing all this drama I promise from now on I will keep it together.

I nod, she gives me her pinky finger.

Me: What am I supposed to do with this?

She giggles.

Zana: We are doing a pinky promise.

I chuckle and do whatever that pinky promise means.

Zana: Thank you for coming.

I nod looking at her.

Zana: You look good.

I chuckle.

Me: Suyangifuna ke manje.(You want me now)

We both laugh, the door opens and her fathers are back.

Sfiso: Nkosazana kaBaba.(Daddy's princess)
it's good to see you laughing.

She smiles looking at me.

She is now talking and laughing I can finally breath. She ask the doctor to discharge her then leave with her dads I go to the lodge, Nonsindiso is still calling.

Me: Baby.

Nsindiso: Why did you go to Durban?

Me: We will talk when I get there baby I promise.

Nsindiso: Ok, I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Nkosazana's call comes through right after Nsindi drops the call.

Me: Hi.

Zana: I assume you will go early tomorrow so can I come see you now just a few minutes.

Me: Uuh...

Zana: Please.

Me: Ok I will send the address and room number.

Zana: Thanks.

I do that then wait for her. She knocks after 15 minutes carrying a plastic bag.

Zana: Hey, I got you home cooked food, my sister cooked so I thought I should dish up for you.

Me: Oh wow how thoughtful thank you, are you feeling better?

Zana: Yeah, a lot better.

I nod and eat the food.

Zana: Uhm so when are you getting married?

Me: In two months time.

She nods.

Zana: Congratulations.

I nod, this is just awkward now.

Zana: Uhambe Kahle ke.(travel safe then)

I nod and walk her to the door opening it for her, she stops and look at me, those hypnotic eyes again, we are kissing while she is in my arms I have to stop but I don't want to stop.

Making love to her feels like the first time, I am gentle making sure I don't hurt her.

We sleep next to each other, we are both sweating, it's hot in here, I can't bring myself to look at her.

Zana: Soso..

Me: Yes.

Zana: Don't feel bad I guess it was just that moment of weakness again.

I look at her, her eyes are moving around like she wants to cry but trying so hard not to let the tears fall. She get up and wear her clothes while facing the other way.

Me: Nkosazana.

Zana: It's okay, bye.

She walk out, maybe this will make things worse for her, I shouldn't have slept with her again.

I am back in my apartment I took an early bus. I find Nsindiso and Noncedo together.

Me: Hi.

They keep quiet, I chuckle nervously I feel like they will see through me.

Nsindiso: So?

Me: Uhm..I went to Durban to..

I look at them they are waiting.

Me: Nkosazana almost lost the babies.

Nsindiso: You went to her?

Me: Those are my kids please understand, I panicked.

Nsindiso: Is this how it's gonna be, you will always run to her every time she trip and fall?

Me: This was serious Nsindiso but I'm sorry for not telling you.

She just walk away, I look at Noncedo she looks disappointed.

Me: I'm sorry it won't happen again.

Ncedo: Do you even love sis Nsindiso.

Me: I do, I love her Noncedo.

Ncedo: You sound like you're trying to convince yourself more than me.

Me: I love her, I paid lobola for her, I am marrying her soon.

She nods.

I go to my room.

Nsindiso: Yesterday we were supposed to be happy, everything went well at home.

Me: We can be happy now.

She smiles, We kiss for some time but I am not getting hard because I am feeling guilty for sleeping with Nkosazana last night.

Nsindiso: are you okay?

Me: Yeah, just tired.

I keep trying until it goes hard I make love to her but it's the shortest round ever.

We sleep in bed but my heart is not at peace.

Two months later.

I am getting married today, I am nervous, I am asking myself a lot of

questions is this what I want? Do I really want this. I haven't seen Nkosazana ever since that day at the lodge but we do talk from time to time. We are getting married in Durban since

both our families are here. My phone rings at the table I don't know the number.

Me: Hello.

Silence.

Me: Hello.

Still nothing, I sigh.

Me: Nkosazana.

She just cry.

Zana: I want to come to your wedding I want to be at peace with this, I want closure.

Me: Please don't come, please.

Zana: Ngiyacela.(I'm begging you)

Me: No don't come okay! Don't come!

I drop the call and sigh.

The ceremony is about to start I am standing next to a pastor, it's a small intimate wedding since we don't have a big family or friends. People are still coming in and they all settle down, a Piano starts playing I see Nsindiso

walking down the aisle looking so beautiful, her dad is next to her. They finally get to where I am standing, he shakes my hand then give me her hand. The pastor says a prayer then a little sermon.

Pastor: I believe our couple have prepared their own vows to...

He stops talking and look at the entrance, we turn to look, Nkosazana is standing there with her big tummy looking at me, her sister is next to her. I look at Nonsindiso she has tears in her eyes.

Qhawekazi hold her hand and walk out with her.

Pastor: Uhm should we continue?

Nonsindiso is staring at me for an answer, I nod a little.

He is speaking but I just feel dizzy I don't hear anything he is saying, I feel a hand tapping my shoulder I look next to me it's my father.

Dad: The pastor is talking to you.

I look at the Pastor, Nonsindiso then my father, I shake my head.

Me: I'm sorry I need some time, I don't feel too good.

I walk down the aisle but vomit as soon as I get to the last seats, my head is spinning I loosen my tie and sit down, people are now around me making me feel worse.

Nsindiso: Sonwa..

My vision is blur as I try to look at her.

I start vomiting once again.

I wake up looking around, I am at the hospital Nonsindiso is next to me still in her wedding gown. My sister walk in.

Ncedo: You're awake.

I don't feel like opening my mouth at all I still feel pretty much sick.

Ncedo: I got a call from Sbani's family, Nkosazana gave birth to two baby boys but they are incubated since they are premature.

I nod, I don't know, I'm not excited at all, she would have given birth at full term if only I had postponed this wedding a bit.

Nsindiso: Are we still going to get married Sonwabile?

I look the other way, I can't answer that, not now because the decision I take right now I will have to live with it for the rest of my life.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 71

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SONWABILE

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I am still at the hospital, I don't get how I just fell sick all of a sudden because I didn't eat anything much that morning just a normal breakfast now the doctors are telling me about dehydration.

Nsindiso left with Noncedo after failing to tell her if we will ever get married after this, I couldn't answer so she stormed out.

Noncedo walk in holding my phone and sit down.

Ncedo: Hi.

I nod.

Me: Which hospital is Nkosazana admitted to?

She stares at me for a while.

Me: I want to see my babies Noncedo, so which hospital?

She tells me the name just then a doctor walk in and discharge me after instructing me to drink a lot of water to stay hydrated and they

gave me some pills. Noncedo drives me to the hospital.

Me: You can wait here, I would like to go alone.

She nods.

I walk in and ask for Nkosazana's ward, I walk in and find her awake just looking up the ceiling, I sit down.

Me: Hi.

She flinch trying to get up.

Me: You had an operation?

She nods.

Me: I told you not to come Nkosazana, I begged you not to go there.

Zana: I just wanted to see you say I do, that way I was gonna learn to move on.

Me: How bad are they?

I ask looking down.

Zana: I can call the doctor to explain it to you before they take you to them.

I nod and she press the buzzer, the doctor walk in a few minutes later and greet, she explains that they are in the incubators but one of them can't breathe on her own because his lungs weren't fully developed yet, I am shattered.

Me: This is all my fault.

Zana: No....

Me: What if I lose them, ngizokwenzani?(What will I do?)

Zana: Don't say that, they are going to be okay.

I can see she's just trying to act strong but this is hard on her.

Me: Can I see them?

The doctor asks one of the nurses to accompany me.

My heart aches as soon as I lay my eyes on them, they are so small with pipes all over them.

I can't stop the tears from falling, I almost lost these babies for the wedding that could have been postponed! I go back to Nkosazana's room, I try to hold her hand but she removes it.

Me: I'm sorry.

She look the other way, I try to hold her again.

Zana: Don't touch me Sonwabile, you have a wife.

Me: I didn't go through with the wedding Zana, I went sick before I can even say my vows.

Zana: But still, this is wrong you came here for the kids not me.

The door opens and Nsindiso walk in I am shocked to see her here.

I look at Nkosazana she has a frown on her face.

Nsindiso: Hi sisi.

Me: What are you doing here?

Nsindiso: I asked Noncedo to give me the address, I just want to say one thing.

She looks at Nkosazana.

Nsindiso: Stop using these babies to get to Sonwabile, you want him to run around you all the time you even ruined my wedding.

Me: Nonsindiso.

Nsindiso: I'm just here to say that, I know little girls like her thinking they can trap men with babies, it won't work sweetheart.

I grab her hand and walk out going back to where my kids are, she widen her eyes as I stare at the glass where my kids are.

Me: How is she using babies Nsindiso? They are here! One of them can't even breath on her own and you are out here causing drama for

the girl who almost lost her babies, are you that insecure?

She shakes her head.

Nsindiso: I didn't know.

Me: You didn't know what? You were there when Noncedo told you they are premature!

She look down.

Me: Just go home and stop embarrassing yourself you're too old for this.

She walk out as I go back to Zana's room, there are two women with her I have seen them at her home, one has beautiful stone bracelets.

Nkosazana: Sonwa Uhm these are my aunts Kayise and Iyana.

I greet them.

Nkosazana: If you don't mind, I don't ever want your girlfriend near my kids if she comes with that bad attitude and energy around them.

I nod.

Me: She won't ever come here again.

She nods.

Kayise has been staring at me it's uncomfortable.

Kayise: You need to do what you said you'll do for those kids.

I look at her.

Kayise: You said you will pay inhlawulo before they are born, you don't promise something and not do it especially concerning the kids, it affects them badly.

Me: I will...I will do it.

They leave a bit later, I remain seated.

Zana: You should go.

Me: I want to see them again before I go.

Zana: I will go with you.

I get her a wheelchair, we both go to our babies.

We watch them as they move their legs and arms.

Me: I have hope, they are going to be okay, Sphehile no Sphelelo.

She nods still staring at them, one of them has stopped moving, Nkosazana slowly get up she is in pain.

Zana: Sonwa call a doctor now..

I can hear panic in her voice it's even shaky.

Me: What is going on?

Zana: He stopped breathing Sonwa! His chest is not moving!

I run out I don't even know who to call I am going crazy shouting at whoever I see.

I walk back in the room with the nurses running behind me, Nkosazana is now holding our boy, she is shaking her eyes are bloodshot red.

Nurse: Give us the baby Doc.

She slowly give them the baby then let out a very loud scream, I am just standing there not knowing what to do.

We are taken back to her ward, she has been crying, I am also panicking no one has said anything. The doctor walk in and look at us.

Doctor: Uhm Miss Langa your baby is going to be okay, the pipes which moves oxygen to his body came off and I...

Zana: How can you let that happen! You should be monitoring him every second!

She shouts then moan in pain.

Zana: That was so close, he almost died!

I wipe my face at least he is okay I thought I am losing him.

They give Nkosazana something for the pain she looks sleepy.

Zana: You need to go home to your wife Sonwa.

I shake my head.

Me: That scared me, I can't leave I want to see him again.

Zana: You need to rest, you look sick.

Me: That's because I was admitted, I just came straight here from the hospital.

Zana: What's wrong?

Me: They said I'm dehydrated.

She yawns.

Me: Sleep, I'll be here when you wake up.

I watch her Sleep and end up falling asleep as well on the chair.

I wake up when I feel a hand on my shoulder, I open my eyes, it's

Qhawekazi, I wipe my face.

Kazi: Hey.

Me: Hi.

Kazi: You are the baby daddy?

I chuckle.

Me: I'm sure you know that very well.

She laughs.

Kazi: Yeah I do I just wanted to say it.

I shake my head, they look alike but their personalities are not the same, she is a bit loud and talkative but Nkosazana has this low voice and has the tendency to speak with her eyes more, if she doesn't like something you will just see it by looking at her facial expressions, very rude too. I chuckle.

Kazi: Dude you're in love.

I look at her.

Kazi: Come on, don't look at me like that, you know it's true.

Me: I don't know what you're talking about.

Kazi: But you just stated the difference between me and my sister.

Me: Did I say it out loud?

She chuckles and sit across me.

Kazi: Nana..

Nkosazana opens her eyes and look at her sister.

Kazi: How are you?

Zana: I'm just scared for my babies.

Kazi: They are going to be okay, I mean they are strong like myself.

I smile looking at them, they look so alike and beautiful.

It's late and they are asking me to leave, I kiss Nkosazana's forehead.

Me: I will come back tomorrow to see you guys okay.

She nods.

I go to where we booked for the wedding, we booked for five days.

I find Nonsindiso in bed, I sit down and take off my clothes.

Me: I don't like what you did at the hospital Nonsindiso, you shouldn't have went there, you are embarrassing yourself.

Nsindiso: I'm sorry I thought it was just another stunt she is pulling after showing up at my wedding.

I go take a shower then go to bed facing the other way.

Nsindiso: So, what now?

Me: I am paying inhlawulo for Sphesihle and Sphelelo this coming weekend.

Nsindiso: With what money?

Me: I will use my savings, I didn't touch that money since my dad helped me with the lobola.

She chuckles.

Nsindiso: So we must cancel everything.

Me: I just told you that I am using all my savings on my kids.

Nsindiso: What about me?

I just get off bed and wear my pants, I book another room and sleep there. In the morning

I go to our room to take and shower and change.

Nsindiso: Sonwabile.

I look at her.

Nsindiso: I'm sorry for my bad behavior yesterday I am just stressed out, I am supposed to be a married woman, I'm sorry I want to support you and not be a nuisance stressing you out more.

I nod.

Nsindiso: So can I come with you?

Me: No, Nkosazana's family will be there I don't want to seem disrespectful.

Nsindiso: But they know you have a wife Sonwa who should be supporting you during this time.

Me: You can support me but don't go there.

She nods.

Nsindiso: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

She smiles and wrap her arms around me.

Nsindiso: I hope they get well soon.

I leave for the hospital and Nkosazana is not in her ward, I find her with the kids, she is breastfeeding Sphesihle I am happy he is able to come out of the incubator.

Me: Hey.

Zana: Hi, I can only hold him for a few minutes and breastfeed, do you want to hold him?

Me: Yes please.

I take him he is tiny but alive that's all that matters.

Me: What about his brother?

Zana: Unfortunately I can't breastfeed him yet but he is getting better, see he doesn't have pipes today.

I nod.

Me: And how are you?

Zana: I'm fine.

She put Sphehile back then I push her back to her ward.

Me: Nkosazana.

Zana: Yeah..

Me: Can you tell your fathers that I will send my family this weekend for inhlawulo.

Zana: Oh okay.

Me: I will pay everything from you to our boys.

Zana: Ok thank you.

She smiles.

Zana: So how does it feel being a dad?

Worrying about someone?

Me: It's scary especially under the circumstances I can't wait for them to get well.

She nods.

Me: And how is being a mom?

Zana: It sank in when I held him in my arms breastfeeding him, it felt real you know.

Me: It is real.

I leave earlier so I can talk to dad about this coming weekend, I take him out to have some lunch and a few drinks.

Me: Uuh dad, so Nkosazana gave birth to two sons the day of my wedding but they are premature.

Dad: Two?

I am still not over sharing with him I have been struggling to connect with him I guess I haven't really gotten over the fact that he left us but I can be civil with him.

Me: Yes, she gave me twin boys, she is also a twin.

He shakes my hand proudly.

Dad: That is wonderful news, you are growing this family.

I nod.

Me: I want to pay inhlawulo for their mom and them.

He nods congratulating me he is happy for me.

Dad: I will do this for you but I need to contact them so they can tell me what is needed besides money, this girl deserves so much more from us after giving you heirs.

I nod.

Dad: Sonwabile.

Me: Tata.(dad)

Dad: Be true to yourself son, life doesn't always give second chances, you only live once.

Me: I know.

We both go back to the hotel after calling Sbani to give him King Ntsika's number.

Saturday morning my dad and his friend go to town to buy a cow for taking Nkosazana's virginity, a goat to cleanse the other virgins of the family then for the kids dad will pay money that is equivalent to six cows so they can take my last name, I literally have nothing on my bank account after today but at least it's for my boys.

Around 10 my dads are on their way to the rural areas because that's where everything will happen.

I have decided that I am not going back to Gauteng anymore, my sister and Nonsindiso are angry and not talking to me but I can't go back not when my boys are still at the hospital.

They are leaving today and I have a meeting with Qhawekazi.

Ncedo: We promised that we are leaving that family and their drama behind.

Me: But I never said I will neglect my own flesh and blood Noncedo, I won't do that to please you dammit!

I grab my keys and jacket then walk out, I drive to Qhawekazi's offices and walk in.

Me: Sawubona.(greetings)

Kazi: Hey dzaddy!

I laugh shaking my head.

Kazi: You can have a seat.

I sit down.

Kazi: So what can I do for you sir?

Me: So uhm..I need a job. I had a good paying job in Jozi but I can't go back, not when my boys are still at the hospital.

She nods.

Kazi: The old man left, Zondi or something.

I laugh.

Me: You don't know your workers?

Kazi: No, no I don't.

We laugh, she is crazy.

Kazi: So I don't know how you'd feel about taking his position but you have to know that I shout if one of your guys are slacking, you are responsible for every single one of them.

Me: I can work with that.

She nods and give me her hand, I shake it.

Kazi: Welcome back to Langa construction company sir.

I chuckle, my pride wasn't gonna feed my kids that's why I am here asking for a job.

Me: Thank you miss.

She walk me out, we are calling Nkosazana as we walk to my car.

Zana: Hey, I was about to call you I have some great news.

Kazi: That's great share them with us.

Zana laughs.

Zana: Nikuphi?(where are you guys?)

Kazi: My offices.

Zana: Offices?

Me: Yeah I got the job.

Zana: Uhm..you're not going back to Jozi?

Me: No..

Zana: Ooh.

Me: So, the news?

Zana: oSphehile are finally out of the incubator, I can finally take them home.

Me: That's great news baby uhm I can fetch you at the hospital if that's okay.

Zana: That's fine.

Kazi: I'm coming too.

Zana: Ok.

We drive to the hospital and find them already dressed and covered with blue blankets I pick Sphelelo up.

Me: Hey little guy, you gave mom and dad a fright huh..

I take Sphelelo giving Qhawekazi Lelo then we walk out, I drive them home, They come to take the babies while I remain with Nkosazana in the car.

Zana: Thank you for staying.

Me: I will do anything for you guys.

My phone vibrates in my pocket it's a message from Nsindiso.

"I am resigning from work so I can come stay with you that side, I love you Sonwabile).

I look at Nkosazana.

Me: I want to marry you.

Zana: What!?

She says widening her eyes.

Me: I want you, me and our boys to be family,
please marry me.

She step out of the car and slowly walk inside.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 72

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NKOSAZANA

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There is no way in the world I am gonna agree to marry Sonwabile, not when I don't know where his relationship with his almost wife stands. I know that it's impossible that they broke up even if they did but it's too soon, not so long ago those two people were ready to say their vows, where did all the love go. What I know is that I don't want any trouble I just want to take care of my kids they need me more than anything and drama is the last thing I need right now.

After he asked me to marry him I just left him there, he is crazy, I don't even think he thought what he said through, it just came out of nowhere.

I am sleeping in bed, mom Miyah said I should rest she will look after the kids for me.

I'm going through WhatsApp statuses since I have been offline for a while I see Sonwabile's he wrote "Sphehile and Sphelelo Maxhanga" and two hearts he is back to using his father's

surname I saw that when he signed for their birth certificates.

I love him, I really do but I want him to make things clear between that woman and Me, he should decide who he wants.

I wake up in the middle of the night to my phone ringing.

Me: Mmm..

Sonwa: I can't sleep.

His voice sounds so sexy and deep.

Me: What's wrong?

Sonwa: I am thinking about you Nkosazana, I should have fought for us even when all of you thought I had you kidnapped I should have stayed and tried to prove my innocence.

I keep quiet.

Sonwa: Ngiyakuthanda kakhulu(I love you so much)I messed up so bad by thinking I can move on from you.

I don't even know what to say, he sounds drunk.

Sonwa: Mama wabantabam.(Mother of my kids)

My heart melts as he says that.

Sonwa: I won't be marrying anyone, you and I belong together, I want two more kids from you, amantombazane.(girls)

I can't help but giggle, drunk people and talking a lot.

Me: What were you drinking?

Sonwa: Water.

Me: Don't lie.

Sonwa: Amanzi amponjwana.(alcohol)

I laugh so hard that my tummy hurts.

Sonwa: Uzoba umfazi wami wena.(you're going to be my wife) that's a fact you can't run away from it.

I want to ask about Nonsindiso but I don't wanna ruin this moment, it tends to be a turn

off if you keep speaking about the other woman all the time.

Sonwa: Where are my boys?

Me: They are sleeping with mom I was resting until someone disturbed my sleep.

Sonwa: Who is that?

I laugh, I like the drunk him better.

Sonwa: I just want my immature Nkosazana and no one else, if she is a spoilt brat that's fine she will be my spoilt brat!

That sounds like Noncedo's words right now.

Me: Please sleep.

Sonwa: Tshela uQhawekazi ngicela lday off.(Tell Qhawekazi I am asking for a day off)

Yhoo, I let of a loud laughter.

Me: But you haven't even started working already you want a day off.

Sonwa: Ngizoxoshwa mos.(I will get fired)

Me: Goodnight.

Sonwa: Ok I love you maLanga.

I drop the call and sleep holding a pillow.

Me: I think I am in love.

I say to myself before sleeping with a smile on my face.

In the morning I wake up early and call him, he answers on the third ring.

Sonwa: muntu wami.(my person)

Me: You will manage to go to work?

Sonwa: Yeah I just have a little headache.

Me: That's what happens when you get drunk a night before your first day at work.

Sonwa: Please don't make me feel worse than I already feel.

Me: Have a nice day baba ka Sphesihle.

It goes quiet for a while then he says "yhoo" softly.

Sonwa: Thank you now I feel like I can take over the world, I will call you later mama kaSphelelo I have to work for my boys.

I smile and drop the call going back to my sleep.

My phone rings it's morning already, I don't know the number.

Me: Hello.

"HI Nkosazana"

Me: Hi.

"this is Nonsindiso".

I keep quiet.

Nsindiso: I forced Noncedo to give me your number.

Me: why?

Nsindiso: I need to talk to you, woman to woman.

Me: Oh.

Nsindiso: Let Sonwabile go, you couldn't make him happy before I don't think you can do it now.

Me: am I holding him hostage?

Nsindiso: Baby, you are just a little girl she needs a woman and I am her.

Me: Mmmm.

Nsindiso: Trust me he is just excited about being a father his mind is all over the place but I am giving you two weeks the excitement will be gone he will remember home and you will be left with a title of being a little baby mama that you are.

I keep quiet, that hits deep.

Nsindiso: Bye sweetie.

She drops the call and I just cover my head and go back to sleep.

"Yeey umfazi ozele akalali kuze kube ile Sikhathi". (A woman who just gave birth

doesn't sleep till this time) that's mom Miyah shouting while removing by bed covers.

Me: Mama.

Miyah: No don't mama Me, you need to wake up and feed those pretty little boys!

Me: Why are you shouting mama?

Miyah: Because I can, now wake up clean up and get ready to be a mom.

I nod and go take a shower. I wear warm clothes then go breastfeed my boys, it still hurts when I breastfeed but mom said I will get used to it.

I put them to bed and sleep next to them. I am staring at their faces up close then decide to take a phone and snap a few photos sending them to their dad. He calls immediately but there is noise where he is.

Sonwa: Thank you for that baby, they are growing huh.

Me: It looks that way.

Sonwa: I love you.

I don't say anything as my mind is filled with Nsindiso's words from earlier.

Sonwa: Nkosazana.

Me: Mmm.

Sonwa: Are you okay?

Me: You gonna come see me when you knock off?

Sonwa: Yes I will.

Me: Ok, go back to work then.

I spend the whole day with my kids they keep crying especially Sphesihle, he is going to be a problem i already see that.

Later Sonwa calls telling me he is outside the gate. I wear my gown and go to him. I get in next to him, he kiss my cheek then hold my hand.

Me: Hi.

Sonwa: Hi.

His voice is hoarse like he has been shouting.

Me: Uhm Nsindiso called this morning.

He widens his eyes.

Me: She told me you're just excited about being a dad after two weeks it will be gone you will go back to her.

He huffs brushing his head.

Me: You were with her because she is more of a woman than me, not spoilt but mature so maybe she is right you are just excited about the babies you will leave me soon.

He sighs.

Sonwa: I realized that I have been rushing you about growing up forgetting that you are younger than me there are stages of life one can't skip, we were in different stages but now we are parents aNkosazana I want my kids to grow up in a warm home and I believe you will make sound decisions now that you're a mom.

Me: Fix things with Nsindiso, I think she was right, you are making all these drastic decisions because of the kids.

Sonwa: No, I love you and deep down you know that.

Me: I have to go.

Sonwa: Kiss my boys for me.

I get off and walk back inside.

He calls a bit later.

Me: Hello.

Sonwa: Baby.

He sounds down.

Sonwa: I love you so much.

Me: Is everything okay?

Sonwa: Yes, I just wanted you to know.

Me: Ok, I love you too.

Sonwa: Thank you my love.

My heart is heavy, why is he talking like he is dying or something.

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SONWABILE

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After driving by Nkosazana to see her after work I came back to my place where I am renting and found Nonsindiso back with all her luggage.

Me: Nsindiso.

She smiles.

Nsindiso: Hey baby.

Me: Why did you come back here?

Nsindiso: To be with you and support you on these difficult times.

I sigh and sit down.

Me: Sit down.

She slowly sit looking at me.

Me: There is no easy way to say this Nsindiso.

I hold her hand.

Me: You are an amazing woman and any man would be lucky to have you, I realised that I love you but I am not in love with you, you deserve more than a man who won't give you all his love.

She chuckles bitterly.

Nsindiso: You are breaking up with Me?

Me: I don't want to string you along anymore I have to be true to you and myself please understand.

Nsindiso: Is it because she gave you babies?

Me: No, I have always loved her.

She sighs.

Nsindiso: I'm pregnant Sonwa.

I stare at her.

Me: What?

Nsindiso: I'm 5 weeks pregnant so I don't know how you gonna do this because this is your baby too.

Me: No..

Nsindiso: What do you mean no?

I just get up and take a walk thinking how the hell am I gonna tell Nkosazana about this, she already have doubts about us so this will make her want nothing to do with me.

I have been living with Nonsindiso for three days now but we don't talk, I don't know what to say to her, on the other hand I only text Nkosazana asking about the kids I haven't found the right way to tell her about Nonsindiso. We don't even share a bed I use the couch while she use the bed.

I am getting ready for work, I need to see my boys before Nkosazana thinks I don't care about them or her.

Nsindiso: Sonwabile.

Me: Mmm..

Nsindiso: You've been quiet for three days, what's the way forward?

I wear my jacket.

Nsindiso: I want everything you promised to me, I want my dream wedding I want us to build a home for our children.

I leave her talking she has become annoying lately.

I get busy with work until it's knock off time, I drive to Zana's home and call her.

Zana: Oh wow look who's calling?

She says with a very sarcastic giggle.

Me: Uhm hey can I see my boys please.

Zana: Come in.

Me: Your dads?

Zana: They are at grandpa's house and it's not like they don't know your ass.

I chuckle stepping out of the car. I find her waiting for me by the door, I hug her and we walk in, she looks great. She takes me to her room my boys are in bed, I pick one after the other greeting them, I can feel her eyes on me.

Zana: You don't call anymore I guess wifey is keeping you busy.

I ignore her.

Zana: What is going on with you?

Me: Nothing I came to see them now I am leaving.

Zana: Ok bye.

I can't even look at her in the eye, I walk to the door but I feel a soft hand grabbing my arm, I turn around looking at her.

Zana: You can't even look at me, what is it?

Me: Nonsindiso is pregnant.

I blurt it out just like that.

Zana: Oh...

She look down rubbing her arms.

Zana: That's great.

I try to touch her but she moves back.

Zana: Uhm so I am guessing you are fixing things with her, she is your wife after all.

Me: No I...

Zana: Go Sonwabile I am sure she is waiting for you.

Sphehile starts crying, I take him and sit down rocking him back and forth, Nkosazana take him from my hands and show me the door.

Me: Don't even think about using my kids to fight me Nkosazana.

Zana: I'm not that petty I just think it's time for you to leave.

The hostility in her voice is huge.

Me: Ngicela isikhathi ngilungise yonke lento.(Please give me time to fix all this).

Zana: Ok.

She put the baby down and sit with her head down, I kneel in front of her.

Me: I won't ever leave you for anyone ever again.

Zana: How long should I wait?

Me: You gonna wait?

She looks at our boys in bed then look at me.

Zana: Yes.

I pull her close hugging her.

Me: Thank you.

Zana: Come back to us okay.

She says holding me tight.

Me: I love you.

I kiss her forehead and walk out.

I walk in the apartment and Nonsindiso is cooking.

Me: Nsindiso.

She looks my way.

Me: You should leave or I am leaving.

Nsindiso: I am not going anywhere.

Me: Ok.

I go to my room and pack my bags, she comes in but I am facing the other way.

Nsindiso: You better stop that shit you're doing, no one is leaving, at least not alive!

I turn to look at her and I am shocked to see the gun in her hand.

Me: What..put the gun down Nonsindiso.

Nsindiso: No! I am a laughing stock, you left me in front of my relatives right at the alter!

Me: I was sick! You saw it.

Nsindiso: You are not getting out of here alive Sonwabile, she won't be happy at my expense!

Me: Let's talk about this.

She shakes her head and the gun goes off, my chest stings I touch it and my hand comes back with blood, it goes off again this time it's my tummy, I go on my knees, she is staring at me as I lay on the floor feeling cold.

-Meanwhile at Nkosazana's home her babies have been screaming their lungs out, she has been trying to calm them down but it's not working. Her dad comes in.

Langa: What is going on? did you drop them?

She wipe her tears looking at them but they keep falling. Langa takes one of them.

Langa: Nkosazana! Go call Sfiso we should take them to the hospital.

She runs out calling her father's name.

They take both the boys to the hospital they are burning up and their skin has changed colour to pink. They are taken into the ER while Nkosazana tries to call Sonwabile but he is not answering.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 73

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NKOSAZANA

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I have never felt so much pain in my life ever since I was born, both my kids are in an induced coma but the doctors can't find anything wrong with them we have been here for the whole day, they are running some tests after tests but nothing.

I have been trying to call Sonwabile but his phone is not going through I am so angry at him.

I dial his number once again it rings and sends me straight to voicemail i just leave a message.

Me: My babies are at the hospital we don't know what's wrong with them please call me when you get this message.

I sit down on the benches there I am not allowed in for now because I wanted to check them up myself and they told me i am not in the right state of mind to do that, I can't be a doctor on my kids.

I try Sonwa again and it's the same story, I just give up.

I stay two whole days at the hospital without hearing anything from Sonwa, His phone is now switched off I am hurt I know he said he needed some time to sort things out but I didn't think he meant not taking my calls or even calling back asking about the kids.

I literally stay here now because my kids are not getting well. I am just watching their lifeless bodies on their beds. I hear a little cough from Sphelelo then another one from Sphehile I quickly get up looking at them, they are both awake it's so unbelievable. I run out to call a doctor. They check their vitals and they seem to be doing greater than people who were in a coma just now.

Dads walk in as I finish breastfeeding Sphelelo.

Sfiso: We heard the good news Princess.

They look at the boys.

Sfiso: They don't look like they were ever sick.

Me: I'm just happy they are fine now.

We take them home, I am now getting worried about their dad, that guy love his boys so much that he doesn't go a day without asking how they are but now it's been five full days.

I draw some courage and dial Noncedo's number because I don't wanna seem disrespectful by calling Nonsindiso.

Ncedo: Hello.

Me: Uh hi Ncedo it's Nkosazana.

Ncedo: Oh..what can I do for you?

Me: I want to ask you about Sonwa, I can't find him on the phone, the boys were admitted they just came out.

Ncedo: Oh are they okay?

Me: Yes.

Ncedo: Good, Sonwa went on a vacation with his wife.

Me: Oh..

Ncedo: Yes, Nsindiso sent a text a few days ago.

Me: But how can he go on vacation he just got a job recently?

Ncedo: I don't know Nkosazana I am not my brother's nanny.

Me: Oh ok.

I drop the call, I feel tears burning my eyes.

"Your fucken baby daddy is incompetent Nana!" Says Qhawekazi walking in my room clearly pissed off.

Kazi: I hate giving people chances because this is what they do!

I sit down staring at my phone.

Kazi: Where the hell is Sonwabile?

Me: He went on a vacation with his wife.

Kazi: Say what now? A vacation when he only went to work for what? Two days? Is this guy crazy!

I look down as tears start falling.

Kazi: Nkosazana don't tell me you are crying for this stupid guy!

Me: He went on a vacation and forgot about our kids.

Kazi: Oh umntaka Langa.(Langa's baby)

She says hugging me brushing my back I just cry out loud.

Me: He said he needed a few days not a vacation!

I finally calm down, I guess Nsindiso Was right, the excitement of being a dad is gone now he realised that I am still just an immature spoilt brat he can't marry.

A month later.

Hope is gone I just told myself that he is dead to us. What kind of vacation makes a man forget that he has kids? One day they are okay and the next day they wake up sick I have been going in and out of the hospital it's tiring

and the fact that I am doing it alone without their father is draining me.

18 MONTHS LATER

I am a mom who is juggling both work and raising my two beautiful baby boys. I am a happy career mom who always makes time for my kids.

I am still pretty much single because I fear the pain men put you through all in the name of love.

I never heard of Sonwabile ever again, Noncedo told me where to get off the second time I called. She told me that his brother and Nonsindiso relocated to get away from my drama and she is happy about that. I heard that she is also in a relationship now which made my brother bitter because he doesn't want Esami to go see her mom anymore and doesn't allow her to come here so they are still fighting for custody in court.

Me: Lelo!Sphehile!

I shout their names, they walk in looking dirty looks like they were eating cakes, dad walk in behind them.

Me: Dad you gave them cakes early in the morning?

Langa: Is there a time frame of when someone should eat the damn cake?

I just zip my mouth, they spoil them too much they give them everything they want.

Me: I am taking them to a doctor for immunization.

Langa: Ok Princess have fun.

Me: Fun? You know they are scared of injections.

He laughs brushing their heads then walk out, I bath them while they are making so much noise singing the song I have never heard before I can't even get the lyrics if there is any.

I make them wear matching outfits, white t-shirts with black shorts then sneakers.

Me: You guys look so charming.

I smile, they look like their daddy, who chose a vacation over them but well I am over him after mopping around for five months hoping he will come back but one day I woke up and told myself that I am too beautiful to be crying over a man and also there are plenty of fish in the sea okay I will find someone else one day but I am not in a rush I am just busy with work and raising two handful boys.

I pick Sphelelo up and hold Sphehlehle's hand going to my car. I buckle them up and drive to the hospital listening to them singing again I never get bored when I'm around them.

They get their immunization then I take them to the mall, We eat lunch taking our time because I am not in a rush to get home I don't get to spend quality time with them because they prefer being with my dads all the time.

As I am eating I see someone familiar but she is giving me her back since she is ordering something. She then turns around our eyes

lock she stares at me then my boys then she rushes out like she is being chased by a cheetah. So Sonwabile is back with his wife now because that was definitely Nonsindiso.

I walk out and get in the car driving home it's been a long day.

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18 MONTHS EARLIER

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A 15 year old girl named Thabsie is on her way to the stream to get water, she is walking barefoot humming a song while hitting a bucket slow to make a beat. She finally get to a stream and collet some water filling a 20 litre bucket then she cross the river to pick up her favourite flowers that grows along the stream every during summer. Still humming a song taking her second flower she hears a sound but she can't make out what it is, she continues collecting but she hear another sound this time it sounds like a wounded

animal, she looks around and walk to the direction where a sound came from. She sees a small plastic bag and pick it up looking inside, there is a cellphones watch and keys, she keeps looking around then scream covering her mouth when she sees a man wrapped with a black plastic bag from his feet to his neck, he is slowly moving.

She runs away crossing the river then take her bucket going back home, her whole body is shaking as she walk in the rondavel her parents are not home but in the fields to rip some potatoes.

She finally find courage to go back and look at that man again, she find him still there but he is not moving anymore. She takes her bucket and get some water. She sprinkle his face with water which causing him to slowly open his eyes. She removes the plastic on his body she can see blood all over what once was a white shirt, the man looks cold as he stares at

Thabsie in sorrow. His head is also badly injured with bumps all over.

Thabsie: Awukwazi ukuhamba?(You can't walk?)

She asks looking at the man, he doesn't answer but continue to groan in pain.

Thabsie: Ngizobiza ubaba ngiyabuya.(I will go call dad I'm coming back)

She runs to the fields and ask her mom and dad on the side, she explains how he saw a man laying on the stream looking lifeless. They rush there to see it themselves, her father picks him up and drag him to his house since he is heavy. He heat some water to nurse his wounds after taking out the bullets with the sharp knife. A woman look for herbs to help him with the pain and heal the wounds faster.

Later they sit around the fire while the mother is cooking the mysterious man is sleeping on the floor but he is awake.

"Ungubani igama?"(what's your name?) Ask Thabsie's father.

"Everything is a blur all I can hear is the baby's cry, I don't even know who I am or what I am".

They all look at each other.

"Ungakhathazeki uzolulama"(don't worry you will get better).

Five months later, the mysterious man still can't remember his name but they just call him "mfana"(boy) while the young girl calls him "bhuti"(brother) they have grown fond of each other in a way that they are always together. The girl respects him. This is a small secluded village where everyone knows each other and get along, when you don't have something to cook you go to the neighbor and ask for beans and cook for your kids. The only time Thabsie and "mfana" are not together is when she goes to school.

Today mfana is alone sleeping outside facing up, he wonders what happened to him, if he

does have a family, he still hear the sound of a baby crying especially when he closes his eyes.

THE PRESENT DAY

Thabsie just came back from school she remembers the plastic bag she found at the stream when she found her brother, she runs to take it under her bed and run to show him.

Mfana: Where did you get this?

Thabsie: It was not far from you when I found you in the stream.

They try to open the phone but it's not working, they ask the neighbors for a charger but they don't find the one suitable for his expensive phone.

"Tomorrow you should go to town and look for that charger maybe it have some clues on how you ended up here I will give you money for transport". Thabsie's dad says to both Thabsie and Mfana.

The following day they take a taxi to town to get a charger, they finally get it but when they

are about to head back home he hears a sound of a baby crying, it sounds familiar to his ears, he looks around and finally spots a crying boy who looks over a year old. The minute their eyes lock his heart skips a beat, he picks him up.

Mfana: Where is your mother? Why are you crying?

The boy doesn't answer, they walk around the place looking for the mother but no one seems like a woman who just lost her son.

Thabsie: The weather is changing let's go home with him and tomorrow we will take him to the police.

They agree and go home with the boy who is holding on to Mfana for dear life.

He charged the phone for a few hours then opens it, unfortunately it says insert sim while it does have a SIM card but there are messages on the phone.

"Nkosazana" he reads the name of the screen.

"Our boys are laying in the hospital bed and you went on vacations Sonwa?" That's a message on the phone, he gets confused.

Mfana: Sonwa?

There are a lot of messages from that Nkosazana about the "boys".

He sleeps with the boy but he is staring at him because he looks familiar to his eyes and his heart does something when he looks at him.

The next morning then take a taxi to town then go to the station to drop off the boy but they are told to wait while they call the mother who reported the boy missing.

They are sitting on the benches the boy is on his lap.

"Mama". The boy says jumping down running to a woman at the door who is holding another boy in her arms, she put him down and hug the boy tight crying.

Mfana and Thabsie get up.

"Nkosazana these are the people who found your son yesterday but because of the weather they took him home and came back with him today" The constable says showing Nkosazana Thabsie and Mfana, She extends her hand to shake their hands while she is blinded by tears, she finally blinks causing the tears to run down her cheeks she gasp staring at Mfana.

Nkosazana: Sonw...Sonwabile?

He stares at her and flash backs of seeing his boys for the first time at the hospital comes back.

He finally remembers who he is and how he ended up in that village.

Nkosazana: Sonwabile.

She says wiping her tears and pick up Sphehle who was missing then hold Sphelelo's hand.

Sonwa: Nkosazana.

She just walk out when she remembers how he left her saying he needs time and never came back again.

Sonwa runs out shouting her name as she buckles up the boys.

Sonwa: I can explain Nkosazana.

She shakes her head, but Sphelelo get off his seat and run to Sonwabile he picks him up holding him to his chest, his eyes is full of tears.

Sonwa: I'm sorry.

Nkosazana: You left us Sonwabile.

Sphelelo get off as well and go to Sonwa, it's like they know him they feel connected to him..Sonwa looks down at him.

Sonwa: You found me boy, you brought me back to you guys.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 73

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NKOSAZANA

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We are sitting quietly at the restaurant opposite the police station I am so angry I am even shaking, like how dare he comes back now! How dare he takes my child I was losing my mind yesterday. I went to town and suddenly there were police doing the raid which caused us to be pushed out and I lost Sphesihle, I feel like a bad mom, what if he was taken by bad guys what was I gonna say to Sonwabile.

The tension on this table is too much that a girl he was with has left saying she is going to the toilet.

The twins are holding on to Sonwa for dear life, its like they know him from somewhere.

Sonwa: Nkosazana

I look at him.

Sonwa: Ngiyaxolisa Sthandwa Sami.(I'm sorry my love)

Me: Don't call me that! And I don't have to listen to you.

I say getting up and try to take Sphehile but he just shake his head burying his head on his father's shoulder.

Me: Lelo, let's go home boy.

He shakes his head as well I sit down defeated.

Sonwa: Can you book a room for us, I want to explain everything to you, please maLanga.

I nod and book a room for us then give the girl transport fare Sonwa promise her he will see her tomorrow.

We get into the room and put the kids to bed, there are two beds, a single bed and a double

bed. We sit down facing different sides. He finally get up and stand in front of me. He slowly take off his t-shirt and there are two healed bullet wounds. I am saying new because it's new to me.

Me: What happened to you?

Sonwa: Nonsindiso shot me.

I stare at him in shock.

Me: What?

Sonwa: The day I told you I need some time, I went home and broke up with her she shot me twice then wrapped me with plastic bags, I guess she thought I'm dead, I was unconscious then woke up in the bushes at some secluded village.

Me: What!?

He sit down brushing his head.

Sonwa: That moment there I thought I will never see you and our kids again.

I don't even know what to say the way I am so shocked.

Me: That day the boys were admitted at the hospital they were in a coma, I guess they felt you were not okay.

Sonwa: I'm sorry.

Me: But Noncedo made me believe you went on a vacation with Nsindiso.

Sonwa: Maybe she was in on this plan to kill me, I don't know my sister anymore.

I sigh.

Sonwa: Thank you for raising the boys, they look good and very well mannered.

Me: Thank you, it wasn't easy because I would see you in them everyday and I thought you left me for Nsindiso.

Sonwa: I told you that I will never leave you for anyone again.

Me: So what will happen now? Nonsindiso needs to pay for what she did!

Sonwa: Trust Me, she will pay and not by going to jail because I might need to provide proof that I don't even have.

Me: Then what are you planning to do?

Sonwa: I'd rather not tell you.

I nod.

Sonwa: So...Uhm.. are you seeing anyone?

I look at him he looks nervous.

Me: Yes.

Sonwa: Oh...okay Uhm okay.

He get up and stand by the window looking down, I go to him and sleep on his chest.

Me: I'm not seeing anyone, I guess I was waiting for you.

I look up at him and stand on my toes kissing him. We kiss until our breathing rythm changes, we take off our clothes it's been a while. He picks me up and take me to bed, he is holding my hands above my head looking into my eyes while he is giving me slow

strokes, I am emotional tears come out from the corner of my eyes.

Sonwa: I will always love you.

We cum, he hold me from behind while I let it all out. I am crying because all these months I hoped he comes back and tell me he loves Me, I was waiting for him that is why I stayed single all this while.

I finally turn and hold him tight.

Sonwa: Shhhh...don't cry I'm back now and I am not going anywhere.

In the morning we wake up when Sphelelo cries, he is standing next to our bed trying to climb up. His dad take him and put him between us.

Sonwa: I want to introduce you to the people who helped me get better, they have become family.

Me: Ok.

We take a bath and bath the kids then we wear the same clothes from yesterday.

Sonwa: You're quiet mama.

I am driving to this village he was talking about, the boys are sleeping on the backseat.

Me: Yes.

Sonwa: Yes what?

Me: When you left you asked me to marry you, so the answer is yes.

He clears his throat.

Sonwa: But I have nothing on my name.

Me: I don't care, we will make a plan.

He look out the window, I hold his hand.

Me: I love you.

He hold my hand tight.

We get to the family and find them sitting under a tree, they are happy to see Sonwabile back.

"I thought you are not coming back Mfana". A man says.

Sonwa: I'm back baba and I am here to introduce my miracles to you and ma.

They nod.

Sonwa: This is Nkosazana Gumede the mother of my children, these two boys Sphehle and Sphelelo.

The man get up happily and shake his hand then take the boys.

Baba: Siyabonga mfanawam.(Thank you my boy).

Sonwa: Igama lami uSonwabile. (My name is Sonwabile)

They look excited for him I can see they care about him.

Baba: I hope you will come back to see us, you have become a son I never had.

Sonwa: This is my home and you have been my family so I promise once I get back on my feet I

will take Thabsie, mama and you to come stay with me but for now I will continue to stay here with you.

Baba: wamukelekile Nkosazana. (You're welcome Nkosazana)

Me: Thank you baba, for saving his life, he means everything to me.

He nods.

We go back to town after he packed a few of his clothes, i guess they bought him clothes here they are really nice people. I book for us again then leave my sons with their dad because the little traitors doesn't want to go with me anymore.

I pack our clothes then leave a note for my dads telling them we are taking a little holiday.

I go back to the hotel and find my boys sleeping with their dad, I take a picture of them and post it on my WhatsApp with a caption of " My family".

I order for us then wake their dad up.

Sonwa: You're back baby.

I kiss him and sit next to him.

Sonwa: Yazi umuhle kanjani?(Do you know how beautiful you are?)

I blush looking away.

Sonwa: I need to wake up tomorrow and start looking for a job baby but I don't know how without my documents maybe Nonsindiso burnt them.

Me: Uhm let me talk to my sister for you though she was very frustrated with you she hired someone else.

Sonwa: I should apologize.

Me: I will explain everything to her.

My phone rings I don't know the number, I answer.

Me: Hello.

"HI you're speaking to Noncedo".

I widen my eyes looking at Sonwa, she told me to leave her alone so I deleted her number I don't know why she is calling me now.

Ncedo: Nkosazana hello are you there?

I put the phone on speaker while looking at Sonwa, he is looking at me as well.

Me: Why are you calling me Noncedo?

I see a frown on Sonwa's face.

Ncedo: I saw your WhatsApp status where is Sonwa?

Me: Why are you asking Me? Isn't he on vacation with Nonsindiso.

Ncedo: The last time I checked he was with her but now after seeing that picture...

Me: When last did you talk to Sonwabile Noncedo? Do you even care about him?

Ncedo: I...I am in contact with Nsindiso.

Sonwa: Noncedo.

Ncedo: Bhuti Oh my God, Nsindiso told me you don't want to talk to me I tried calling you but your phone wasn't going through.

Sonwa: For over 18 months?

He says in disbelief.

Ncedo: Why are you with Nkosazana?

Sonwa: That's all you care about! That bitch almost killed me!

Ncedo: What are you talking about?

Sonwa: Leave me and my family alone

Noncedo, leave Nkosazana alone don't ever call her again.

He grabs the phone from my hand and drop the call fuming.

He walk around in the room looking deadly, I have never seen him this angry I am getting a bit scared. He finally stops walking around and give me his hand, I hold it getting up, he hold me without saying anything.

Me: Are you okay?

Sonwa: I don't want anything to happen to you, by now Nonsindiso knows I am alive because I have a loud mouth sister, and there is no telling what she'll try to do so I have to be ahead of her.

I nod.

Sonwa: I love you and I won't let anything happen to you.

Me: I won't let anything happen to you again.

And I mean that, if Nsindiso thinks she is gonna do as she pleases again then she is in for a suprise no one messes with my family.

The week ends with us living happily together in a hotel, I talked to my sister and she agreed to take Sonwa back because I was begging her to, so now he is starting tomorrow. Noncedo has been calling none stop but Sonwa blocked her number.

We had a great time here, I don't think my boys would want to leave because they have gotten close to their father.

Me: Uhm so you are going to continue staying here because I don't think you will be able to travel to work from the village.

Sonwa: This hotel is expensive a lodge is better baby.

Me: Ok I will find it for you.

Sonwa: Thank you for everything my love, you have grown I am proud of you.

I find a place for him to stay.

The whole week I am working and so does he but we see each other everyday, I can't sleep without seeing or talking to him.

I am in my office when I see someone opening the door, I look up and see Nonsindiso standing there looking at me. I am a little angry thinking about what she did to Sonwabile.

Nsindiso: Where is Sonwabile?

Me: Why are you asking Me?

She takes out a phone and show me the pictures of him and my boys, I often take pictures of then and post it on my WhatsApp.

Nsindiso: Where is he?

Me: Please leave my office before I call security.

I take the telephone but she grabs it from my hands and smash it on the floor.

Me: You do know that I am not scared of you right?

Nsindiso: Maybe you should be.

I step closer to her, she is taller and bigger than me.

Me: Why? If abasakufuni shiyeka sisi. (If they don't want you leave sister)

Nsindiso: Where is Sonwabile?

She grabs my neck tight, I try removing her hand but it is too tight so I knee her tummy hard she let go, I push her head down to the table hard she bleeds immediately on her

forehead, while I call security. They run in and grab her.

Security: Should we call the police Miss?

Sonwabile walk in holding a brown paper bag his other hand is on his pocket.

Sonwa: There is no need for that, we gonna talk to her, you can leave sir thank you.

They look at me I nod and they walk out, Sonwa close the door and lock. Nsindiso is wiping her blood on her forehead I don't see any remorse as she stares at Sonwabile.

Sonwa: I came to give you lunch baby.

He says kissing my lips, I sit down and look at him, he looks calm.

Sonwa: Did she hurt you?

Me: No, but I did.

He nods.

Nsindiso: So you're alive.

Sonwa: Yeah Why?

I chuckle, what is wrong with him? He should be angry.

Nsindiso: You came back to her?

Sonwa: yes, she is my home I belong with her.

I hear a knock on my door, Sonwabile unlocks and Noncedo walk in with Sonwa's father and mom, I see his face changing he keeps clenching his jaws.

Luzuko: Sonwabile you didn't tell us you were leaving we heard from your sister and even now you're back but you didn't come to us .

That's his father looking at him.

Sonwa: Come to you for what?

Luzuko: We are your parents.

Sonwa: Parents? You thought I was just gonna pack and leave and never even once call you? No one tried finding out what really happened to me, I couldn't remember who I was because this girl shot me and left me to

die in the forest, she even lied about being pregnant with my child.

Noncedo: What?

Sonwa: So I don't want anything to do with all of you because you showed how little you give a fuck about Me! Especially you Noncedo! I hate you! I have always put you first all my life but now you thought I would just go without telling you for months you didn't try anything to find out because you don't care! You only care about your bloody self.

Ncedo: Bhuti..

Sonwa: Now listen here, I don't want to see any of you anywhere near my woman leave Nkosazana alone all of you if you know what's good for you, get out.

They walk out with tails between their legs.

He look at me.

Me: Was it a coincidence that you found Nsindiso here? You didn't look shocked.

Sonwa: I have to go, I will explain later.

He kiss me and rush out.

I don't hear from him even after knocking off, his phone is off, I take the kids and drive to his place it's locked I use my keys, he isn't here.

We go to bed without him but I can't sleep, I am getting worried.

In the middle of the night I quickly sit up when I hear the door being unlocked, he walk in and stop by the door looking at me.

Sonwa: Baby you're here?

I get off bed and go to him, he has blood on his t-shirt.

Me: What happened? Are you okay?

Sonwa: Yes I'm fine, I didn't know you're coming.

Me: I have been trying to call you.

Sonwa: I left my phone at work I didn't want it to be tracked to...

Me: Tracked?

Sonwa: Nonsindiso won't bother you again.

Me: You killed her?

I whisper, he shakes his head and take off his bloody t-shirt.

Sonwa: I'm not a killer I just sent her a very powerful message.

I nod.

Sonwa: I want us to get married on the 31st of December at exactly 00:00 I want us to start a new year as a married couple.

Me: But the 31st is in a few days.

Sonwa: Exactly my point, I can't wait for you to be my wife.

He leaves me standing there going to the bathroom.

It's the 31st I am getting married, the time is 11:45 pm, yep I am getting married at night because my man wanted it that way, I don't know how he did it but I only had to look for my dress everything was taken care off.

I am wearing a white wedding gown it's beautiful, I am beautiful.

My dads walk in wearing white suits they stand on my either side.

Langa: The things you do Nkosazana, getting married at night? Really?

I laugh.

Me: It wasn't my idea dad.

Sfiso: Are you ready?

Me: Yes I am ready.

We walk out going to the beach, there are lights all over there is a beautiful set up all white, everyone is wearing all white. I am standing at the entrance looking at my handsome man and my boys next to him standing exactly like him. There is a pastor next to them.

My fathers walk me down the isle, I see Sonwabile looking away wiping his eyes, I get to him my dads hand me over to him.

I look around the guests my whole family is here and so is the people who took care of him. I see Noncedo and her parents walking in and sit at the back, someone walk in pushing Nonsindiso, she is on a wheelchair, I look at Sonwa.

Sonwa: We can start pastor.

He starts by a prayer then give us time to say our vows.

Sonwa: Sthandwa sam(my love)we've been through a lot for a very short space of time we were together, we were separated just when we thought our love is blossoming, they failed to keep us apart but today I am promising you forever no one will ever get between us.

He looks at the back then back at me.

Sonwa: I will paralyze each and every one of them.

He kiss my forehead I smile.

Me: Thank you for keeping your promise that you will come back to us, I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you and our kids.

The pastor bless our marriage and our boys take out the rings from their pockets, we put them on and I am re introduced to Mrs Nkosazana Maxhanga and Sonwabile is my husband at last.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 74

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SBANISETHU

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I have accepted the fact that me and Noncedo are over, I tried everything to apologize to her but she wants nothing to do with me. The only problem I have now with her is that she is cohabiting with her boyfriend and she wants my daughter to visit there, I can't allow that she doesn't even know that man well. So she has taken me to court to get full custody of our daughter but I am fighting against it, she knows very well that she has to stay at home with me she is just fighting a losing battle and it's tiring.

Nkosazana and Sonwabile are busy sorting out traditional events like Lobola and the traditional wedding because they might have done a white wedding but tradition still needs to be carried out. Noncedo is not part of her brother's wedding preparations I guess they are not on good terms.

I go to my sister in her room, she is alone in bed scrolling down her phone, I kiss her cheek sleeping next to her, she still stays at home

because Ntsika didn't allow her to stay with Sonwa before doing a traditional wedding, the man is trying though because he has bought a house but it's not that big I guess Qhawekazi pays him well.

Me: Nkosazana kaBaba (Daddy's princess)

She smiles.

Zana: Hey bro.

Me: Where are the boys?

Zana: They are with their father.

Me: They don't like staying here anymore huh.

Zana: Spending time with their father makes them happy, they are making up for the time they lost with him.

She sounds sad.

Me: What really happened vele?

Zana: Nonsindiso tried to kill him.

She go on to explain the whole ordeal I feel bad for them, i mean she thought Sonwa left

her with the kids while the guy didn't even know who he was.

Me: But you're okay now right?

Zana: Yeah I'm happy.

Me: That's great.

Zana: What about you? You're still angry at Noncedo.

Me: It's not about anger anymore sis I just want all this to end so I can move on with my life I gave her the divorce she wanted.

Zana: I'm sorry for all this trouble I feel bad because I started it.

Me: No it was just not meant to be.

Zana: So I have seen a bit of tension between you and Sonwa but you guys were getting along before.

Me: Uh well he is a cool guy but I guess after our family did him wrong he kept his distance.

Zana: But he does need a friend other than me and I think you would be a really good friend.

I shrug my shoulders.

Zana: Can you go with me to take the boys?

Me: Yeah we can go.

I drive to Sonwabile's house, he is with some old couple showing them around Nkosazana looks happy to see them, she is even hugging them then her husband.

Zana: Where is Thabsie?

Sonwa: She is with the twins in their room?

She walks away and so are the couple leaving us in the awkward silence it's like we are complete strangers.

Me: Your house is beautiful.

I say breaking the silence.

Sonwa: Thanks, Uhm do you want a beer.

Me: Yeah sure.

He gives me a beer and take one as well, we sit down on.

Me: I heard about what happened to you,
sorry man.

Sonwa: Pecks of not having friends or a real
family if I had one they would have searched
for me.

I sip on the beer.

Me: There is a game playing at Moses Mabhida
Stadium tomorrow.

Sonwa: Oh yeah?

Me: I'm watching it live you can come along,
my brothers don't really like soccer.

Sonwa: Oh ok we can go.

He switch on the TV we talk about soccer
there is no awkwardness anymore the
conversation is flowing. My sister walk in
holding a tray then there is a girl behind her
looks young natural beauty, she is holding a
juice.

Zana: We made snacks for you guys, we are with uma and Baba in the backyard shout if you need anything.

Sonwa: Thank you baby.

They walk out.

Sonwa: I prefer beer.

Me: Me too.

We laugh as he put away the juice and take another beer for us.

Me: So these are the people that helped you?

Sonwa: Yes Bab'Khumalo and his wife then a girl is Thabsie she is like a little sister to me they will be staying here with me.

I nod.

Me: She goes to school?

Sonwa: Yes she is in grade 11.

I nod.

Me: You're doing a good thing.

Sonwa: But the only problem I will have is getting transport for her the school is far from here and the schools I tried to get this side doesn't take grade elevens.

Me: Uhm she can come to my school we don't normally take grade elevens as well but I can pull some strings.

Sonwa: Oh thanks man that's way better I was still very much stressed about this, they even suggested they will stay at the village and come after her matric here.

Me: There's really no need for that, tomorrow you can just come by with her documents while Nkosazana help her with a uniform.

Sonwa: I will do that, let's go sit with them.

We go at the back they are just sitting around listening to the old man saying jokes.

Sonwa: How would you feel about changing schools Thabsie?

Thabsie: The classes have already started will i catch up?

Me: Yeah you will I can help you, you are going to attend my school.

Thabsie: Oh ok.

She seems shy man pretty little thing.

We spend the whole day here it's fun, Sonwa and I exchange numbers so we can talk about school for Thabsie and also the game which is later tomorrow.

The next day I am in my office waiting for Sonwa, he comes in I get up we shoulder hug, she is with Thabsie who seems nervous.

Sonwa: Nkosazana was called in at work so I will take her to get a uniform.

I nod, he gives me her papers I look at them.

Me: Oh you're a straight A student, the principal won't have a problem taking you, please give me a moment I will be back.

I go to the Principal's office and explain it to him, he accepts her then I go back to the office.

Me: You don't have to pay school fees today just an admission fee.

He nods and pay it immediately, his phone rings.

Sonwa: I have to take this, it's Kazi and I know we are going to fight.

We laugh as he get up and walk out, my sister is one hell of a rude person but lovely too.

Thabsie: How are the kids in this school sir? Won't they laugh at me.

Me: You care so much about people?

She look down.

Thabsie: Starting a new school is scary, maybe they will laugh at me.

Me: Then we will discipline them the best way we know how, suspension.

She nods, Sonwa walk back in.

Me: So I will give you everything you will need to buy for her from stationary to a full school uniform.

I give them a copy of everything then they walk to the door.

Me: Let me go with you so I can help.

Sonwa: That's great I am clueless when it comes to this I used to go to a public school where everything was free.

We walk out and drive to town using my car.

We buy everything she will need, I also insist on using my own money to some of the things then we go to a restaurant to eat but Thabsie isn't eating just staring at her plate.

Sonwa: You don't like your food?

She slowly pick up the fork and knife, I just let go of my fork and knife and eat with my hands, I can see why she is not eating, she doesn't know how to use these things. Sonwa looks at me then start eating with his hands as well. Thabsie starts eating too with her hands.

I drive back to school so they can take their car, Sonwa is using Nkosazana's old car.

Today I am at school waiting for Sonwa to drop Thabsie off so I can take her to her class. He calls telling me he is outside, I walk out and greet them, Thabsie is looking down clearly nervous.

Me: You gonna get used to being here.

Sonwa: I will fetch you later okay.

He hugs her and go to his car.

Me: Lets go meet your classmates.

We walk in class and we find Mrs Carter teaching.

Me: Hi ma'am can I have a minute.

She nods.

Me: Good morning class.

"Morning sir" they all shout.

Me: I am here to introduce your new classmate Thabsile Khumalo, make her feel welcomed.

"HI Thabsile".

They all shout at once, I look around to see if there is any available seat but there is none.

Me: Quinton help me get a chair and table for her.

He get up and we walk out I get a chair and Quinton grab a desk we go back in class, she sit next to Q then I thank Mrs Carter, I go back to my office.

After an hour now I have to take my first class of the day and it's Thabsie's. I get there and start my lesson, they seem to be listening to me even Thabsie looks like she is getting it

But I am not suprised she is a clever child referring to her previous school report.

It's after school I am going to my car I see her standing by the gate then Sonwa's car stops, I drive towards him and hoot once, he step out and come to the window, we fist bump.

Sonwa: We are still going to watch the game.

Me: Yes, I will pick you up at 4:30 pm the game starts at 5 so you need to go and freshen up bro.

Sonwa: Sure.

He walks away and open the door for Thabsie, he treats her like a little sister I like guys like him who sees family in loyalty I don't know if that makes sense but yeah.

I pick him up and drive to the stadium it's buzzing and luckily we support the same team.

We have a lot of fun I don't know when last did I shout like that. After the game we grab a few drinks then drive to his house. We walk in talking and laughing, we find Thabsie giving her parents food in the lounge.

Thabsie: Hey Bhuti should I dish up for you?

Sonwa: Yes please.

We sit with the parents, she comes carrying two plates and give one to me then the other to Sonwabile.

Me: So how was school?

Thabsie: It was okay they are more nicer than I thought, so you teach Physical science and Life Sciences?

I laugh.

Me: No the other one is my brother.

Thabsie: Really?

Me: Yeah I know nothing about Physical Science.

Thabsie: You look like the same person what I couldn't understand is how you changed your clothes now I get it.

Me: There is four of us looking all the same I don't even know which one is me when I am with them.

Everyone laughs.

Me: I have to go now..

Sonwa walk me out and I drive home. I find Tinyiko in the lounge.

Me: Wifey.

Niko: Hey I don't see you often lately don't tell me you went back to that lifestyle of sleeping around you're a father now.

Me: I'm not doing anything illegal that's for sure.

She laughs.

Niko: Ok that's good.

I go to my room take a shower then go to bed.

In the morning I do everything I need to do then drive to school.

My whole day goes smoothly I am actually teaching very well mannered pupils this year, they ask questions and ask for revision every now and then and I don't mind that's why I am here teaching them.

It's Friday Sonwa and I planned a little get together as boys, being my brothers and him at his house, the parents went home for lunch since maZiyanda wanted to see them and talk about the traditional wedding since Sonwa wanted them to be a huge part of the

planning. Thabsie and Nkosazana are around but not for long. We pull up at Sonwa's house and walk in. We find Thabsie in the lounge she get up and gasp staring at us.

Lethu: Oh we get that a lot little one.

It's the first time seeing us all together.

Thabsie: Uhm..hello.

Me: Hi Thabsie.

She looks at me it's funny how she is looking at each and one of us like she is searching for the difference, Sonwa and Nkosazana walk in laughing.

Me: Hey love birds.

We all shoulder hug Sonwa.

Zana: Thabsie, meet Letho, Lethu, Sbonga and you've already met Sbani.

She says pointing each one of us.

Thabsie: I thought he is sir Gumede a Life Sciences teacher.

She points at Sbonga, We all laugh.

They leave while we take our beers and go chill outside.

Sonwa: So any plans of ever getting married again Sbani?

Me: I don't think so man, I don't think marriage is for me.

Sbonga: You are just scared of falling in love again, not everyone will turn out like Noncedo you know, maybe it just wasn't meant to be.

Me: I guess you're right.

We spend almost the whole night talking about boys stuff it's a great vibe I get to know Sonwabile on a deeper level, he is a very cool guy down to earth I guess we didn't give him a chance before but I am willing to start a friendship with him.

A month later, Its my sister and Sonwabile's traditional wedding, lobola negotiations were held yesterday then they came back today with the cows, Bab'Khumalo is leading everything because Sonwa takes him as a

father I haven't seen Noncedo or her parents anywhere.

They do everything that needs to be done, it's the fun they are having for Me, it makes me think twice about ever getting a woman again and marry her.

Thabsie: Sir.

I turn to look at her, she is wearing a short traditional attire that matches the bride's and groom's.

Me: Yeah..

Thabsie: Uhm...Bhuti said I should call Sbani?

I chuckle.

Me: Ok I'm coming.

We make her so confused shame it's not even funny. I go to Sonwa and stand next to him.

Me: Congratulations man this is beautiful makes me want to fall in love.

Sonwa: Thanks, I saw you with a very disturbing grin on your face.

I laugh shaking my head.

Me: So everything is done?

Sonwa: Yeah they are just giving my wife gifts now since our white wedding was short notice.

Me: So they are only giving Nkosazana gifts?

Sonwa: Well technically it's "our gifts" but I know it's mostly women stuffs in there.

Me: Can I present to you, your own personal gift then?

Sonwa: You got me a gift?

Me: Of course I did, what kind of best friend would I be if I didn't. This way sir.

We walk to the front yard and stop there, he is looking around.

Sonwa: Uhm there is nothing here.

Me: Just wait for it.

A truck drives our way and stop by the gate, they open at the back and drive out the later Mercedes-Benz.

Sonwa: Damn!

He exclaims, I have been asking him about the type of car he would like to own one day and this is it. The guys comes to us and hand him the keys then give him papers to sign.

Sonwa: Uhm I think you got the wrong address.

"Sir just sign there please we are in a rush".

I laugh as he signs the papers hesitantly.

Now he is staring at the shining beast in front of him then back at the keys in his hands, it doesn't have a plate number yet.

Sonwa: No ways!

He shouts I think he now gets it.

Sonwa: No fucken ways!

He looks at me and lightly punch me on my shoulder I laugh stepping back.

Sonwa: Boy! There is no way!

He can't believe this.

Now people are this side looking at us, my sister comes to us.

Zana: What is going on? Oh damn whose car is that?

I point at Sonwa who is still in shock staring at the car.

Zana: What!?! Sbani?

Me: He is my friend and that is his wedding gift.

She screams hugging me like it's her own car, then she grabs the key from Sonwa and go to the car, she is in the driver's seat already.

Sonwa looks at me.

Sonwa: What the hell is that?

Me: It's called having friends in high places my friend.

Sonwa: You're mad boy.

We shoulder hug.

Sonwa: Thank you so much, I wasn't expecting anything at all let alone this huge gift, thanks man.

Me: So you accept it?

Sonwa: I'm not crazy! Of course I accept it.

He says walking towards the car and open the door for Nkosazana.

Sonwa: This is my moment to shine baby, step aside.

We all burst in laughter, as he takes her hand and lead her to the passenger seat then go to the driver's seat driving away.

I go back inside and find Thabsie eating while standing on her feet.

Me: Intombazane ayidli imile. (A girl doesn't eat standing on her feet)

She quickly sit down, I laugh sitting next to her, it's been a long day I am tired.

Me: I didn't say stop eating Thabsile.

She is so shy.

Noncedo walk in and look at us, it's literally just the two of us inside everyone was outside. I didn't even know she was here.

Ncedo: who is this?

Me: Hello to you too Noncedo.

Ncedo: Hi, ubani lo?(Who is this?)

Me: Sonwabile's little sister.

Ncedo: Who?

Me: Wee.

I rest my head on the couch and close my eyes.

Ncedo: So you are with younger girls now?

I open my eyes.

Me: Ukhuluma nami? (You are talking to Me?)

Ncedo: Baby girl run and never look back, he...

Sonwa: Noncedo!

He shouts standing by the door.

Sonwa: I didn't invite you here to harrass my people especially My LITTLE SISTER!

He put some emphasis on little sister.

Ncedo: Your what?

Sowna: You heard me. The wedding is over now you can go.

Ncedo: Sonwa I am your sister, Who is this?

Sonwa: It's time for you to leave.

She looks at me for a while then walk out, that girl hates me it's not even funny, to think that she is a mother of my child and I changed for her once seems like just a made up story.

Sonwa: Thabsie, are you okay?

Thabsie Yes Bhuti.

Sonwa: Sure.

Me: I'm okay too thanks for asking.

He slap the back of my head.

Sonwa: Thank you again for that man, I don't have words to express how much I appreciate it.

Me: It's cool man.

Sonwa: Let me go and say goodbye to the guests I will be back.

I nod, he walks out. I look at Thabsie she is just sitting quietly. I take her legs putting it on my lap then remove her heels.

Me: I don't get why women love high shoes, your feet look swollen.

Thabsie: I think it's because of standing for too long.

Me: I guess you will have to walk barefoot for the whole night.

Thabsie: I am going to bed.

Me: Why? The night is still young.

Thabsie: I don't drink and I want to catch up on my school work.

Me: Ok.

She takes her plate to the kitchen then come back pick up her shoes then walk away.

I have grown and I am proud of myself if I was still the old Sbani I would definitely be having girls all over me right now.

We spend the whole night drinking, there are girls and guys, Nkosazana's colleagues and Sonwabile's it's a party.

I wake up in the morning with a banging headache, I am in the room I quickly sit up when I realise it's Thabsie's room, how the hell did I end up here!?! I am still fully dressed but where is the child and how did I end up in her room.

I get up and go to the bathroom, I wash my face then walk out, I find her curled up in a couch with a fleece over her, I look at the time it's 5:30 in the morning, I pick her up she opens her eyes then close them again, I take her to bed and cover her with her blanket, I feel really bad for sleeping in bed while she sleeps on the couch. I go to my car and drive home telling myself that ngibuyekile!(I am never drinking again) The headache!

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 75

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SBANISETHU

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Things are going great, my friendship with Sonwabile is growing in a way that I can't go anywhere fun without him but I give him space because he is married I can safely say I have a best friend apart from my brothers, we've grown into this solid team that I believe no one can break. I didn't know it felt this good to have a friend other than family.

Today he is taking out his wife, twins and Thabsie, the parents went back home because they do farming and sell for the community so they go back from time to time, so he asked me to tag along.

We are at the restaurant having a meal.

Zana: So Thabsie have you made friends at school?

Thabsie: I get along with Quinton and Nelly but everyone in my class is cool.

Zana: Good because we are throwing you a sweet sixteen party and you are in charge of the guest list.

She smiles widely.

Thabsie: Wow thank you sisi I have never had a party before.

She seems excited.

Zana: There's a first time for everything baby.

We finish eating and walk out. Sonwa and I sit at the lounge while the ladies are busy in the kitchen.

Sonwa: You're quiet.

I huff.

Me: I am going to court tomorrow, I hate all this back and forth Noncedo wants me to do man, my daughter will get sick if she takes her away but courts doesn't judge based on traditions.

Sonwa: Maybe they will be on your side man you will tell them she doesn't have a stable home which is the truth, she is not married to that guy I don't think they will allow it.

I look at him.

Me: You might be right, I will have to tell them the truth, I bet she lied about where she is staying.

Sonwa: I don't know what happened to Noncedo.

Me: I thought she was the one.

Sonwa: But I guess it's all in the past, I wouldn't want any of my friends to date my sister ever again.

I nod.

Me: But you're here married to your best friend's sister.

Sonwa: You know that's different.

I laugh.

Me: I know I was just pulling your leg.

Nkosazana walk in.

Zana: Baby can you help me with the twins bath.

Sonwa: Sure.

Me: I'm leaving see you tomorrow guys.

I hug my sister then walk out. I find Thabsie sitting outside with her books, I sit next to her looking at her Physical Sciences text book.

Me: You worry a lot about Physics huh?

Thabsie: Yes, it's a bit hard for me.

Me: But your Grade10 report you got an A+.

Thabsie: Because I gave it my undivided attention just like I am doing now.

I nod looking at her, brown eyes, long eyelashes and bushy eyebrows, she is beautiful. I quickly get up when I think about my friendship with Sonwa, I don't ever wanna lose that.

Me: I should get going.

Thabsie: Ok bye.

I go to my car and drive home, I should find a woman who will keep me company maybe I am lonely that is why I am out here analysing a child.

I get a glass of water then head to my room, I get in bed and scroll down my phone I can a lot of girls hitting my inbox but one thing about me I hate being approached, I believe a

man should do the chasing not the other way around, I toss the phone next to me and sleep.

I am getting ready for court and Nkosazana said I can leave Esami with them, so I drop her off first.

I walk in and hug her, then she takes Esami from me.

Zana: Hey Sami..

Esami: Hello.

I smile, she is the most precious thing I have right now.

Zana: You seem down.

Me: I don't know what is going to happen today sis, anything can happen they can let Noncedo take my daughter.

Zana: I don't think they will Bhuti.

I kiss their cheeks and walk out driving to Court. I find Noncedo sitting at the benches outside I sit next to her.

Me: Hi.

She nods.

Me: I'm sorry for everything Noncedo just please don't take my daughter away from home.

She just take her phone I see a ring on her finger, I almost choke on my saliva.

Me: Noncedo.

She look at me.

Me: A ring?

I can only manage to say one word because my voice now is different.

Ncedo: I'm engaged.

Me: When?

Ncedo: The day of Sonwa's wedding I got home and there was a beautiful setup then my man proposed, and the great part is he doesn't have a crazy family just his grandma and his son.

Me: Oh..uhm congratulations.

She giggles looking at her ring, she looks happy.

My heart is painful maybe I still had a little hope that one day we will fix things but now it's all gone, it's really over.

She walk in first, I stand by the door and remove my wedding ring I have never removed it even after our divorce.

We sit down while she takes out a lot of papers from her bags and face the judge in front of us.

She greets us.

Ncedo: Judge before making any decisions I want to show you something.

She gives her some papers.

Judge: What is this?

Ncedo: That's when I had a miscarriage...

I swallow.

Ncedo: His sister beat me up and I landed in a hospital losing my baby in the process.

The judge looks at me and Noncedo is going all out to make me look bad.

She gives her other papers.

Ncedo: This is a tittle deed of a house I own in Durban North where I will be staying with my daughter, she will have a secured home.

I look down.

The judge clears her throat and do what I was afraid off, she gives Noncedo full custody and she only give me visits on weekends and we will be doing the exchange through the police Station and even now she asked the police to accompany her to take my daughter. I get up already feeling like my gut is being twisted, I walk to my car and lean on it.

Ncedo: I need my daughter today Sbani.

Two police men walk out and talk to Noncedo.

Me: Esami is at Sonwabile's house.

She nods and go to her car, the car that I bought with an open heart buying it for the person I thought is the love of my life.

I drive out and they drive behind me to Zana's house.

I walk in first and find Esami on Thabsie's lap, she is sleeping, Nkosazana and Sonwa are sitting on the opposite couch.

Me: Hi.

Zana: How did it go?

I sit down as Noncedo walk in with the police.

Ncedo: Hey Bhuti, I'm here to fetch my daughter.

She looks around then go snatch her from Thabsie.

Sonwa is on his feet.

Sonwa: Noncedo! What is wrong with you?

Now Esami is crying she hates it when someone wake her up so we have ways to wake her up we don't just snatch her.

Ncedo: I'm just taking my daughter as the court ordered.

I get up and take Esami from Noncedo.

Me: Don't cry hey, you are a big girl and big girls don't cry.

She nods, she loves it when you call her a big girl, I hug her then give her to her mom.

Ncedo: I know where to get her clothes.

I nod.

Ncedo: Bye everyone.

She walk out, I sit down wiping my face looking up.

Sonwa: Sbani..

I look at him.

Sonwa: Your nose is bleeding, are you okay?Thabsie go get a tissue.

Zana: Esami nees to come back.

Me: She can't..she..they gave her....full custody.

My eyes are heavy I want to keep them closed.

Sonwa: Sbani! Nkosazana we need to take him to the hospital.

Zana: That won't help, let's take him home.

She is already crying.

They are panicking running around the house getting their jackets and keys. I feel someone wiping my nose I open my eyes, It's Thabsie with tears in her eyes.

Me: What's wrong?

Thabsie: I hate blood..

Me: I'm...sorry.

It's getting hard to even breath now.

Thabsie: Bhuti, Sisi!

She shouts I am just keeping my eyes closed but I can hear everything, for now.

I wake up at home in my room, Nadia and my dads are sitting next to me.

Me: Landi..

Nadia: Hey boy.

Me: Please call Noncedo and ask if my daughter is okay.

Ntsika: We already called.

Me: She is okay?

They all look down, I slowly sit up.

Me: Is my daughter okay baba?

Ntsika: She is admitted to the hospital.

I get off bed still feeling dizzy.

Me: What happened to her?

Ntsika: She is having similar symptoms like you but Noncedo didn't let us in.

Me: Please take me to her.

Nadia help me to the car, I feel weak.

She drives to the hospital, I can see Noncedo sitting on the chair, I go to her.

Me: Noncedo.

She look at me her eyes are bloodshot red and puffy.

Me: Please let me take her home, I will let you see her anytime.

Ncedo: So it was okay when you kept her away from Me!

She shouts and I understand her anger there was a time when I didn't let her see her because she had started seeing someone and I was angry.

Me: I'm sorry about that...please she will die, we will lose her Noncedo.

Ncedo: The doctors are doing everything they can.

Me: It won't work!

I shout and someone grab my shoulder pushing me back.

"Don't talk to my woman like that man".

A hoarse bold voice says, I look at him he looks rich and decent a bit old, I guess it's Noncedo's man because now she is crying in his arms.

Me: I just want my daughter please.

Ncedo: I want him to leave, my daughter is going to be okay.

I go on my knee and look down.

Me: I am begging you Noncedo just give me my daughter I promise I won't ever keep her away from you but now she needs to be home, you can't take her away from home.

Her man looks at her holding the sides of her face, you can tell he loves her.

"Let him take her my love, I know these things, she won't make it if you take her away from her family please baby".

She slowly nods and walk away.

She comes back minutes later with a doctor saying she has signed for her to be discharged.

I go to her ward and find her crying calling me.

Esami: Daddy!

I pick her up and hug her tight.

Me: I'm here baby, daddy is right here.

I walk out with her.

Ncedo: Sami..

She takes her.

Ncedo: I'm sorry okay, mommy is sorry I love you so much.

She gives her back to me.

Ncedo: I didn't mean to hurt her and put her through this pain.

Me: It's okay.

Ncedo: I will see her tomorrow.

I nod and walk out. Nadia drives us back home, I go to bed Esami is next to me sound asleep.

I spend the whole night thinking about what I did so wrong to Noncedo, okay I know what I did but for her to just leave me like that and even move on, I thought one day she will come back and ask me if we can try again but she's happy and the man loves her I should stop thinking that she won't be happy with her that maybe one day he will abuse her because that is not always the case when we break up

with people we love. We hope for so many things to go wrong but we shouldn't think that just because we hope for it to happen it will actually happen, Noncedo might get her happy ever after with that guy.

I wake up in the morning and alert the Principal that I can't come to work because I am not feeling good.

I go join my family for breakfast, my brothers are already leaving for work.

Me: I'm not going in today.

Lethu: That's understandable you've been through a lot for the last 24 hours.

I nod and start eating.

Niko: Sbanisethu.

Me: mmm.

Niko: What's wrong? Esami is okay.

Me: Nothing, why?

Niko: We grew up together, I know every single one of you like I know myself.

Me: What's wrong with me?

Niko: What do you mean?

Me: Is it the punishment I am getting for all those years playing with women's, Noncedo is getting married again and shit hurts.

She hold my hand.

Niko: Maybe she met her soulmate Sbani and yours is still out there, you know the saying that you gotta kiss a lot of frogs before we meet your prince, well in your case a princess.

Me: Lethu was your frog?

She laughs throwing her head back.

Precious: I know you're not calling my man a frog Sbanisethu!

She shouts coming in.

Me: Why are you eavesdropping?

Niko is still in tears with laughter, Precious joins in.

Precious: But he was once my frog as well, nasty as hell!

I laugh, my phone rings it's Sonwa.

Me: Hello.

Sonwa: I heard you didn't go to work I am outside.

I drop the call and walk out, he is really here. He step out of the car and we shoulder hug.

Sonwa: You look better than yesterday.

Me: Yeah Esami is back home.

Sonwa: Nkosazana told me, that's better.

I nod.

Sonwa: Yesterday I thought you are dying man, shit was scary.

We lean on his car.

Me: I'm not going anywhere anytime soon, you are stuck with me bro.

He chuckles.

Sonwa: Thabsie almost died, she is scared of a lot of blood like it's a some sort of an animal.

Me: Eish...I have to apologize for scaring her.

Sonwa: She understands that you were sick.

Me: Did you know that Noncedo is getting married again.

Sonwa: No.

Me: She is engaged and he looks like a good man.

Sonwa: That's cool it's better now that she has found her parents she won't bother me with negotiations.

Me: You don't want to be part of it?

Sonwa: No I'm good.

I nod.

Sonwa: How do you feel about that?

Me: I mean, it still hurts but I will live.

Sonwa: I'm sure you will find a woman suited for you one day, she was not it, I don't like her for you.

Me: Yes dad.

We laugh.

Me: Thank you for coming to see me.

Sonwa: You're on for drinks tonight? My wife will be with me.

Me: Sure so I can hold a candle for you.

He laughs.

Sonwa: See you then.

He drives out.

- We are already at the club with just Sonwa, he says Nkosazana is coming. I left Esami with Thabsie's parents since they are back. We agreed that I will sleep over at Sonwabile's place.

We order drinks and sit at the VIP section. I see Nkosazana walking in with a lady, she was at her wedding and I know she is a doctor.

We hug them and order their drinks. Sonwa and Zana sit together and ask the girl to sit next to me. I am looking at Sonwa I see what is going on and I don't like it.

I finish my beer and get up walking out. I go to the shops and buy a cigarette I only smoke when I'm drinking.

Sonwa stand next to me.

Me: So you are setting up amaBlind dates now?

Sonwa: What are you talking about?

Me: That girl?

Sonwa: Okay you got me, my wife and I thought you guys will get along.

Me: Because I am not capable of finding a woman?

Sonwa: No it's not like that I..

I walk back in leaving him there. He comes in and sit next to his wife I can see them talking with their eyes.

Me: I am calling it a night, see you around.

Zana: But it's still early.

Me: I just want to take my daughter and go home.

I walk out and drive to his place. I knock on the door, Thabsie opens the door.

Thabsie: Hi.

Me: I came to fetch Esami.

Thabsie: Oh ok, she is in my room.

I walk in and take my daughter, she is sleeping. I buckle her up. Thabsie walk out with her bag.

Me: Thank you.

I take the bag and put it in my car.

Me: Goodnight.

Thabsie: Goodnight.

I hug her for a while then step back when I see lights, Sonwa has just pulled up.

Thabsie walk in while Sonwa comes and stand in front of me. He is staring at me for too long for comfort.

Sonwa: Angifuni ukuxabana nawe.(I don't wanna fight with you)

Me: Ukhuluma ngani?(What are you talking about?)

Sonwa: Ingane leya(that is a child) and if you ever think about messing with her I will forget that you're my friend and break every single bone in your body.

Me: It was just an innocent hug, if you don't want me to get along with her you should have told me not accuse me of shit, you think I don't see that she is a child?

I chuckle as he doesn't answer.

Me: And stop setting up stupid dates for me I am more than capable of finding a girl.

I walk away.

Sonwa: Sbani..

Me: Voetsek!

I drive home, I don't know why I am angry I know they were just trying to cheer me up and the Thabsie issue I can see she is a child but I guess I should not even greet her because

Sonwa will get suspicious of me I don't even know why he is my friend if he doesn't trust me around his sister.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 76

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SBANISETHU

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Sonwa and I haven't been talking for two days now it feels like the whole week because he has been like a brother to me we don't go a day without talking to each other.

It's Sunday and I am in my room bored and lonely I hear a light knock on my door.

Me: Come in.

The door opens and Sonwa walk in then stand by the door.

Sonwa: Hi.

Me: Sure.

Sonwa: We are taking the kids out, can I take Esami?

Me: Yes you can.

Sonwa: I'm sorry if it seemed like I am accusing you of....

Me: You were accusing me.

Sonwa: I'm sorry.

Me: Ok.

He walk out. After a few minutes there is another knock I just keep quiet I'm really not in the mood. A door opens I look up, it's Noncedo looks like her beauty is on another level ever since we broke up, she is also gaining weight I guess she really is happy more than she has ever been. I sit up looking at her.

Ncedo: Hey.

She waves her left hand, the ring is very noticeable.

Me: Hi.

Ncedo: I thought I could take Esami out but Sonwa beat me to it.

Me: Sorry I didn't know.

Ncedo: I guess I should have called.

I nod.

Ncedo: I'll take her on Wednesday I will be off at work.

Me: Ok.

Ncedo: Thanks, bye.

Me: Bye.

She walk to the door.

Me: Noncedo.

She turns.

Me: He makes you happy?

Ncedo: More than ever and he makes me his number one priority something you failed to do.

That hurts, I guess I didn't appreciate her more.

Me: I'm sorry for everything Noncedo, I'm really sorry.

Ncedo: I'm over it really, I am leaving the past behind Sbani.

I go to her and hold her hand looking into her eyes hoping I see that girl who loved me wholeheartedly and I saw right through her but I don't see it anymore.

Me: Ngiyakucela.(I'm begging you) just give me another chance.

Ncedo: I don't love you anymore, I love Sakhe and he loves me.

I try to kiss her but she push me back and slap me.

Ncedo: I'm over you Sbani, you're not all that anymore, I'm not one of your hoes.

Me: But I stopped Noncedo I left everything for you, everything!

Ncedo: But you and your family are toxic and if you don't change you will raise the kids just as toxic as all of you!

She shouts then storms out.

I sit down and wipe my face, everything that she said got me thinking, I shouldn't act like the whole world revolves around me so I take my phone and call Sonwa.

Sonwa: Sure boy.

Me: Send location I'm on my way.

I drop the call and wear my best clothes, those that make the ladies go crazy then put on some cologne I look and smell good.

I check my phone the location is there so I go to my car and drive out. I find them having fun

with all the kids it's a hotel with a pool so they booked it. Esami runs to me and we hug.

Me: You missed daddy huh.

Esami: Yes!

I go to Sonwa and sit next to him.

Me: Hi.

Sonwa: Are you good?

Me: Yeah...I'm sorry about earlier I acted like a brat.

Sonwa: Its okay I was wrong to accuse you of having a thing for Thabsie.

Me: I promise from now on I will stay away from her.

Sonwa: What? But she is always around I didn't mean to s...

I shake my head.

Me: Its okay I get it.

I look at Thabsie she is sitting with the twins, they love her a lot.

Later we take the kids home and go to bed.

The week goes on smoothly, if I'm not at school I am hanging out with my brothers but mostly Sonwabile.

Today it's Thabsie's 16th birthday but we are not going, I heard Sonwa and Nkosazana are going to the village to help Bab'Khumalo deliver the veggies to the big markets they are in demand, so Thabsie will be with her friends but they left Qhawekazi to go and check on them from time to time because there is a lot of under age pupils so they need monitoring, Nkosazana made sure there is non alcoholic beverages but knowing school kids they might bring alcohol there.

I am busy marking scripts of my students Qhawekazi walk in.

Kazi: please accompany me to go check on those kids, I don't trust them at all!

I laugh.

Me: Come on what's the worst that could do?

Kazi: Get drunk and vandalize my sister's property.

Me: That's not the worst, she can replace everything.

Kazi: Sbanisethu!

Me: Okay! I'm coming Geez.

I walk behind her.

Me: Let me carry you on my back.

She quickly turns and jump on my back, I laugh taking her to the car then drive to the place, we can hear noise all the way from the gate.

We walk in and they all go quiet I can see some of them are trying to hide alcohol but I already saw it. I look around and spot Thabsie sitting next to Quinton, she is wearing a tiara and a pink dress with sparkles.

Me: Thabsile.

She get up and come to us.

Me: Are you drinking?

She shakes her head.

Thabsie: I don't drink.

She is avoiding my eyes.

Me: What about your friends?

She keeps quiet looking down.

Kazi: Hey! Every single one of you who has alcohol stashed somewhere bring it here right now!

She shouts standing on top of the chair, trust my sister to bring in some drama in everything.

They start taking alcohol from every corner of the room looking embarrassed as hell I am their teacher after all.

Once we are done there are so many bottles of vodka than Ciders and wine.

Kazi: Nizidakwa mos!(You're drunkards!)

I want to laugh at the way she is staring at all of them but they have to know this is wrong.

Me: Most of you are underage and it's a party of a sixteen year old! If you thought this party was too dull for you without alcohol then you

should have stayed at home, if the cops would get here you would put owners of this house in trouble man, Vodka really!?

They are looking down because I am shouting.

Thabsie: I'm sorry sir please don't tell Bhuti and Sisi they will be mad at me.

Kazi: I don't lie to my sister baby.

Thabsie: Ngiyaxolisa.(I'm sorry)

Tears stream down her cheeks immediately, I feel bad this is her party she shouldn't be crying.

Me: Look there is fun without alcohol, let me show you.

I take them to the backyard and start the braai, Qhawekazi put on some music they start dancing doing some challenges.

It's now an awesome party they are all having fun even Thabsie but Quinton is all over her but at least she is her age mate.

Kazi and I go back inside and sit on the couch.

Kazi: Teenagers are a handful!

She says fanning herself dramatically. Just then we hear a scream we run outside, Thabsie is in a pool and looks like she doesn't even know how to swim she is literally drowning, I jump in and pull her up, I step out with her she is holding me for dear life. Every one is just standing there.

Kazi: What happened?

They all keep quiet, she walk back inside fuming. I look at Thabsie she is shaking as she is hiding her face on my chest. Kazi comes back with a stick, I shake my head.

Kazi: I asked what happened, if no one answers ngizoqala la ngiyophuma ngale kowokgcina(I will start here and stop with the last one of you)

She says pointing at them.

Kazi: Quinton!

She shouts everyone jumps in fright.

Quinton: I'm sorry miss, Pearl pushed her into the pool.

Kazi: And what the hell for?

He looks down.

Quinton: She is my girlfriend and she didn't like that I am close to Thabsile.

Thabsie push me away and run inside.

Me: You almost caused a tragic accident, what if she drowned and died here?

Pearl: I'm sorry I was angry.

Kazi: That doesn't justify shit! Bro how do you deal with all of this almost everyday! I would kill them!

I chuckle.

Me: The party is over let me call your transport to pick you up.

I walk inside and call the transport then alert the parents that they are on their way, that's the party of a teen, it's hard you should make sure they get home safe.

Kazi is with a crying Thabsie in her room, her first party turned out really bad. I change into Sonwabile's clothes then go take her present in my car and walk back in, Kazi is now cleaning while drinking the kids' alcohol.

Me: Really!?

Kazi: what! I'm old i am allowed to drink and I can't throw this away!

I shake my head.

Me: So you are keeping it for yourself.

Kazi: The night is still young you can join Me!

I laugh.

Me: I will definitely join you now.

I walk in to Thabsie sitting in bed with a towel wrapped around her body, her hair is wet falling on her back, I sit next to her.

Me: How are you feeling?

Thabsie: I want to go back to my previous school! They weren't this mean to me there!

Me: But not everyone is mean here only pearl and I am sure it was a mistake she will apologize trust me.

Thabsie: I don't want her to apologize I want to go back home!

She shouts covering her face.

Me: Hey.

I turn her head to face me.

Me: You don't have to run away Every time something wrong happens, sometimes you have to stand your ground and face it, you are young you have many memories you are still going to build for yourself.

I wipe her tears, innocent child she is.

Me: Here.

I give her the present, she opens it then gasp staring at it.

Me: I talked to your parents and brother first about buying this gift they agreed but you will

be monitored because we don't want you slacking at school.

Thabsie: This phone looks expensive!

Me: I know.

She giggles.

Thabsie: Thank you so much I promise it won't affect my school work.

Me: It better not.

She keeps turning it around I guess she likes it.

Me: More presents are coming with your family tomorrow.

Thabsie: Thank you I even forgot that I fell in the pool and almost drowned.

I laugh.

Me: You forgot while saying it.

Thabsie: Well....

We laugh.

Me: Are you joining us with cleaning the house?

Thabsie: Yes but I'm scared of auntie Qhawekazi.

Me: Oh that one is like a dog with no teeth, all bark no bite!

Kazi: Oh is that how you describe me Sbani!?

Thabsie is laughing.

We all go and clean while Thabsie is busy laughing at Kazi's dry jokes.

Kazi: Do you remember our party when we turned sixteen bro.

Me: No.

Kazi: I was the heart and soul of that party bro I danced the whole night everybody was watching me.

And girl can dance! Nkosazana is just lazy to dance but Qhawekazi! They took it from Langa.

Kazi: I broke it down baby!

Thabsie is in stitches.

Me: You were a handful though.

Kazi: I know that's why everyone wanted to hang out with me i was just amazing.

Me: I said handful.

Kazi: Doesn't matter, I choose to be positive.

Thabsie: How do you always stay so happy auntie Qhawekazi?

Kazi: I don't let people's actions get to me, I decide what I want for myself and that is happiness.

Thabsie: When did you start having a boyfriend?

I choke on the drink and start coughing.

Me: At 21! She started having a boyfriend at 21.

Kazi looks at me, I nod, I know she started having a boyfriend way before that but Thabsie doesn't have to know that, it wasn't a serious thing anyway.

Kazi: Yeah I had my first boyfriend at 21, why? Do you like someone?

She starts blushing.

Thabsie: No.

Kazi: Then why are you blushing?

Thabsie: I'm not.

Me: What about Quinton?

Thabsie: He is my friend.

I nod, the honesty and innocence in her face.

We finish eating then she goes to bed, we sleep in the other rooms.

In the morning I wake up to a smell of bacon and eggs. I take a shower then wear my pants only. In the kitchen there is Thabsie setting up the table.

Me: Morning.

Thabsie: Oh hi, I was just about to call you and sis..

Kazi walk in looking like she has been hit by a train.

Kazi: Aaah!

She screams holding her head I laugh.

Me: That's what happens when you drink alcohol meant for the kids.

Kazi: You are not funny?

I look at Thabsie.

Me: Never drink alcohol neh, it makes you look like her.

Kazi: Fuck you!

We laugh at her then start eating.

Me: Thank you for breakfast Thabsie.

Thabsie: Thank you I like my first phone ever.

Me: Cool.

The door opens and the family walk in.

Zana: Hello everyone, why is it so clean? Was there even a party here?

Kazi: Oh there was a party alright!

Thabsie is looking down playing with her hands.

Zana: Nothing went wrong right?

Kazi: Nothing, nothing at all we just joined the party it was fun.

Zana: Good.

Sonwa: Did you have fun?

Thabsie: Yes Bhuti I did.

She says in a low tone.

Me: I am leaving now, bye everyone.

Kazi: Yeah me too.

We go back home, I go straight to bed and fall asleep immediately.

Months go by, we are busy with the final exams everyone needs help and I always want my class to have outstanding marks so I make sure we take extra classes after school, just an hour for revision. I want to keep busy all the time because I am stressed Noncedo is getting married the first week of December which is in two weeks, I have accepted it but I don't have to like it but she did invite me and Sonwa is also invited so we will go together.

- I am standing at the entrance of the well decorated hall where Noncedo is getting married, I get flashbacks of our wedding day, when she was looking at me saying I am her forever but I guess forever ends here.

I go to where Sonwa is sitting and sit next to him.

Sonwa: You good?

Me: Yeah.

He nods, The groom walk in and stand at the alter. All the bridesmaid and groomsman follow.

Slow music starts playing we all get up, I turn to look at where she is standing with her dad, she looks beautiful her dress suits her, our eyes lock then she looks at the alter, in my mind I have this hope that she will realise that she made a mistake but she just smiles and walk down the isle.

Me: I'm leaving.

Sonwa: But..

Me: I can't stand this.

I walk out going to my car.

Sonwa: Sbani.

I look at him.

Sonwa: It will take time but trust me you will move on and find your own happiness.

I just get in my car and drive off in speed taking a route to the palace, I need to see grandma Ziyanda.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 77

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THABSILE

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My life took a very sharp turn the day I found a man laying on the side of the stream barely alive. I found a brother I never had, a week of his recovery we bonded and it felt like we had known each other our entire life, he didn't know who he was but he still had a good heart you could tell with the way he communicated.

I was always afraid that one day he will remember who he is and leave us, my parents found a son they've always wished for. From a village to a suburb he took us with him and he gave me a life I never thought I would have, I go to the best school, I choose what I want to wear right from the shops I recently had a party though it didn't end well but it was special to me because it was my very first birthday party. Sonwa and his wife are amazing people I love them so much.

We are writing our last exam of the year today and it's Life Sciences exam, Mr Gumede has

been moving around the room like he is the one about to write an exam.

Sbani: You're all good right? No one needs me to explain anything?

Quinton: Sir the exam starts in 30 minutes, it's over now.

The class start laughing as he nods his head.

Sbani: You're right, I've done my part boy so good luck all of you.

He walk out, I collect my books and run out following him.

Me: Sorry sir.

He turns looking at me, there is something he does with his eyebrows that makes me a bit scared of him, he raise them then furrow them together.

Me: I...I need help with this.

He stares at me.

Me: Sorry I know it's already too late but maybe I can understand this.

I show him my textbook he takes it for a while then start explaining it to me very slow.

Sbani: You get it now?

I smile.

Me: Yes sir thank you so much.

He nods still looking at me.

Me: Uhm you can go.

I laugh looking at him, he seems confused by something.

Sbani: Yeah sure.

He walk away I go to my corner and relax trying to remind myself everything I studied, the siren starts ringing we all go to our separate exam rooms.

We start writing and I am very confident as I continue writing.

After my exam I go to Mr Gumede's office to get my phone, I had it with me today because auntie Qhawekazi is the one who will fetch me from school since both Auntie Zana and Bhuti

Sonwa are working. I knock he shouts that I should come in. I open the door then sit down opposite him, he raise his eyebrow I look down.

Sbani: You're done already?

Me: Yes and auntie Kazi said I should call her immediately once I am done so she can take me out for shopping.

Sbani: Woah kumnandi ukuba noAuntie.(It's nice to have an aunt)

I smile.

Sbani: Here is your phone.

He hand it to me.

Me: Thank you, I usually leave it at home it was just today.

He nods.

Sbani: You don't have to explain, me and you had a deal that it won't affect your school work and I trust you.

Me: Thank you.

I get up and walk to the door.

Sbani: Thabsile.

I turn to look at him.

Sbani: Uhm it's that time of the month, you didn't know?

I look at him confused then realise what he means, I look at my skirt it's dirty, I feel like crying I'm so embarrassed I am standing still.

He get up and walk up to me.

Sbani: Relax, this is normal.

Me: I...I...I want...

Sbani: I will call Qhawekazi to get you something to change, for now you can use the staff's bathroom, come let's go.

He takes me to the bathroom then walk out, I look around I didn't know there are showers here. I take off my clothes. It's not my first periods but they usually come around the 1st of every month but now it came out of

nowhere in the middle of the month, I guess my circle is changing.

I hear a knock as I am still showering, I keep quiet.

"Baby it's me open up". That's auntie Kazi's voice.

I slowly open the door.

Kazi: Oh my baby I heard what happened, auntie is here okay.

I just cry.

Me: I'm so embarrassed auntie.

Kazi: Why? This is natural and only Sbani saw it, we grew up with him he knows these things.

I nod but I'm still not okay. I change into my tracksuits I guess she went to the house to get them.

We go back to Mr Gumede's office, I sit down keeping my eyes on the floor.

Sbani: Thabsile.

Me: Sir.

Sbani: That happens to most women out there don't feel embarrassed, even the one sitting next to you it happened.

Kazi: Why am I the reference here?

Sbani: Am I lying?

Kazi: No but you didn't have to make me an example.

He shrug his shoulders.

Kazi: We are going to paint the town red baby!

She looks at me once then burst in laughter.

Sbani: Don't start.

I know she wants to make fun of me.

Kazi: I didn't mean it literally.

Sbani: I hate your jokes sis they are really not funny.

Kazi: Ok I'm sorry.

We get going and she takes me to town and make me choose a lot of clothes, she pays then we go to eat good food, she teaches me

how to eat with a fork and knife then we go home.

She drop me off at home after buying a lot of junk food and dinner because I am home alone for now since she is rushing to meet someone.

There is a knock on the door Mr Gumede walk in carrying Esami.

Esami: Thasie!

She shouts stepping down from her dad and runs to my arms, she calls me Thasie so adorable.

Me: Hey Sami.

I kiss her all over her face, she is giggling so loud.

Me: Uhm Sir you can sit down.

He take a seat looking at me and Esami, he has a frown on his face I'm afraid to ask if he is okay.

Sbani: Uhm are you okay?

Me: Yes thank you for earlier.

Sbani: Its okay, you don't feel any pain?

I shake my head.

Sbani: That's good, I am here to see Sonwa he will be here soon.

I just keep playing with Esami until she look tired, I let her sleep on my lap I brush her hair. Sbani is now drinking beer.

Me: Sir.

Sbani: Mmm?

Me: Can I ask you a personal question?

Sbani: Sure.

Me: Uhm will you ever get married again?

He stares at me I feel like slapping myself for asking that I don't even know why I asked I guess I am just curious.

I am saved by the door opening, Sonwa walk in and they shoulder hug happily.

Sonwa: Man I haven't seen you in days!

Sbani: You missed Me?

They laugh shoulder hugging once again, they have so much love for each other it's not something you see everyday men showing genuine love for each other.

Sbani: I was stressed about the exams you'd swear I was the one writing.

Sonwa laughs, they continue to drink while watching the sport channel. I go put Esami in my bed then go to the kitchen to cook.

The noise in the lounge Sbani and Sonwa are making can tear the roof up. I dish up for them then sit down scrolling down my phone, Sonwa's phone rings.

Sonwa: That's my wife I have to take it.

He answer it walking out. I look up and Sbani is staring at me.

Me: Uh...uhm...I'm so sorry for asking you that question I know it's none of my business.

Sbani: And you are just a child, what do you know about marriage wena?

I gasp, the sound of his voice is too hostile first time hearing him speak that way.

Me: I'm sorry sir I won't..I won't ever do it again.

Sonwa comes back rushing to take his keys.

Sonwa: My wife has a flat tyre I'm fetching her at work, ngiyabuya bro.(I'm coming bro)

He rush out, leaving us in awkward silence.

Esami walk in rubbing her eyes, I get up to take her but her dad picks her up first I step back.

Sbani: You can take her.

I take her and go to stay in the kitchen feeding her.

Sbani: Sorry about earlier, I shouldn't have answered you so rudely.

I nod.

Sbani: You are good with her.

I don't say anything.

Sbani: Thabsile.

Esami: It's Thasie daddy..

Her dad laughs, I feel like something is moving down my spine I don't know what is.

Sbani: Ok Thasie la Sami please forgive me.

Me: I forgive you, please forgive me for being forward.

Sbani: I forgive you.

I go to bed with Esami, her dad said he will fetch her in the morning I bet he is meeting a lady somewhere that's why he left her.

Weeks flew by, we are already past the results stage and I passed with flying colours every one is proud of me especially mom and dad, Christmas we had s very big Christmas dinner at auntie Zana's house it was amazing.

It's been an amazing year filled with a lot of unexpected things in my life now we are turning a new page I am doing my matric now and I am happy to be here making those who believes in me proud.

It's my first day as a matric student I am walking tall as I am now a senior student and it feels so good.

I walk in at the gate and see sir Sbani's car driving in then he step out of the car coming towards me.

Me: Morning sir.

Sbani: Morning Thabsile.

He walk away just like that, I just go to my class and clean my new desk.

We don't do much since it's the first day then we go to a lunch break but I am called to the office, when I get there aunt Nkosazana is here with both Sir Gumede, Letho and Sbani.

Me: Hey Auntie, hello sir.

They greet back.

Zana: I came to see my brothers about something but I couldn't leave without seeing your pretty face, do you have lunch money?

I smile widely.

Me: Yes mom gave me this morning.

Zana: Ok great.

Me: But I wouldn't mind if you give me more you know.

Letho and Zana laugh but Sbani is keeping a straight face staring at the screen of his computer.

She gives me twenty rands then walk out with Letho. I get up from my seat to leave as well.

Sbani: Sit down.

I quickly sit looking at him, I wasn't expecting him to talk.

Sbani: I'm glad I am not teaching you this year.

Me: Oh..uhm...

I don't know where that is coming from, maybe I am a bad student.

Me: But I passed very well sir.

Sbani: Its not about that.

I get up.

Me: I have to go the lunch break is almost over.

He get up and walk up to me.

Sbani: I will stay away from you from now on and only God knows until when.

I look at him confused, he take something out of his pocket, it's in a box. He opens it and take out a necklace it has a little gold lock, it's beautiful.

Sbani: I want you to have this.

He loosen my tie then put the necklace on, he fix my tie again.

Sbani: Go, and good luck, Candidate.

He says with a smile that doesn't even reach his eyes, I walk out going to class my head is spinning from all the confusion. What was he talking about when he said he will stay away. And what is the necklace for. I have never been so confused in my life.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 78

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SBANISETHU

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I am sitting in my office thinking about my life, I guess I will spend the rest of my life single.

I just got a warning from my ancestors it felt like I am sleeping then a cheetah was standing there staring at me, I saw Nkosiyabo behind it, I know what it means I get what it meant. I slowly collect my things and walk to my car driving home. Nkosiyabo is the next in line to be king after Phiwokuhle, he is brother Manqoba's son.

I get home and go to my room, I open the drawer and take out a necklace it has a gold key. I look at it for a while then go to Nkosiyabo's room, I knock and walk in I find him sitting in bed looking down at his phone, he is topless the boy is lifting weights and already has a tattoo that covers his whole arm, it's a cheetah.

Me: Hey boy.

Nkosi: Baba, how are you?

He calls me and my brothers baba even though we are just a few years apart.

Me: I'm good.

He has this calm aura around him, and he is quiet most of the time, he is dark skinned but look exactly like his grandpa King Ntsika.

Nkosi: I can feel you're not okay.

Me: No, I'm fine I came to give you this.

I give him the necklace, he takes it staring at it.

Nkosi: This feels like dejavu, like you have already given me this necklace.

I chuckle.

Me: It's new, I got it a few days back.

Nkosi: Thank you baba.

He get up and put it on.

Me: Sure.

I walk out and go back to my room. When I walk in I see something shinning under my bed, I kneel to take it it's another necklace with a key but it's a bit bigger than the one I gave to Nkosiyabo just now. I am so confused staring at it. I sigh and put it in my drawer.

I spend weeks going to school then going straight home.

I just came back from school I receive a call from Sonwa.

Me: Bro.

Sonwa: Ukuphi?(where are you?)

Me: I'm at home.

Sonwa: Are you good? I haven't seen you in a while.

Me: I'm fine just busy.

I am actually avoiding going to his house just like I'm avoiding seeing Thabsie at school.

Sonwa: Sbani.

Me: Yeah

Sonwa: We are best friends right?

Me: Ja.

Sonwa: We tell each other everything?

I sigh wiping sweat on my nose.

Sonwa: Ok it's fine if you don't want to talk to me.

He drops the call, I sigh and change my clothes then go to my car driving to his work place. I greet my sister first then go on site to see Sonwa, he is sitting down, on his phone.

Me: Hi.

He turns looking at me then look back on his phone.

Me: Uhm...Unjani?(How are you?)

Sonwa: Fine.

I nod looking around.

Me: When are you knocking off?

He get up.

Sonwa: I'm going home now.

Me: Ok we will talk when we get there.

He walks away to his car, I go to mine and drive behind him.

We get to the house and walk in, Thabsie is sitting on the couch with books in front of her, the necklace is still on her neck.

Sonwa: Hey little one.

She get up smiling and hug her brother then sit back down.

Thabsie: Hello sir.

Me: Hi.

We sit down after getting beers Thabsie go to her room.

Sonwa: So What's up? Why are you avoiding Me?

Me: I'm not avoiding you I'm just going through something.

Sonwa: You don't want to talk about it?

Me: It's me being single for this long, having feelings for someone who is not meant for me.

Sonwa: Uhm do I know her?

I slowly shake my head.

Me: I guess I will grow old alone.

Sonwa: I don't understand you Sbani, you've never had a problem with girls before what is going on now.

Me: I don't wanna play no games now, I want someone who will love and respect me I want someone who will help raise my daughter.

Sonwa: How will you find her when you don't even wanna go on dates? How do you even know that the girl is not meant for you?

Me: I got the message from my ancestors and it hurts man but it was so wrong, she is too young.

He stares at me for a while.

Sonwa: You are talking about Thabsie Sbanisethu?

I shake my head.

Me: No..no..I'm not.

Sonwa: Ungenza islima..(you're making me a fool) you've been seeing a girlfriend in a child all this time while I thought you are like a big brother to her! That's why you've been avoiding coming here.

Me: Its..it's not like that Sonwa, and I didn't even entertain it that should count for something.

Sonwa: Count for something wamasimba!

Me: Come on I'm sorry, I still see a child in Thabsie, I wouldn't do anything to ruin our friendship you are like a brother to me.

He shakes his head

Me: Ngiyaxolisa.(I'm sorry).

Sonwa: Just get out.

Me: See why I didn't want to talk to you? You are judgemental like you've never made any mistakes in your life!

I grab my car keys and walk out, I was talking to him as a friend not a judge!

I drive home, I just want to get out of town and go far away these coming holidays.

The holidays are here I am packing my bags and my daughter's clothes then take the necklace I found under my bed. I look at it for some time then put it on my neck. I take Esami and say goodbye to everyone. I drive out, we are just taking a short trip going to a resort just outside of Durban. It's just me and my daughter.

We get to a very beautiful resort there are palm trees all around and a beach, Esami is clapping hands looking happy.

Me: We are going to have a great time here baby.

Esami: Yeeey!!!

She screams throwing her hands in the air.

We walk in she is walking right in front of me I have bags in both hands.

Me: Don't run baby you gonna fall.

Esami: Okay! Okay!

She starts walking slow, very slow she is cheeky.

Me: Esamisipho!

I shout.

Esami: Daddy..

She give me the puppy eyes I sigh shaking my head. We check in and go to our room. There is a single bed and a double bed. I order food for us, we eat then go to bed

I am sleeping facing up while touching a necklace on my neck.

In the morning I wake up first and take a shower then ask for an outdoor picnic for my daughter and I. I bath her and make her wear a dress and a summer hat.

I carry her to where our picnic is set, we sit down and she starts stuffing herself with everything on the basket.

Me: Slow down baby you gonna choke.

Esami: I won't.

Me: Ave unenkani.(you're so stubborn)

We eat I drink a bit of wine, some lady comes to us and try to play with Esami but she ignores her and continue to eat.

"You have a beautiful daughter".

Me: Thank you.

"Is her mom inside?"

I am really not in the mood just like Esami, I just pack up everything and take my daughter walking away leaving her standing there.

Me: Do you want to go for a swim?

Esami: Yes daddy.

I change her into a swimwear and I swear my short. We walk out there are pools for adults and the other one for kids, there are two couples and their kids are swimming, one the kids who look older run to me and ask to take Esami, she agrees and they go to the pool with her. She is having fun screaming her lungs out I'm just busy with my phone but still keeping my eyes on her.

A group of girls in bikinis walk up to the adults pool, they are so loud. They start swimming but the other one is just standing next to it watching as others swim. I am posting my baby's pictures.

I look at the girls as they come out of the pool then one of them push the one who was

standing outside so hard she falls inside the pool then she moves up once and move under the water once again, they are laughing at her. I squint my eyes looking at the pool she is drowning and none of them sees it, they all think it's a joke. I jump inside the pool and grab her, I push her out first then step out as well, she is unconscious. Everyone is now quiet my daughter is crying next to me.

I quickly perform a CPR on her she is not waking up, my mind is filled with the day of the party when Thabsie almost drowned.

I do it over and over again she finally coughs out water opening her eyes. I look at her neck there is a necklace looking exactly like the one I gave to Thabsie just a little bigger.

Me: Are you okay?

She nods, her lips are pink, small eyes and very light skinned with a lot of hair, she even have a side burns. She is shaking.

I help her up then take my crying daughter calming her down.

Me: Daddy is fine don't cry.

I look at the girl who pushed the other one.

Me: Why did you push her?

"I didn't know she can't swim, I was just playing, I'm so sorry Khwezi".

Even the hotel management is here now checking if Khwezi is okay. I go to my room and bath my baby, I feed her then put her to bed.

There is a knock on the door, I open the door I blink looking at this beautiful woman standing in front of me, she is holding her bag.

"Hello" she says in a very sweet voice she look shy, my eyes move to that necklace again.

"I asked your room number from the management so I can come and say thank you for saving me I literally saw my life flashing before my eyes".

I nod still staring at this necklace.

"Oh uhm my name is Khwezilokusa Nkosi".

I shake her hand.

Me: Sbanisethu Gumede.

Khwezi: Thank you again sir.

I nod.

Esami: Daddy.

She says behind me rubbing her eyes, Khwezi look down at her smiling.

Khwezi: This is your daughter?

Me: Yes.

She stretches her hand to Esami, they shake hands.

Khwezi: I'm Khwezi.

Esami: My name is Esamisipho ka Sbani.

I chuckle.

Khwezi: Nice to meet you.

Me: Uhm..where did you get that necklace?

She touch it.

Khwezi: I found it back home.

I nod.

Me: Ok.

Khwezi: Bye, thank you once again.

Me: Bye.

She turns walking out a scarf falls, it was entangled on her bag. I pick it up and walk in my room closing the door.

I go back to bed with my daughter holding Me, she is my first love.

At night I dream of the exact necklace that is on that girl's neck, I wake up and stand at the balcony looking down. I see her sitting right next to a pool there is a bottle next to her it's late but there are lights all over the place. I wear my shorts and walk out.

Me: Hey.

She turns looking at me.

Khwezi: Hi.

I sit next to her, it's a bottle of wine she is holding a glass on her hands.

Me: If I were you I would be scared of the pool.

She giggles.

Khwezi: I'm alone no one is going to push me.

Me: Was that your friend?

Khwezi: Yes, we came here to celebrate my 21st birthday.

Me: Oh..happy birthday.

She smiles.

Khwezi: Thank you.

She pours wine then hand a glass to me.

Me: No I'm good I left my daughter inside I should go.

She nods.

Khwezi: Her mom didn't join y'all?

I chuckle.

Me: No, she's with her husband.

She clears her throat.

Khwezi: Oh..sorry.

I get up.

Me: Uhm oh earlier you dropped your scarf it's in my room.

Khwezi: I didn't realise I will fetch it in the morning.

Me: Ok cool.

I go back to my daughter, she snuggle close to me, I kiss her forehead.

Me: I love you Sami.

Esami: Daddy..

She says in a low voice her eyes are closed.

Me: Sleep baby.

In the morning I am packing my bags when I hear a knock on the door, it's Khwezi wearing a white dress.

Khwezi: Sanibonani.(Greetings)

Me: Hey..you can come in.

She walk in and go sit in bed next to where Esami is sleeping.

Khwezi: How old is she?

Me: Turning 4 years in two months.

She nods.

Khwezi: She looks just like you.

Me: I made her with my eyes opened.

She laughs shaking her head. I give her the scarf. She get up fixing her dress, she is too hairy her thighs and legs that can turn any man on right there.

Khwezi: It was nice meeting you sir, goodbye I see that you are packing.

Me: Yeah our little holiday is over.

She nods and walk out closing the door.

I drive back home with my daughter singing her lungs out behind me, she is always happy.

I get home and baba is sitting in the lounge.

Me: King.

Ntsika: Sbanisethu I'm glad you're back, I haven't been seeing much of you lately.

Me: Yeah I've been busy.

Ntsika: I am invited to umemulo(traditional Zulu coming of age ceremony) of one of my friend's daughter tomorrow and I would like you to come with me, we haven't spent time together in a while.

Me: Oh ok I will definitely come with you, I love seeing pretty women!

He laughs shaking his head.

Me: Wake me up tomorrow sir.

I walk away to my room then take off my t-shirt then the necklace putting it back to the drawer.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 79

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SBANISETHU

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Ntsika and I are wearing traditional attires that we wore at Nkosazana's traditional wedding. We are on our way to this Memulo he was invited to so I am his "plus one". He is then one driving.

Ntsika: I am glad that we got this chance so we can talk.

I nod.

Ntsika: How have you been?

Me: Lonely, the only thing that actually matters to me right now is Esami but I have nothing else going on, all I do is go to work then go back home, nothing about my life is exciting.

He sighs.

Ntsika: I'm sorry we didn't try harder to get Noncedo back.

Me: I'm over that baba, I'm just worried about my friendship with Sonwa, we had a fall out recently and it's not looking good he might not want to ever see me again.

Ntsika: Come on, that boy has been like a brother to you, he genuinely cares about you I'm sure you guys can fix whatever happened between you too.

Me: I hope so.

He nods looking at his watch.

Ntsika: We still have time, I hate being late you know, now everyone is looking at my hot ass pretty face, no I don't like that.

I burst in laughter.

Me: What!?

Ntsika: I don't age look at me, thank God for Ziyanda's good genes man!

It's been a while since I had such a great laugh.

We get to where the ceremony is, there is a huge stretch tent a big house with a lot of rondavels. It's packed people are moving around the whole yard.

We step out of the car I can see people turning to look at us especially women and I love the attention.

Ntsika: See what I meant, everybody is looking at me.

Me: They are actually looking at me dad.

We chuckle walking inside the tent, a man his age comes to us, he is also in a tailored traditional attire. They shoulder hug with dad then hand shake me.

Ntsika: Nkosi, this is my son Sbanisethu, Sbani this is my good old friend from the hospital I once worked in Mr Lunga Nkosi.

Me: Nice meeting you sir.

Nkosi: Likewise, come this way I have reserved a special place for you King.

Dad chuckles.

Nkosi: I knew you were destined for great, being King of Kings suits you.

Ntsika: Thank you.

There is a huge white chair that is meant for dad right in the front row, I sit next to him.

Me: You are a VIP mos.

Ntsika: I know and it feels so damn good!

I laugh.

Me: You love attention.

Ntsika: who doesn't?

We hear girls singing the Zulu traditional song we all get up to see, one girl is covered in blanket while others are singing next to her only in their grass-reed beads made as skirts and they all have short hair very beautiful young girls. They go to the hut then after a few minutes we hear women ululating there is so much noise as the father Mr Nkosi is doing a traditional Zulu dance right outside the hut

clearly happy. The girls come out they remove the blanket from her, she is looking down wearing white beaded skirt, their breasts are all out, they are virgins after all and this is a beautiful tradition. Her head is covered in cow fat(umhlehlwe).

She starts a song in a very low voice the other girls sing with her they all walk in the tent singing and dancing I am fascinated I still haven't seen her face. She has a spear in her hand, she starts another song then dance going to her father, she plants a spear on the ground then go back to the other girl to kneel, her dad get up dancing as well and pin a lot of money in the cow fat in her head. She does this to a lot of people even Dad who get up happily to pin more money around her head. I am stunned when she plants the spear right in front of me still looking down, I look at dad he has this grin on his face. She walks away to kneel then starts a new song, I slowly get up taking a few hundred rands notes on my

pocket then pin all of them in her head. I go and sit down, my heart is racing I don't know why. Most of the other parts of the ceremony they do it on their own in the hut.

The rest of the money is put in a basket because there was a lot of it, there wasn't much space to pin it. They do a Zulu traditional dance which is led by the girl herself she does it so purely and perfectly it's amazing man I am in awe!

They finally walk away now it's time to have food and drinks, my dad and I are moved inside to a well decorated table and he has his seat again.

Me: Okay I have to say I am jealous of the way these people treat you, it's like this was your ceremony!

He laughs sitting down, I am next to him once again. Nkosi walk in with a girl she is still not wearing anything on her upper body but she has removed the money in her head. The man is clearly proud of his daughter.

Nkosi: King!

He shouts smiling holding his daughter's hand who is forever looking down. Dad get up.

Nkosi: I want you to meet my daughter Khwezilokusa.

I have heard the name before, it rings in my head. She has two (iziphandla) goat skins around her wrists.

She shakes hands with dad then they hug.

Ntsika: I'm proud of you for the respect you have given to your parents and to yourself, this was a beautiful ceremony.

Khwezi: Thank you King Ntsika I heard a lot about you.

Ntsika: Only good things I hope.

She giggles.

Khwezi: Yes of course.

Oh so she can talk.

Ntsika: Meet my son Sbanisethu Gumede.

She look up our eyes lock, oh damn even short hair looks way better on her because the last time I saw her she had long hair.

I give her my hand, she shakes it a little.

Nkosi: Uh...

Khwezi: We've already met once, remember the guy I told you about who saved me from drowning.

Her dad looks at me and shake my hand.

Nkosi: Oh she told me about that, thank you, she knows nothing about swimming I tried swimming classes but it didn't work.

I chuckle.

Me: Maybe one day she will learn how to swim.

They sit with us even the mother joins in she is just as beautiful. My dad is boasting about me being a teacher from the age of twenty one and Mr Nkosi is also talking about his daughter

who recently graduated and already got offers overseas.

They leave us at the table alone once they are done eating. We are awkwardly quiet now she is just keeping her eyes down, I notice that she still has her necklace on.

Me: Your necklace is beautiful.

She touch it a little then laugh.

Khwezi: This was supposed to be given to me today by mom and dad but I found it in my room first and wore it I don't know how, and he even lost the key, I guess the old man is getting old.

I nod as I feel mine on my neck.

Me: So you are going overseas?

Khwezi: Well...I am still thinking about it leaving home is not easy.

Me: Yeah I know.

Khwezi: and I still have a whole month to think about it.

Me: That's good, you will get time to say goodbye to your senseless friends.

She laughs really hard.

Khwezi: Don't be that guy.

Me: Well I am still angry at how that girl pushed you, it was malicious.

Khwezi: No it wasn't she was just playing.

Me: If you say so.

Khwezi: So how is little Esamisipho ka Sbani.

I chuckle she remembers how my daughter introduced herself.

Me: She is fine, she wanted to come with us here.

Khwezi: You should have come with her I would have loved to see her again.

Me: Oh no that one is a handful.

Khwezi: I'm sure she's not that bad.

Me: She is very bad, she has mood swings.

She giggles.

Khwezi: Who taught her to introduce herself like that?

Me: I did, these days kids go missing very easily so I am teaching her to be able to tell people who she is so it can be easy to find me or home.

Khwezi: That's clever.

Me: I know, I am that guy you know.

She laughs.

Khwezi: You're funny.

Me: I was supposed to be along side Trevor Noah but life happened.

She laughs she even have tears in her eyes.

She wipe them then look at me. Mr Nkosi walk in.

Nkosi: Hey other men are drinking traditional beer outside you should join us.

Me: Me?

Nkosi: Of course you.

Me: Oh thank you sir but I'll pass.

He laughs walking out again.

Khwezi: I will get you a beer.

She get up and walk away, you can visible see the butt cheeks on the beaded skirt. She comes back wearing a short dress holding a bucket full of beers with ice.

Me: Thank you nkosazana. (Princess)

She smiles looking down, I take a beer, she also look through the bucket and come back with a cider, she was hiding it under the beer.

I look at her she just shakes her head.

Me: What?

Khwezi: Don't say a word.

She pours it in a glass then immediately throws away the bottle.

Me: You're naughty.

Khwezi: I'm old now so this is it!

I raise my bottle.

Me: To you Khwezilokusa.

Khwezi: To me.

We click our glasses then drink. We hear noise and girls walk in, I notice that most of them are the friends she was with the day I first met her even the friend who pushed her but she is wearing a dress and not traditional attires like others.

"Oh hello". The girls leader says I believe she is called iqhikiza judging from the way her beads are different from the others.

Khwezi: Oh hey guys.

They sit with us.

Khwezi: Meet Iqhikiza lezintombi, her name is Nomusa, this one is Khanyisa and...

I don't get other names I am not rude but I am really not interested in knowing their names I only got the leaders name and the girl who pushed her into the pool who is now sitting next to me.

Nomusa: Iphi into yethu?(where is our thing?)

She says to Khwezi who get up and walk away.

Nomusa: You are the guy who saved her from drowning? I didn't know you knew each other.

I chuckle sipping on my beer.

Khanyisa: I know him, he is with the famous King Ntsika.

"Woah the one who usually is with a cheetah in his interviews? Oh now I recognise him the four guys who all look the same". One of the girls keep talking which make them end up wanting to take pictures with me so much to my annoyance. Khwezi comes back and they are all over me i am looking for a way to get out politely so.

Khwezi: Uhm guys give him some space to breathe come on.

She walks in with a bucket full of drinks again

Now guys are walking in, one of them kiss her cheek but she wipes it annoyed.

"I hope now you will give it up".

Khwezi: Give what up?

"The cookie, or ants will have a feast once you die" they laugh but I don't find it funny and so is Khwezi who looks so irritated.

"At some point kuzomele usinike ukudla kwamajita"(you have to give us guys' food)

Khanyisa: True friend it's been long over due.

There talks the girl that annoys the hell out of me.

Nomusa: Kahle wena owaphoxa abazali.(You disappointed your parents)

She keeps quiet immediately. I get up.

Me: Khwezi I'm going to check on dad.

She get up as well.

Khwezi: Let me come with you.

The guy who was talking a lot slap her butt she turns and slap him so hard, when she wants to do it again I walk around the table and hold her from behind.

"Ugcwele amasimba wena Khwezi" (you are full of shit Khwezi" he is getting up coming at her but I hold Khwezi next to Me, there is so much noise, Nkosi and dad rush in Khwezi is now crying.

Nkosi: Kwenzakalani la?(What is going on?)
Khwezi why are you crying?

Khwezi: uDelani baba he is still doing what he has been doing to me since I was young.

Her dad is fuming, he starts punching this Delani and use a stick he had in his hand to beat him up, his friends run out. I walk out with dad.

Ntsika: Ruining such a beautiful day, that boy has no respect. I hope that beautiful girl find the right guy who will treat her like a princess she is.

He is tipsy I can tell from the way he is talking.

Ntsika: Let's say our goodbyes I don't want to get drunk my wife will kill me.

I chuckle. Nkosi walk out with his daughter and dad ask to talk to him while I talk to Khwezi.

Me: Are you okay?

Khwezi: I'm angry.

She says giggling wiping her remaining tears.

Me: Yeah I saw that slap, I don't ever want to get you angry.

She smiles looking away.

Me: So you stay here full time?

Khwezi: No, we only came back for the ceremony, but it hasn't been long since we moved to Durban, I was studying at Fort Hare.

Me: Oh I hope we will get to meet again.

Khwezi: Yeah sure, I would like to wine and dine with royalty.

I chuckle raising my eyebrow she look at me then look away smiling.

Me: Well this royalty is asking for your number, please.

Khwezi: I will call it out for you.

I take out my phone and give it to her instead, she punch it.

Khwezi: Your daughter is cute.

Me: Thank you.

She is my lock screen.

Khwezi: Nihambe Kahle.(travel well) and thank you for coming it was nice meeting you again.

Me: Usale kahle Khwezilokusa.(stay well)

I hug her briefly because his dad and mine is close by.

I walk to the car.

Ntsika: You are driving boy.

I drive us back home.

Ntsika: Can you believe that all the paintings in that house are Khwezilokusa's paintings.

Me: What do you mean?

Ntsika: She started painting from a very young age, and she studied fine Art and also she is left handed. Fascinating right?

I am definitely fascinated.

Me: Wow I saw the paintings I thought it was Picasso paintings.

Ntsika: Nop, it's all Khwezi. Her signature KN right next to a star.

I nod.

Me: I didn't really pay much attention.

Ntsika: Pay attention, the girl is doing the Lord's work!

I laugh really hard.

Me: Baba..

All the way home I am laughing, the man is crazy worse now that he drank a bit.

When we get home I take my daughter and go to my room.

I take my phone and call Sonwa but it rings and go on voicemail, maybe he is busy so I call Khwezi.

Khwezi: Hello.

Me: Miss Nkosi.

Khwezi: Uhm.. hi..

Me: You are speaking to Sbanisethu.

Khwezi: Oh hey Sbani.

Me: Yeah, I just got home.

Khwezi: Nihambe Kahle?(did you travel safe?)

Me: Yeah we did thank you.

Khwezi: That's great.

Me: When are you coming this side?

Khwezi: In three day, kusamele ngiwashe lamabhodwe amakhulu cabanga. (I still have to wash big pots imagine)

Me: I'm sure your mom will help you.

Khwezi: Yeah she will but still...

Me: I will call you later ok.

Khwezi: Ok.

I drop the call and sleep in bed next to my adorable daughter.

Later I call Khwezi we talk briefly then say goodnight.

The next day I am driving to Sonwa's house I know he is off. I knock, he opens holding Sphehlehle in his arms.

Me: Hello.

I take Sphe from him and walk in. We sit on the couch.

Me: Where is Lelo?

Sonwa: He is taking a nap.

I nod.

Sonwa: I heard you went on a holiday.

Me: Yeah I just needed some time alone with my daughter.

He nods.

Sonwa: You're okay now?

Me: A little.

Sonwa: Look I was wrong, I apologise for judging you.

Me: Can we not go back and just move on please.

He nods.

Sonwa: I'm not really a good friend right?

Me: You are a good friend.

He nods.

Sonwa: You are glowing I guess the holiday did you good.

I smile.

Me: Yes it did man, yes it did.

Sonwa: You are smiling, what's up?

Me: I'm just happy we're talking that's all.

He nods looking at me suspiciously I just laugh going to the kitchen to get a beer.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 80

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SBANISETHU

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I am meeting with Khwezi for dinner today, she just came back today so I asked to take her out late.

I have made a reservation, table for two at one of the classy restaurants in Umhlanga so I call her.

Khwezi: Hello.

Me: Hey I am about to leave the house now, should I pick you up or?

Khwezi: No just send me the address I will drive there.

Me: Ok.

I send the address then fix my shirt. I am wearing black formal pants and a white shirt. I wear my watch then take my keys walking out. I get to the restaurant first and order juice only while waiting for Khwezi.

After a few minutes I look at the entrance and there she is standing there looking around, she is wearing a black dress just above her knees it's strapless.

I get up and walk up to her holding her hand.

Me: Hey, this way miss.

She smiles as we walk to our table, I pull a chair for her, we sit and a waiter is already here, she orders juice too then look through the menu.

Me: Can I just say that you look breathtaking my lady.

Khwezi: Thank you, you look dapper yourself.

Me: Thank you, so what are we having?

Khwezi: Can you order for me please.

I raise my eyebrow, she smiles then close the menu putting at the table then sip on her juice.

I call the waiter and order for us, we wait for our meal while having a flowing conversation.

Me: So I heard you are a left handed artist, now that's not something you don't see everyday.

She giggles.

Khwezi: You'd be suprised with what I do with this hand.

I squint my eyes, that just took me to some place else.

Khwezi: Uhm...

I think I have been staring at her for a while I clear my throat taking the drink.

The waiter comes with our food, I feed her first then wipe the side of her lips.

Me: Is it good? So if it's not we will order something else.

Khwezi: It tastes amazing.

We eat for a while then my phone rings, I take it.

Me: Sonwa.

Sonwa: We are taking Esami, she is sleeping over.

Me: Oh..

Sonwa: Yeah we are at your house I thought I will find you here.

Me: We will talk tomorrow.

Sonwa: Sure.

I drop the call.

Me: sorry about that, that's my friend Sonwa telling me they are taking Esami for a sleep over.

Khwezi: Oh okay. So she stays with you full time?

Me: Yes, izingane zakithi azihlali komunye umuzi ngaphandle kwasekhaya.(our kids don't stay in another place other than our home.)

Khwezi: How?

Me: They get sick, her mom once tried to take her away, she did get full custody in court but my ancestors said were like naaa!

Khwezi: That's hectic.

Me: I know.

She shifts on her seat a bit.

Khwezi: Why did you break up with a person who gave you such a beautiful baby girl.

Me: Well uhm..it was complicated. I demanded respect even when I was wrong, when she expressed herself I took it as being disrespectful, basically I was in the wrong.

Khwezi: Oh wow, so admit you were wrong? Now that's not something you see everyday, usually there is always a blame game.

Me: I keep it real.

Khwezi: Didn't it affect your baby?

Me: She was young but I know it did, she had to adjust into going back and forth from me to her mom but she is getting used to it.

She nods.

Me: So, do you have someone?

Khwezi: Not really, my last relationship was a year ago.

Me: Why did you guys break up?

She takes a deep breath.

Me: Uhm it's okay if you don't wanna talk about it.

Khwezi: He tried raping me 6 months in a relationship while I told him I am planning to reach my 21st birthday as a virgin.

Me: Oh sorry that must have been traumatic for you.

Khwezi: It was, I was so scared he almost killed me but I was saved by Nomusa, she came home that day and found him on top of me, she hit him with a vase and called the cops.

I nod.

Me: I'm so sorry.

Khwezi: It's okay I went for counselling.

Me: That's good.

She orders some desert while I ask for a beer.

Her phone rings, she clears her throat
answering it.

Khwezi: Hello.

....

Khwezi: But you said next month!

....

She sighs and put down her phone.

Me: Is everything okay?

Khwezi: Now they are putting me in a lot of
pressure, I have only a week to decide if I am
taking the offer to go work overseas.

Me: What do you want?

Khwezi: I want my art work to be out there, I want to make a name for myself and I can only do that if I swim with the big fish.

I nod.

Me: So you don't believe in yourself much huh?

Khwezi: I do.

Me: You think you need that person more than he needs you? But it's the other way around that is why they are calling you none stop.

She sighs looking sad.

Khwezi: I'm so confused, I wish dad was here I need his advice right now.

Me: Where is he?

Khwezi: They will come back tomorrow.

I nod.

Me: You can call him though.

Khwezi: I will call him when I get home.

I pay the bill then we walk out.

Me: I will drive behind you to make sure you get home safe.

She nods and go to her car, I drive behind her to her house. The gate slides open we drive in and step out of the car.

I pull her to my chest hugging her, she step back after a while and look up at me.

Khwezi: It's still early do you wanna have a drink or two?

Me: Yeah sure why not.

We walk inside the beautiful house, it has paintings all around the lounge. I look at them i can see a star and a signature KN.

Me: You painted all of this?

She nods taking off her shoes.

Me: I don't believe you.

She giggles and grab a bottle of vodka and two glasses she gives them to me then grab a juice.

Khwezi: This way.

We walk down the passage, she opens one of the rooms.

Khwezi: This is the room I use as my studio.

It has everything an artist that paints needs.

Khwezi: You want proof that I did all of this.

Me: Oh yeah I do.

She takes off her necklace.

Khwezi: Give me something you have in you.

I take off my necklace, she put them down and stare at them for a while, okay for a long time then she goes to her board and put some paint in front of her, she is sitting down.

She take is using her left hand with only a grey pain. I am staring at the painting confused she is too quiet.

Khwezi: Pour yourself a drink, this might take a while.

I do just that and sit while looking at her painting. I slowly get up and go to where she put our necklaces, she is painting them exactly

the way they are positioned. Then she draw a star then KN. I am stunned.

She get up standing in front of me with a grin on her face.

Khwezi: You look constipated.

I pull her waist and kiss her, the minute she kiss me back I pick her up, she wrap her hands around my neck her legs are on my waist. She breaks the kiss and step down from me.

She is moving her eyes around the room.

Me: I think I just orgasmed right here.

She laughs, I wanted to break the awkward moment.

Me: That is beautiful I wasn't expecting it at all.

Khwezi: Thank you.

I take one necklace and turn her around putting it on but I realise that it's my key. She touches it.

Khwezi: I think I like this one better, ngicela ungiphe yona. (Please give it to me)

Me: You can have it.

I turn her around again and kiss her pinning her on the wall, my blood is getting hot. Her dress rolled up to her waist my hands are on her butt.

I kiss her neck pulling down her dress, her boobs are out. I lick one after the other then back to her lips.

Khwezi: We should stop.

She says still kissing me.

Me: Yeah we should.

She doesn't break the kiss and I don't want to do it either.

Khwezi: Sbani..stop.

Me: But you are still kissing me baby.

All this time we are speaking while kissing, I am so hard. She finally breaks the kiss. We are breathing heavily her eyes are different.

Me: Your kiss is good..shit.

Khwezi: Move away.

I put her down moving away from her, she fix her dress and pour vodka in her glass and drink it all up with no dash.

Me: Woah that was hot.

She giggles.

We go back to the lounge and continue drinking while watching music videos on TV.

Me: So you don't have siblings?

Khwezi: No, it's just me.

I nod.

Me: Well, I have a lot.

We drink the whole bottle.

Me: I think we need to stop now.

Khwezi: I guess we should.

I get up to take my keys.

Khwezi: You're not thinking about driving home right now right?

I look at her.

Khwezi: You will use a guest room, come.

She hold my hand taking me to a room.

Khwezi: You can sleep here.

I take off my shoes and my t-shirt while she moves all the bed covers. I sleep in bed and pull her on top of me.

Me: Let's sleep here, we won't do anything.

Khwezi: Ok.

She take off her dress leaving only her white lace panty.

Me: Mmmh.

She get in next to me.

Me: Did you really have to get in naked?

Khwezi: But I'm wearing a panty.

Me: Same shit really..

She giggles facing the other way.

I try to sleep as well while trying to get my guy to sleep.

I wake up in the morning and she is still next to me. I go to the bathroom and pee. I wash my face then go back to bed. She moves and open her eyes.

Khwezi: Hi.

Me: Hey.

She get out of bed and walk to the bathroom I cuss under my breath, that ass!

She comes back and just stand there, her pointy tits, damn.

Khwezi: How much did we drink last night?

I just shake my head, she is not afraid of walking around naked at all.

Me: I have to get going.

Khwezi: Oh ok.

She walk out then come back wearing a gown. I wear my t-shirt and shoes. She walk me to my car.

Me: I had a great time, we should do this again.

Khwezi: Yeah sure.

We hug then I get in my car and drive home. I am in a good mood whistling.

Ntsika: Hheeyi!

I am startled by dad coming around his car I didn't see him there.

Me: Don't do that, you almost gave me a heart attack!

Ntsika: You didn't sleep home.

Me: Ay baba I'm old.

Ntsika: I didn't ask you.

Me: Weee...

I go to my room and take a shower, I feel so alive.

Once I'm done I drive to town and get breakfast for Sonwa and his family then drive to his place.

We shoulder hug then I hug my sister kissing her cheek, I fist bump the twins then pick my daughter up hugging her.

Me: Hey baby.

Esami: Hey daddy.

I put her down then briefly hug Thabsie then give her my car keys..

Me: I got breakfast for everyone.

She get breakfast then dish up with Nkosazana. We eat breakfast.

Sonwa: You look unusually happy.

Me: I'm not supposed to be happy?

He chuckles.

Sonwa: You know what I mean.

I just laugh.

Sonwa: We are going out for lunch right so Thabsie and my wife won't cook today.

Me: I'm in.

Zana: Thanks for breakfast Bhuti.

Lunch time we are already seated at the table in a restaurant waiting for our food.

I feel some eyes on me, I look up and see Khwezi with a gay guy and another girl, she is standing staring at me then she slowly go to the table and sit down her friends follow her. Her eyes are still on me.

Me: Excuse me.

I get up and go to them.

Me: Hello.

The gay guy greet back dramatically I chuckle.

Me: Hey.

Khwezi: Hi.

She seems off.

Me: Khwezi.

She look at me for a while then look down again.

Esami hold my hand, she followed me.

Khwezi: Hey Esamisipho.

Esami: Hey.

She says waving.

Me: Can we talk outside please.

She nods and we follow each other out.

Me: What's wrong? We were okay this morning and now you seem angry.

Khwezi: Aren't you on a double date?

Me: a double date?

I chuckle when I realise what she means.

Me: No, that's my sister, her husband and the little sister.

Khwezi: Oh..

Me: Yini?(What is it?)

Khwezi: I thought you are on a date so I didn't want to ruin it.

I laugh.

Me: Come on, let me go introduce you to my sister.

Khwezi: Why?

Me: Because I want to.

We walk in, she stands next to me looking shy.

Me: Uhm guys this is Khwezilokusa, Khwezi this is my sister Nkosazana, my best friend Sonwabile and Thabsile, and these are my boys Sphesihle and Lelo.

Sonwa has this wide smile on his face getting up and handshake Khwezi.

Khwezi: Nice to meet you.

Sonwa: Nice to meet you too Khwezi.

He says looking at me I want to slap that ridiculous grin off his face.

Khwezi: I have to go I am with my friends.

Nkosazana nods smiling as well. She walks away.

Sonwa: Mmmh what was that?

Me: What was what?

I ask taking a seat.

Zana: That girl is pretty damn!

I smile.

Sonwa: She really is, right Sbani.

Me: Fuck off wena!

We go back home, I immediately call Khwezi.

Khwezi: Hello.

Me: Can we meet for a few minutes.

Khwezi: You can come over so you can help me pack.

Me: Pack?

Khwezi: Yeah.

I take my keys and drive to her house. I knock on the door she comes to open in her shorts and a tank top.

Me: Hey.

I hug her kissing her cheek then we walk in. She get me a juice and we proceed to her room. There are bags and clothes everywhere.

Me: What is going on?

Khwezi: I have decided that I don't want to miss this opportunity, this is a big deal to me and dad told me to follow your heart.

Me: What are you saying?

Khwezi: I'm taking that offer of joining the great artists overseas.

Me: Oh..

I sit down looking at her.

Khwezi: This is a huge exposure, I won't ever get this opportunity again, it's a once in a life time opportunity.

I scratch my head.

Me: Is this what you really want?

Khwezi: Yes.

I nod and get up putting her juice down.

Me: Good luck have a nice trip. I'm going home goodnight.

Khwezi: You are leaving now?

Me: Yeah.

Khwezi: But you just got here Sbani.

I walk out going to my car.

Khwezi: Sbani.

I turn looking at her, she is standing by the door.

Khwezi: What's wrong?

I walk up to her and stand in front of her.

Me: I thought we could try things out and see if it will work.

Khwezi: Uhm...

Me: But I don't want to hold you back, I don't want you to drop everything just for umjolo(dating) that might not even work out. This is more important to you than the guy you just met a few seconds ago.

I sigh.

Me: I thought maybe this is finally it, that maybe you will be the one clearly I was wrong but it's all good, I'm used to being alone anyways.

She is looking down.

Me: Bye Khwezi, again good luck.

I get into my car and take off her necklace on my neck then drive home. I can't really say I am in love with her because it's been a few days but there was just something about her that draws me closer to her, but that is not enough to make her stay, she hardly even knows me.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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KHWEZILOKUSA

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I am sitting in my room looking at my bags, I am done packing now my head is filled with Sbani's words, he wanted to try things out

with me? He is very charming and soft spoken any woman can fall in love with him. I need to do this for myself I always dreamed about going overseas meeting different artists and probably even see the great Picasso's studio.

I started painting when I was four years old but it was messy then, I was still in creche but one day I walked inside the class alone while others were playing, I remember the first thing I painted was a bird that I saw earlier sitting at the window. When everyone came back to class the matrons were shocked to see me with paint all over me but most of all they were shocked to see what I had painted and I have been drawing since then.

My dad brought paints and boards for me when I was 8 years old I spent a little time with friends and most of my time alone in a room where my dad had set out to be my little studio.

I remove the bags from my bed then sleep on my tummy calling Sbani, he answers on the third ring.

Sbani: Hello.

Me: Hey.

Silence, I don't know why I even called him.

Sbani: Khwezi.

Me: Yeah.

Sbani: What's up?

I don't say anything, I hear him sigh.

Sbani: When are you leaving?

Me: Tomorrow night.

Sbani: Ok, I'm happy for you.

Me: Will you come to say goodbye?

Sbani: I'd rather not.

Me: Oh..ok.

Sbani: Khwezi you don't understand. I don't want to hurt myself okay, you are leaving and

seeing you will make this harder than it already is.

Me: Ok Uhm what if I call them and postpone for next week?

Sbani: That is just the same shit Khwezi don't you get it!

He shouts I just drop the call and pull the covers closing my eyes.

I hear a buzz at the gate I wake up and check the car, I rub my eyes when I see that it's Sbani's car, I open the gate going back to bed. I hear him come in, I just keep my eyes closed.

Sbani: I'm sorry for shouting at you over the phone.

I open my eyes looking at him, I move over he sit down facing the other way.

Sbani: I can see you're done packing.

He says with a chuckle.

Sbani: You wanted me to come and say goodbye?

I sit up.

Sbani: Well then Goodbye Khwezi and I hope this works out for you.

He turns looking at me with a little smile on his face.

Sbani: Uzoziphatha Kahle angithi?(You will behave right).

My heart melts, there is nothing charming than a Zulu man speaking pure deep isiZulu.

Me: Ngizoziphatha Kahle.(I will behave)

He nods and get up.

Me: Uhm I was about to cook, would you like to stay over for dinner?

He look down then nod a little. We go to the kitchen he sit on a barstool looking down the whole time while I get busy with cooking. I leave my pots and stand in front of him holding his hand, he looks at me.

Me: Why are you so sad?

Sbani: Because I think I know what this is.

I look at him confused.

Sbani: I am being punished, I was a bad boy I played with a lot of girl's feelings and when I got married I tossed them like trash, so that is why I can't find love again.

He chuckles removing his hand from mine.

Sbani: But I promise, given a chance I won't ever mess up again.

I can feel sincerity in his tone. I look at my paintings all around the house and look down, I feel tears in my eyes then they fall. He walks around and stand in front of me wiping them.

Sbani: I didn't mean to do this to you, I'm not trying to stand in your way.

Me: I just need one year, just a year to get my name out there.

He huffs.

Sbani: Ok.

I dish up for us and we sit opposite each other, he is not eating just staring at his plate.

Sbani: You are not the one.

He says after a while then look at me with cold eyes.

Sbani: I'm not even in love with you so you can go do whatever I don't give a fuck.

Me: Sbani..

Sbani: You were just another girl on a hit list.

Me: What?

Sbani: You're just pretty but definitely not my type.

I gasp a little, he get up and walk out leaving me in tears.

Mom and dad walk in while I'm sitting on the couch crying.

Nkosi: Khwezi lam.

I quickly wipe my tears and hug him and mom who kiss me all over my face.

Me: Mama.

Mama: I missed you.

Me: I missed you too.

Nkosi: Why are your eyes red were you crying?

Me: Uhm no I...Uhm...I had a blocked nose and I used Vicks it kind of..like ...got into my eyes.

I am stuttering.

Nkosi: Ok.

Dad orders dinner then I go to my room, I am asking myself whether I should call Sbani and give him a piece of my mind or not.

I just call him..

Sbani: Mmmh..

He answers like he is asleep.

Me: Who do you think you are?

Sbani: Ey Khwezi I don't have time for this.

He drops the call, I call him again.

Sbani: Yhooo.

Me: I'm sorry.

Sbani: For what?

Me: Irritating you, whatever made you angry.

Silence.

Me: You wanted to kill my self-esteem and it worked.

I wipe one tear that has fallen.

Me: I was just another one on a hit list, you wanted to use me.

Sbani: I..

Me: I heard you loud and clear.

I drop the call and sleep. My phone rings the whole night I end up switching it off.

In the morning I go to my studio and sit in front of a board but my mind is blank. Rash and every paint in front of me has personality of it's own it depends on whether I'm happy, calm or sad. I use dark colours when I'm sad then colourful when I'm calm and happy. I start painting with my eyes closed. I stay for over 3 hours there. I hear the door opening

and the cologne is familiar I don't turn but just look at the painting.

Sbani: Your dad said I will find you here.

I nod.

Sbani: Ngizoxolisa. (I'm here to apologize)

I carry on painting.

Sbani: Look..Khwezi I didn't mean what I said, I just wanted to make myself feel better but I was hurting you instead.

He huffs.

Sbani: I'm not that kind of guy I promise, I don't bash women.

I remove the board of my painting then put a clean one. I continue painting, I feel his hands on my shoulders then on my eyes.

Sbani: Please don't cry.

I continue painting with my shaky hand as he is still standing quietly behind me his hands are on my shoulders. I can see his face as I close

my eyes. After some time I let go of the paint brush and open my eyes.

Sbani: Wow...what...

Sounds like he is out of words.

Me: This has been my life from when I was a kid and if someone I hardly even know ask me to choose I will definitely choose this.

He stands next to me staring at the painting.

Sbani: It's like I'm looking at the mirror, Khwezi this is..how can you draw a painting of me so perfectly.

Me: It lives in me. You made me angry but when I close my eyes I see you.

He sighs and pull me up not minding I have paint in my hands.

Sbani: Ngicela ungixolele. (Please forgive me)

I shake my head.

Me: It doesn't matter really, I'm not your type anyway.

Sbani: I have feelings for you.

His soft lips touch mine, I kiss him back. I have never been kissed like this before, he sure knows how to kiss.

Sbani: I won't ask you to stay I just want to give this a try please even when you will be miles away I will wait.

I look at him, I can see desperation in his eyes.

Me: You will?

Sbani: I don't have a choice Khwezi, I strongly believe you're the one. Give me a chance.

I nod.

He give me a very deep kiss filled with so much emotions.

Sbani: How long will you be gone?

Me: They are giving me a five year contract, I haven't signed anything yet.

He nods looking down.

Sbani: Ok.

My dad walk in, I step back from Sbani and put back my paintings where they are.

Nkosi: Prince, I hope you are joining us for dinner my wife prepared it.

Sbani: Oh..uhm ok.

We go sit at the table with mom and dad and start eating.

Mama: So Sbani you are single right?

Sbani: Yes ma'am.

Mama: Mmmmh..

I look at her she is smiling looking at dad who also has this ridiculous smile on his face. They ask him a lot of questions about his work, previous relationship and a lot of things.

Me: I really feel like you are asking him personal questions.

Nkosi: But he is your friend we want to get to know him on a personal level.

Me: Ok dad.

After dinner I walk him out. We stand next to his car.

Sbani: Who is taking you to the airport tomorrow?

Me: Mom and dad.

He nods.

Sbani: So uhm this is goodbye?

I nod.

He hugs me then peck my lips. He get in his car and drive out. I just stand there looking at his car driving away then slowly walk in.

Nkosi: I saw you and Sbani kissing.

I look down scared.

Nkosi: He seems like a good guy, is he okay with you leaving?

Me: He doesn't want to stand in the way of my dreams.

He nods.

Nkosi: Come here.

He hold my hand, we sit on the couch.

Nkosi: What is the arrangement between you two?

Me: He said he will wait for me.

Nkosi: And you think that's possible?

I look at him.

Me: If he doesn't wait then that's okay but I won't give up my dream for him.

He nods.

I go to my room and try to sleep but keep tossing and turning, I take my phone to text him.

Me: "Sbani".

He reads the text after a few minutes.

Sbani: " Baby, I want to hold you in my arms tonight, please give me that chance".

He replies, then I receive his call.

Me: Hello.

Sbani: Please baby just grant me this wish, I promise I will bring you back early tomorrow morning.

Me: But how..

Sbani: Sneak out, I will fetch you right now.

I giggle.

Me: What?

Sbani: I want to feel you breathe next to me, please.

His soft voice makes me smile.

Sbani: I am in my car now.

Me: Ok.

I wear my short gown I am only wearing a panty and a bra underneath, it's at night.

My phone rings I just use a back door to sneak out then walk out the gate getting in his car.

He just smiles and drive away. We stop in front of a huge house then he step out and open the door for me.

We walk in and I have never seen such a beautiful interior. We go to what I believe is his room everything is white. I guess everyone is sleeping.

Me: You have a nice home.

Sbani: Thank you, can I get you anything to drink?

Me: No I'm fine.

He takes off his t-shirt then his pants leaving only his briefs which makes his dick visible, I look away.

He get in bed and look at me.

Sbani: Come to bed baby.

I take off my gown and get in next to him, he hold me to his chest while I touch my padlock on his neck.

Sbani: This feels right to me Khwezi, you belong with me.

I look at his eyes, they are beautiful, I kiss him, he pulls me on top of him while our lips are still locked.

His hands are not my butt I am feeling things man, all tingle and hot. He flip us now he is on top of me. He is kissing my neck while taking off my bra. The minute his tongue comes in contact with my nipple I shake.

Me: Sbani..

Sbani: Yes baby..

He goes down to my belly button and pull up my legs, he is grazing my do it with his teeth over a panty.

Me: Ooh...

Now my panty is off and he is mouth is in there I am grabbing on the sheets then his head, my body vibrates I clench my jaws as he come back to my lips.

Sbani: Are you okay?

Me: No..

Sbani: Talk to me..

I'm so tempted to give it all up but in my head it's too soon, my feelings want it all.

Me: Can you make love to me?

He stares at me.

Sbani: No..

I pull him to me and kiss him.

Me: You don't want this?

Sbani: I do, I want you..

His eyes are too small now and he keep licking his lower lip, sexiest man I have ever laid my eyes on.

He get between my legs and lick my clit once again I feel so wet he get up and stroke his dick, it has veins and it's quiet big.

Sbani: Don't be scared I will be gentle, okay?

I nod, he rub my clit then I feel the tip in there I move up a little.

Sbani: I want you to relax for me, I don't want to hurt you.

He wrap my legs around his waist then push the tip in again.

Me: Aaah..Sb...

Sbani: I'm almost done Baby.

He kiss me then i feel like something is tearing my pussy apart I scream.

Me: Aaah..fuck...it hurts..

I cry.

Sbani: I'm sorry baby..you're okay...

He is sweating, he slowly moves I am just clenching my jaws trying not to scream. He moves faster for a while then groan holding my waist tight. His body is shaking as I feel his weight on top of me.

Sbani: Shit..

He slowly pull out and it hurts all over again..he kiss me.

Sbani: You don't regret this right?

Me: I don't but kubhlungu.(it's painful)

He takes me to the bathroom and tell me to pee.

Me: You were killing me Sbani with your thing, I can't even pee.

He laughs squatting in front of me.

Sbani: Thank you for trusting me with this.

Khwezi: Usazokhokha inkomo yaMa.(You will pay my mother's cow)

Sbani: I can even pay it tomorrow morning.

We both laugh but I keep flinching.

Sbani: Let me kiss it better.

I shake my head. He pick me up going to the shower with me.

Me: The pain is worse when I'm standing.

We shower while he keeps trying to soothe down there with cold water then we go back to his room. He change the bloody cover then we get in bed he is holding me too tight, he is quiet.

Me: Baby.

He smiles a little looking at me.

Sbani: I love you Khwezi.

That comes as a shock, I didn't expect him to say those words now.

Sbani: And I wasn't expecting you to give me your body and something you kept for this long.

Me: Well my dad gave me the key.

He shakes his head.

Sbani: I gave you the key to my heart.

I touch his necklace on my neck.

Sbani: I now understand why I found this necklace under my bed, I will give you my all Khwezi if you let me.

I sleep on his chest, no guy has ever talked to me this way I'm in love. He ask if he can make love to me again and I agree though it is still painful but I love how he is so gentle with me

and the sweet nothings he keeps whispering in my ear.

In the morning I feel a kiss then he shakes me.

Sbani: Baby..

I open my eyes.

Sbani: What time are you leaving?

Me: I'm not leaving.

Sbani: Khwezi..

I can see he thinks I'm still sleepy but I'm not. He is looking sad, he keep wiping his face, my pussy is still throbbing from last night and he is talking about leaving, he must be crazy.

Sbani: It's 6 o'clock now I have to take you home so you can check if everything is packed.

Me: I just said I'm not leaving Sbani.

I pull the cover over my head and close my eyes going back to sleep.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 82

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SBANISETHU

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I am looking at Khwezi she is sleeping peacefully next to me, I have been trying to wake her up for an hour now but she keeps telling me she is not leaving. I am tempted to stop waking her up so she could miss her flight but that won't be fair. I kiss her neck caressing her ass then put her leg around my waist, I slowly rub her clit I hear her moan a bit then opens her eyes I still can't believe she allowed me to take it all yesterday, she even allowed me to do it again.

Me: Baby..

Khwezi: Mhm mmm kusabhlungu.(it still hurts)

Me: Ngizokwenza kancane ngeke
ngikulimaze.(I will do it slow I won't hurt you)

She agrees and open her legs for Me, I make sure she is wet so it won't hurt much, she is holding me tight scratching my back It feels so good I am grabbing on the sheets as I give her fast few strokes, I cum hard then sleep next to her wiping my sweat, I don't remember the last time I had sex so you can imagine the energy I have and she is tight I am the one who opened it up so it's perfect.

Me: The parents are awake now.

She widens her eyes.

Me: And I have a huge family sneaking you out won't work.

Khwezi: So how am I going to leave?

Me: We will leave the way we came in.

She rolls her eyes.

Khwezi: By now mom and dad knows I didn't sleep home.

She sighs.

Me: When is your flight leaving Khwezi?

Khwezi: Later today for Johannesburg.

Me: Oh ok.

She looks at me for a while then I see tears in her eyes, I'm confused.

Me: Why are you crying?

Khwezi: I'm not leaving anymore.

Me: Baby..

She just sobs looking away.

Me: Why Khwezi?

Khwezi: I... it's you.

I pull her up and let her cry in my arms.

Me: I didn't mean to make you feel bad about leaving, this is a great opportunity I understand and I will wait for you like I promised I would.

Khwezi: Why would you wait? There are plenty of girls around.

Me: Because out of all those plenty girls my heart chose you, it chose only you.

She sleep on my chest.

Me: I don't want you to give up your dream for me, I don't want you to resent me tomorrow for it.

I wipe her tears then look deep into her eyes.

Me: It will hurt but you have to do this, I saw your work it's great you deserve this opportunity.

We kiss and I go to her weakness point which are her nipples, in this little time we've spent together I have studied her body like it's mine, I make love to her then hold her in my arms.

Khwezi: Mind, body and soul, I'm yours Sbani.

My heart skips a beat.

Me: I love you.

Khwezi: I love you too.

We take a shower together she is facing the other way while I wash her back. I step out of the shower first and get my t-shirt and sweatpants that I think can fit her, she can't walk out with a gown because anyone can see her here because I think they are all awake now. She comes out of the shower looking beautiful.

Me: You can try this on.

She wears my t-shirt and sweatpants, they are baggy but they suit her.

Me: You're beautiful.

Khwezi: Thank you.

She is down.

I take my keys and hold her hand. We walk out and I bump into all my moms in the kitchen then Ntsika, Nadia and Langa walk in as well.

The minute Ntsika's eyes lands on Khwezi he smiles. My baby is looking down I can feel her shaking.

Me: Hello.

Ntsika: maNkosi.

Khwezi: Yebo.

Me: We would love to stay and chat but we are in a rush, by the way this is Khwezi.

My moms try to ask me questions all at once but I'm already out the door holding Khwezi's hand.

I drive to her house and stop a few houses from her house.

Khwezi: You have a big family.

Me: You should see us all together, but I will formally introduce you to them one day.

She huffs looking up.

Me: It's okay.

We kiss for a while.

Me: Will I be able to see you before you go?

Khwezi: Yes.

Me: Thank you for last night, I feel like a man again.

She smiles a little then hug me unexpectedly, I hug her back and kiss her. She step out of the car and walk away wiping her tears. I sigh driving back home.

I just walked in the interrogation room I call home everyone's eyes are on me as I join them at the table. I don't know how many questions I have ignored ever since I stepped in the room.

We finish breakfast and I have been ignoring them ever since. I go to my room and pick up my dirty clothes going to the laundry room I take Khwezi's gown as well. I do my laundry dry it then go back to my room.

Someone knocks and Nkosiyabo walk in with his hands in his pockets.

Me: King.

Nkosi: Some people are here to see you.

I look at him confused.

Me: What people?

Nkosi: Dad asked you to come in the lounge.

I step in the lounge, the room has three angry women and Khwezi they are sitting on the floor, they even have little sticks on their hands. Ntsika is smiling sitting over there.

Ntsika: Sit here Sbani.

I sit next to him.

Ntsika: These woman are here demanding to know if you have entered the kraal.

I look at Khwezi, she is looking down on the floor, I love her and her family for keeping tradition this way.

Me: I did baba.

Ntsika: Are you sure?

Khwezi slowly look at me then down again, I get up going to my room then come back with the sheet we slept on. Khwezi's mom seems happy judging from the smile on her face. My dad gives them some money for "ukugeza

amazolo" which simply means because they came here early they are "covered in dew from the grass" so that money is a way of wiping them. They walk out after a few minutes they didn't even ask for tea.

I call Khwezi after a while I know she is home now.

Khwezi: Hello.

Me: Hey baby.

Khwezi: I came home to mom and granny waiting for Me, I don't even know when she got here but they checked my virginity and asked me who is responsible.

Me: That's okay I know this is how it is supposed to be done.

Khwezi: I realised that the minute you came back with the white sheet.

Me: Yeah uhm so..how will I see you before you leave?

Khwezi: Uhm...you can't..mom, dad and granny are taking me to the airport.

Me: Oh..ok that's fine.

Khwezi: Sorry.

I drop the call disappointed. Dad walk in and sit next to me.

Ntsika: You're the man.

I chuckle.

Ntsika: I'm proud of you, we raised a real man.

Me: Thank you dad.

Ntsika: Are you okay?

Me: She is leaving today.

Ntsika: Oh..for that job offer?

Me: Yes.

Ntsika: It must be hard, but you know you did a good thing by not stopping her because she was gonna end up resenting you for making her miss this opportunity, give her space to decide what she wants for herself.

I nod.

Ntsika:9 And don't feel like she is choosing her career over you, she is a young artist who loves what she do let her spread her wings and find herself, let her put her name out there then maybe one day she will come back to settle.

Me: I hear you dad, and thank you for this talk.

Ntsika: I am the bravest.

I chuckle.

Me: Yes you are.

His phone rings.

Ntsika: Nkosi....ok..ok.

He get up.

Ntsika: Nkosi is outside the gate, Khwezi wants to say goodbye.

I follow him out walking slowly behind him.

We greet Nkosi.

Nkosi: You raised your boy well Ntsika, my wife told me about this morning, all the anger I had vanished when she told me what this boy did.

He keeps talking to dad, I open the door for Khwezi she step out, she is still wearing my t-shirt and her jeans.

Me: So uhm this is it.

I say with a shaky chuckle.

Khwezi: We still gonna go home and take my bags.

I nod and hug her.

Me: Go put your name on the map baby, I will be here waiting.

She nods her eyes are teary.

Me: I love you so much, I would kiss you but I know the old men are looking at us.

She giggles.

Khwezi: They sure are.

Me: I love you.

Khwezi: I love you.

I hug her again then kiss her forehead. They get in the car and drive away. I just go straight to my room and sleep.

I wake up to Esami sitting on top of me.

Esami: Daddy.

I pull her to me tickling her.

Me: Hey.

She sleep next to me playing with my beard.

Me: How was the weekend with your mom?

Esami: We went to the beach with mom and dad and Lundi.

Lundi is Noncedo's husband's son.

Me: Ok.

I check my WhatsApp and go to Khwezi's status. She wrote my name Sbani and a heart. Then a picture of her with her dad at the airport.

Me: "Send me your picture".

I send a text and she replies with a lot of pictures.

Me: "I said a picture baby"

She sends laughing emojis.

Khwezi: "The flight is about to take off, I will call you when I land".

Me: "Ok I love you".

I put my phone down and sleep.

In the morning my phone keeps beeping, I take it wiping my eyes it's Khwezi.

Khwezi: "I can't do this Sbani"

"I am coming back home".

I call her immediately, she answers.

Me: Khwezi.

Khwezi: Yeah.

Me: What kind of boyfriend will I be if I don't push you to be great baby? Please don't give up on your dreams.

She sniffs.

Me: I promise you we will talk everyday, we will even Skype any time you want, I don't want to be the reason why you miss this chance.

Khwezi: Ok.

I am dying to tell her to come home but I don't want to be that guy.

Me: Ngiyakuthanda Khwezi.(I love you Khwezi)

She doesn't answer but drop the call instead. I just go to gym and lift some weights to get my mind off stressful things.

Two months later...

Khwezi is travelling the world with other famous artists, yesterday she was in Britain. We talk everyday and she send pictures every time she travels, I am falling in love with her deeply and it's scary because she loves what she does and she is happy there so maybe she won't be coming back anytime soon, she was

so happy when they took her to the famous Picasso's, I am happy for her.

I am wearing my shirt getting ready for work I feel a dizzy spell which makes me quickly sit down on my bed.

My phone rings it flashes "My morning star" because that's what she is to me.

Me: Baby.

Silence.

Me: Khwezi.

I hear moaning and groaning sounds, someone is clearly having sex. I go crazy moving around the room.

Me: Khwezi!

Veins are popping in my head and they hurt, tears are flowing down my cheeks.

Me: Khwezi...

I hear something like a knock I listen attentively sitting in bed trying to calm down.

"Sheila I left my phone....oh my God I'm so sorry I didn't...." the door slams. That was Khwezi's voice.

I drop the call and after a few minutes she calls again.

Me: Khwezilokusa.

Khwezi: Hey baby, I left my phone at Sheila's room and I walked in on her having sex can you believe it! I am so traumatized.

I have a lump in my throat I thought it was her, my body is still shaking.

Khwezi: Sbani are you there?

Me: When...when are you coming back?

Khwezi: We talked about this, I signed that five year contract and you said you support me!

Me: Ok fine Khwezi! Fine!

I get up, my head is spinning I am not thinking straight as I walk in the bathroom and get the pills I don't know what they are for, I didn't check. I take two more bottles and empty

them in my mouth. I go back to my bed and sleep on my back staring at the ceiling.

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Meanwhile Khwezi is in her room upset that Sbani shouted at her even after discussing the contract with him. She explained everything to him about the contract and Sbani said it was okay to finish the whole five years and she agreed that they will meet in Johannesburg in a months time Sbani said he is going to pay for everything from her flights to their stay in Jozi.

Next thing she feels her stomach turning she starts vomiting everything she ate earlier for breakfast. When she tries to get up from the floor she fails and end up on the floor. Sheila who is the friend she found here and she is also an artist but deals more with drawings.

She find her on the floor moaning in pain holding her tummy. She calls 911 for emergency. The help comes and she is rushed to the hospital.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 83

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SBONGAKONKE

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I'm getting ready for work but I feel weird, it's like there is something chopping my intestines. I groan sitting in bed, my wife is sleeping. The pain is getting worse I shake her, she open her eyes, she is still the prettiest girl I have seen.

Me: I feel sick..

She quickly sit up and feel my forehead.

Niko: You are burning up baby, what's wrong?

Me: I don't know, my stomach hurts, a lot
Niko.

She get off bed and rush to the bathroom, she comes back with a wet towel putting in my forehead.

Niko: Do you need water to drink?

I nod.

She walk out I sleep facing up but it gets worse I walk out holding my tummy and knock on Sbani's room but he is not answering. I see Lethu and Lethokuhle walk out of their rooms.

Letho: Are you also in pain?

Lethu and I nod.

Lethu: Let's check on Sbani.

Me: I have been knocking for a while.

He turns the handle, we walk in and find him sleeping in bed there is foam coming out of his mouth but he is not moving. We all run to him calling his name. Nadia and dad walk in.

Nadia: What is it?

She looks at Sbani and push us away from him.

Nadia: Sbanisethu!

Dad hold his hand checking the pulse.

Ntsika: Go call Langelihle! The pulse is still there but...

Letho rush out.

Nadia: But what Bhuti!

She is shouting already sweating holding Sbani, her eyes are bloodshot, she is holding the tears.

Me: He is going to be okay right baba?

Ntsika: He has to be okay..

He is also sweating, he keeps checking his pulse.

Langa and Nkanyezi run in and look at Sbani.

Langa: What happened?

Just then Sbani starts having something that looks like a seizure more foam come out of his

mouth, I stare at him in horror, I am losing my brother.

Letho: Dad do something!

Ntsika: Nkanyezi help me take him to the car.

They walk out, I sit on the floor and take off the shirt I am wearing, I feel hot all over my body.

Niko: Baby..

I look at her as she sit next to me.

Niko: Sbani is going to be ok, he is strong like the rest of you.

Me: But what's wrong with him?

Niko: We will hear from the doctors..come let's go so you can get dressed.

She pick up my t-shirt and hold my hand, I get up going to our room. I get dressed and drive to the hospital with my wife. I find my family sitting at the benches.

Me: Is he okay? What did the doctor say?

Nadia: They haven't said anything, no one had even come out of that fucken room!

Langa: Landile calm down..

Nadia: I can't...what if..

Two doctors walk out of the emergency room and come to us, we are already on our feet.

Nadia: What's wrong with my son?

Doctor: We found a high dosage of different types of pills in his system.

Ntsika: Overdose?

They nod.

Me: is he going to be okay?

Doctor: We are using an injectable medication that reverses the effects of overdose.

I nod.

Lethu: When can we see him?

Doctor: You can all go home and come back tomorrow.

Nadia: No, I will stay.

Doctor: Sir..uhm we can't allow you in for now because...

Nadia: I don't care I will wait here.

Nadia stays and the rest of us go home.

We are quiet sitting around the table.

Ntsika: Sbonga..

I look at him.

Ntsika: Don't do that, if you're not strong then your brother's situation will be worse, you need to be strong for him.

Niko hold my shaking hand tight.

Me: I need to be with him.

I get up.

Ntsika: You will go in the morning, go to bed.

I go to my room and sleep in bed, I feel so tired, that is my twin brother we were both in one amniotic sack.

In the morning I am the first to wake up and shower.

Niko: You do know that they won't allow you in before visiting hours.

Me: Sniko I don't care! I have to be with him!
She look down.

Me: I'm sorry for shouting, I..just..I need to see if he's okay.

Niko: Let me make some breakfast for you then you can go.

Me: I will eat once he is awake.

She sighs. I grab my keys and drive to the hospital. I talk to security to let me in. I walk in his ward and Nadia is sleeping on a chair.

Me: Landi.

She looks at me and wipes her face. Her eyes are puffy.

Me: How is he?

Nadia: He had another seizure an hour ago.

Me: Is he going to die?

Nadia: Don't say that Sbongakonke! I'm not losing any of you.

I stand next to him holding his hand.

Me: Brother..you can't leave me...you need to fight to come back.

The door opens Sonwa walk in like he has been running.

Sonwa: Sbonga, Qhawekazi just called us today what happened?

Nkosazana walk in as well already crying, I hug her.

Sonwa: What happened to him?

Nadia explains what the doctors said.

Sonwa: He wouldn't..He was happy with Khwezi..he wouldn't.

Me: Yeah but the same Khwezi left him! So how was he happy!?!Khwezi was doesn't give a fuck about him.

The seizures start all over again and we are pushed out of the room, I am walking up and down the passage.

Nadia: This is your fault Sbonga! Had you not talked about Khwezi like that he wouldn't have had that seizure it's your fault.

Me: Landile.

Nadia: You are one insensitive motherfucker you know your brother love that girl.

Me: I'm sorry I was...

Nadia: Fuck off!

Ntsika: Landile don't talk to him like that.

Nadia: He is a piece of shit.

Ntsika: Heey! Don't take out your stress on your son Landile.

I just walk away and go sit outside, I know my brother loves Khwezi I didn't mean to talk like that about her I was out of line and I feel really bad about it.

Nadia: Ngiyaxolisa boy.(I'm sorry boy)

I look down.

Me: Is he okay?

Nadia: He woke up and he is asking for you.

I run inside, I stand next to him holding his hand.

Me: I'm sorry...I'm so sorry for..

Sbani:It's...okay..I...know..you..didn't..mean..it.

He is talking like he is out breath.

Sbani: Please...call..Khwezi.

I nod and Nadia give me his phone I search for Khwezi's number. I call it putting it on loud speaker.

"Hello"

A voice that sounds sleepy answers, I see Sbani shaking his head.

Me: Hey is that Khwezi?

"No..uhm..Khwezi was admitted yesterday".

Sbani tries to get up but groan in pain holding his tummy.

Me: What happened to her?

"I don't know, she just vomited then fainted".

Me: Ok please call this number and let us know how she is".

"Ok".

I drop the call.

Sbani: I need...to..see her...

Me: You need to rest Sbani I'm sure Khwezi will be okay..

He sleep holding his tummy, he looks in so much pain and it hurts seeing him like that.

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KHWEZILOKUSA

*

I just woke up I can smell different types of medications and they make me nauseous, I don't know what happened to me I just vomited out of nowhere.

I sit up looking around for a bathroom, I see it and get off bed walking slowly towards it I am already gagging. I reach the bathroom and vomit till my stomach hurts.

I flush then go back to bed, I find the doctor next to my bed smiling.

Doctor: Hey Miss...uh..

Me: Nkosi.

She giggles I know she won't be able to say it.

Doctor: How are you and the little one?

I look at her confused .

Me: I'm fine.

She giggles.

Doctor: You didn't know huh?

Me: Know what?

Doctor: That you are pregnant.

I gasp in shock.

I look at my tummy then shake my head, there is nothing in here.

Doctor: I have no reason to keep you here, I just need you to take it easy, give your body enough rest and stop stressing.

I stare at her I'm horrified.

She gives me something to help with nausea.

A cab just dropped me off, I go to my room and find my phone in bed. I notice I received a call from a South African number.

I start by calling Sbani it rings for a while then he answers.

Sbani: Khwe..zi.

He is talking like he was running.

Sbani: Are...you..ok?

Me: Sbani why are you talking like this? Are you ok?

I hear a groan then shuffling.

"Hey Khwezi you're speaking to Sbonga".

Me: Oh hi.

Sbonga: Sbani is at the hospital, he overdosed some pills...

Me: What!?! Why? Why would he overdose, Sbani baby are you okay? Is he okay Sbonga?

I'm in tears already and I am taking my clothes throwing them in bed.

Sbonga: He will be fine, so how are you? We heard you were also admitted.

Me: I'm fine it was nothing serious, Sbani..

Sbonga: Sbani! Sbani no, not again...Doctor..

The line cuts, he was panicking over the phone I don't know what to do, I feel light cramps on my abdomen. I rush to Sheila's room and knock. She opens the door and hug me.

Sheila: You are back baby, you scared me.

Me: I need to go back home Sheila.

I sob sitting in bed.

Sheila: What's wrong?

I try to explain but fail because I'm crying.

Sheila: Ok calm down I will check for the available flight back home, for now just get in bed and calm down.

I get in her bed, my phone rings with Sbani's number.

Me: Baby.

Sbonga: It's Sbonga.

Me: Is he okay?

He huffs.

Sbonga: He keeps having seizures, I can't even help him.

I cry really hard.

Sbonga: I'm sorry..I didn't mean to scare you he is going to be ok.

He doesn't sound too convincing.

Me: Please let me know when he wakes up.

Sbonga: Ok sisi don't stress too much he is strong.

Me: Ok thank you for letting me know.

Sheila sit next to me.

Sheila: I got the flight for you to Johannesburg it leaves in three hours though.

Me: That's okay thank you, let me go pack.

She helps me pack.

Sheila: Why are you taking everything?

Me: I'm..I'm not coming back.

It's slowly sinking in that I am pregnant and I'm sad.

She drives me to the airport and we hug for a while.

Sheila: I still don't understand why you would leave your dream for a man.

Me: I'm leaving for myself, I just realised that he is my life.

She nods.

-2 days later I just landed in Durban, I didn't find the flight immediately from Johannesburg to Durban. I have been in contact with Sbonga

and he just told me that Sbani isn't talking anymore and that scares me.

I walk in the hospital premises and see Sbani's look alike, all four of them and they still freak me out.

I slowly walk up to them, they hug me I'm sure they have heard about me.

Me: Uhm..how is he today?

"Uhm he is getting there, uhm I'm Sbonga, this is Lethu and then Lethokuhle".

I nod looking down, they are intimidating.

Sbonga: Come this way.

We walk in the ward, he is awake just looking up.

Sbonga: Sbani, brother look who is here.

He doesn't turn at all.

Me: Baby..

He slowly turns his head looking at me, I can see tears flowing from the corner of his eye.

I rush to him and sleep on his chest crying.

I feel his arms around me.

I calm down after a while wiping my tears, he is holding my hand too tight.

Me: I missed you.

He is just looking at me, the tears are still there on his face, I wipe them.

Me: I shouldn't have left, I'm so sorry.

I can see he wants to talk but it's like something is stopping him.

I take his hand and put it on my tummy.

Me: I'm scared.

He close his eyes and open them again.

Sbani: You..still..have...my..necklace..on.

I hug him tight then sit holding both his hands.

Me: You gave me the key, remember?

He nods smiling.

Me: Why did you overdose baby?

Sbani: I..thought..you..are..cheating..on..me, I thought...you're..the one...I heard..having..sex..I.

Me: But I told you it was Sheila baby.

Sbani: I'm..sorry.

He groans while I feel a sharp pain in my tummy but it quickly goes away.

Me: Aaah..

He hold my hand.

Sbani: What's..wrong?

I smile.

Me: Nothing..

The doctor walk in and ask if I could step out for a while they are doing some check ups.

I sit down next to the brothers.

Sbonga: Are you okay? You are sweating.

Me: I hate the smell of the hospital.

Sbonga: Oh sorry.

We all go back to his ward but I can't take it anymore, I run to the bathroom and vomit there I fail to get up so I just sit on the floor.

Sbani: Khwezi..

I look up, they are standing by the bathroom door looking at me, Sbani is on the wheelchair , clearly worried.

Sbani: What's wrong?

Me: I don't know, the pills that doctor gave me are not working.

Sbani: Pills.

Me: For nausea, I am pregnant.

Sbani: What?

He slowly get up and come kneel in front of me.

Sbani: Are..you..serious?

I nod looking down.

Sbani: Baby..wow...thank you..thank you so much.

Me: And I am not going back, I am staying.

He hugs me tight, he is trembling then it becomes worse. Lethu rush to me pulling me up as Sbonga and Letho hold Sbani, his eyes rolls back, I scream my lungs out. He can't die on me.

I take off his necklace on my neck, he is now trembling on the floor you can see that the brothers are traumatized they are not even calling for help.

Me: Move away from him.

I kneel next to him and put the necklace around his neck.

He stops shaking immediately but remain still.

Me: I love you, please don't leave me, don't leave us Sbanisethu..please, I don't know anything about the baby, you have to teach me everything please.

He opens his eyes.

Sbani: I love you.

I kiss him hard but quickly stop when I hear the brothers clearing their throats. I am still shaken that was scary and I hope it doesn't happen again.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 84

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SBANISETHU

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I feel like I have been in a long dream and I am trying to wake up from it but I can't. My heart feels heavy when I open my eyes, I am in the hospital bed. Maybe I was dreaming, Khwezi is not here. I try to see up but a pain shoots through my stomach I clench my jaws holding

on to the sheets. A door opens Sbonga walk in and stand next to me, I can see fear in his eyes.

Sbonga: You gave me a fright, I thought I'm losing you.

Me: I'm sorry.

The door opens and I want to jump out of bed and hold her in my arms.

Me: Khwezi...baby you're here.

She look at Sbonga.

Khwezi: I was here yesterday.

Me: Oh so I wasn't dreaming?

Khwezi: No, I'm here and I am staying.

Me: Thank you.

Khwezi: Why did you overdose Sbani? Do you realise what you almost did! You wanted me to raise a fatherless child!

She shouts, I look down.

Me: I'm sorry.

Khwezi: Well sorry doesn't cut it!

Me: I wasn't thinking straight, when I heard those sound I thought it was you baby, I'm sorry.

She storms out, I look at Sbonga.

Me: I'm sorry brother.

He shakes his head and walk out too.

Nadia walk in with her brothers, they stand next to me.

Ntsika: How are you feeling?

Me: I feel better, not much pain on my tummy anymore it just comes and goes.

All of a sudden Nadia punch me so hard on my tummy I groan in pain.

Langa: Wenzani Landile?(Landile what are you doing?).

He says pushing her away from me.

Nadia: You know what boy? You should have taken a rope and hanged yourself if you really wanted to die, we would have buried you by now.

She is speaking so fast her face is turning pink, sweat on her nose.

Me: I'm sorry Landi, I didn't m..

Nadia: You are taking me a hundred steps back to when your mother died! I can't heal if you keep doing this Sbani! You guys don't care about anyone's feelings but yourselves.

Sbonga walks in I am still holding my tummy.

Sbonga: Are you okay?

Me: Nadia punched me.

He turns looking at her.

Sbonga: Why would you punch him Landile!
You want him to get worse again!

Nadia: Don't talk to me like that, I'm not your mate.

Sbonga: You are fucken crazy..

Nadia slaps him so hard I get off bed as painful as it is and pull Sbonga away.

Me: Leave him alone..

I feel my chest closing in, I am breathing heavily. Sbonga hold my shoulders pushing me to bed. I sleep facing up and dad put the oxygen mask on I can finally breathe.

Ntsika: Landile don't ever do that again.

Nadia: Bhuti, these are my kids I will do whatever I want.

Nkanyezi: Landile!

He roars staring at her, she look down.

Nadia: I'm sorry.

I slowly remove the mask and look at Sbonga.

Me: Where is she?

Sbonga: Getting some air, she can't stand the smell of the hospital.

I smile looking at dad.

Me: Khwezi is back dad.

He smiles back standing closer to me.

Ntsika: She is?

I nod.

Me: And she is pregnant.

Ntsika: Wow that's amazing, that is great son congratulations.

I chuckle.

Me: We don't shoot blanks huh.

Ntsika: You are just like me.

They all congratulate me, I feel like a real man.

Later Khwezi walk in and sit down, looks like she has been crying.

Me: Ngicela uxolo sthandwa sam.(Please forgive me my love)

She nods.

Khwezi: I am going home, I am tired.

I nod.

Me: You need to rest so my son can grow well.

Saying that makes me feel goosebumps.

She get up and peck my lips but I deepen the kiss I am getting hard imagining our first time, how tight she was, how innocent she was. I

can feel her nails on my skin as we enjoy the kiss.

Me: I miss you.

Khwezi: You need to get out of here.

We are still kissing while talking.

Me: Fuck..baby..I am so hard.

She breaks the kiss and look at me with her sexy small eyes..

Me: you're so sexy.

She giggles and kiss me again.

Khwezi: Get well soon.

Me: Thank you for coming back to me.

Khwezi: With you is where I'd rather be, all day everyday.

She says that and walk out leaving me over the moon I just wish I can get out of here already.

It's a new day, bright and early in the morning and I am feeling so alive, I am sitting in bed

after taking a long shower, Sbonga is on his way to fetch me.

He walk in, and look at me for a while.

Me: What is it?

Sbonga: I'm glad you're coming home.

Me: You can't live without me.

He chuckles, Sonwa walk in and chuckle.

Sonwa: Die-hard, you have lost weight.

Me: My woman is back, I will be feeding my craving that have been there for over two months.

Sbonga: That is just nasty!

We all laugh walking out. Sbonga drives home, Sonwa is behind us.

We get home and they are doing a braai outside, I rush to hug grandma as soon as my eyes lands on her.

Ziyanda: Welcome home boy, I'm glad you're okay.

Me: I missed you.

Ziyanda: I'm here now.

I kiss her cheek then hug grandpa then everyone else, they all came back.

I go inside my room and call Khwezi.

Khwezi: Hello.

Me: Are you home?

Khwezi: Yes.

Me: Is your mom and dad around?

Khwezi: No they went home.

I drop the call take my keys then tell my family I am coming back in 20 minutes I still feel pain but it's not much.

I walk in her room, and find her in bed.

Me: Have you showered?

She nods.

Me: I want to officially introduce you to my family.

Khwezi: But they know me by now.

Me: I want to introduce you to my grandma I know she will love you.

She shakes her head.

Me: Please.

I can begging her until she agrees, I choose a dress for her then we leave.

We get home the noise is in the backyard. I hold Khwezi's hand going there. I stand there looking at grandma.

Me: Grandma and the rest of all you, I want to introduce the love of my life to you, Kwezilokusa Nkosi, she is carrying my child in her womb and I want to do right by her.

Grandma get up and hug her welcoming her.

Me: Ngicela ungivumele ngithumele omalume bami kini.(Please allow me to send my uncles to your home).

I say looking at her, she is blushing keeping her head down.

Khwezi: Ok.

She says shyly, my brothers blows whistles
there is too much noise in here.

Me: Dad.

He nods.

Ntsika: We will send a letter requesting the
date of the negotiations.

I bow my head.

Me: King of Kings.

I pull a chair for Khwezi, we sit down and I dish
up for her.

After the whole braai, I take my woman to my
room and remove her shoes then slowly
remove her dress. I cup her boobs massaging
the nipples, she breathes out loud.

Me: I still want you to live your dream..

I say kissing her neck.

Me: I want you to have it all..

She moans, I pull down her panty and slap her
butt she gasps.

I take off the rest of my clothes and bend her over.

Me: Tell me if it gets uncomfortable okay.

Khwezi: Ok.

Her voice is smooth and sweet, I grab her butt cheeks and go in with my tongue until she is wet the way I want her to be, I slowly enter her tight walls she screams and I understand why.

Me: Relax baby, it's me okay, I will never hurt you.

I slap her butt again I feel her meeting my thrust which makes me shiver.

Me: Oh God..fuck

I keep giving her light spanking she seems to be enjoying it.

Me: Baby.

Khwezi: Aaah..

Me: I want all of you.

I pull out and sit in bed pulling her on top of Me, I slowly enter her pussy again slowly easing her down. She is holding my neck too tight not moving I lick one nipple she shakes, I lick another one then suck it she starts moving immediately.

Me: Yes baby..

I help her move her waist just the way I want it and she gets the hang of it because now she is sweating moaning, she is close I can feel it, she moves faster I shoot my cum deep in her she trembles with her inner pussy grabbing my dick.

Me: Fuck...shit.

I kiss her, her eyes are hardly open.

Me: That was amazing..you are a fast learner.

She giggles hiding her face on my neck. We get in bed I hold her.

I hear a knock on my door.

Esami: Daddy..

She shouts on the door, Khwezi jumps out of bed.

Me: What the hell!

Khwezi: What if she walks in and see us naked.

She says wearing her dress.

Me: Baby the door is locked. You almost fell!

She sit down. I go open the door.

Esami: Sawubona Sbani.(Hello Sbani)

I chuckle.

Me: Baby girl.

She pass me walking in my room then go sit next to Khwezi.

Khwezi: Uhm..hi Esami.

Esami: Hi, you are pretty.

Khwezi: Thank you, you're beautiful too.

I watch them as they talk like peers, Esami has a lot of questions to ask and Khwezi seems like she doesn't mind answering all of them.

Me: Sami.

She looks at me.

Me: You like Khwezi huh?

Esami: Yes, is she going to be a new mom just like Ncedo got a new dad for Me?

I chuckle, they do grow up fast.

Me: Yes, do you like that?

She keeps quiet for a while like she is thinking.

Esami: You are my new mom?

Khwezi nods hesitantly.

Esami: Can you hug Me?

Khwezi nods and they hug, Khwezi is in tears I don't know maybe it's the hormones.

Esami: Thank you daddy.

I smile as she runs out, I hug Khwezi she is holding her tummy crying.

Khwezi: I don't know anything about being a mom Sbani.

Me: You gonna be great baby, and you won't be doing it alone I will be here.

I wipe her tears kissing her forehead.

Me: You are going to be a great mom I promise.

Khwezi: Ok.

We sleep through the night. I wake up first in the morning and write a note that I have an early meeting but Qhawekazi will bring her breakfast in my room.

I am meeting my cousins Yandisa and Lwandle.

I walk in their studio and we shoulder hug.

Me: I'm here to talk business gentlemen.

Lwandle: which one cause I know damn well you can't sing.

We laugh.

Me: Property boy.

Yandisa is busy with music while Lwandle is selling properties. So what Lwandle does is build houses and buildings from scratch then sell or rent it but they both have the same

amount of shares in both companies, they share everything.

Lwandle: You want to leave home?

Me: No, I want a studio for the mother of my kids.

Lwandle: Wow!

Me: Yes and I want it to be huge boy, that person left her dream job coming back for me so i want to show her that her dream is just about to begin.

He nods and take his laptop. He shows me beautiful huge buildings but I see one I like, it is a double story building.

Me: This is it bro.

I say pointing at it.

Lwandle: I hope you have enough saving because the cost estimation is 1.8 million.

I chuckle.

Me: I can even sign a tittle deed right now but that is for the owner, I just need to know how

am I supposed to pay, monthly installments or you want cash?

I say with a smirk on my face, they laugh.

Lwandle: you are full of yourself.

Me: So..

Lwandle: I will get the tittle deed and the payments options you gonna have to choose from.

Me: Good, I will get this by the end of today right?

Lwandle: I will make a plan for you brother.

We shoulder hug.

Me: Thank you.

I go to my car and call Khwezi's father, I got the number from her phone, I ask for a meeting tomorrow but ask that he keeps it discreet.

I go back home and find Khwezi laughing her lungs out in my room, she is with Qhawekazi.

Me: What are you doing to my baby Kazi?

Khwezi: Your sister is funny babe.

Me: and she is a very good liar too.

Kazi: Sbani! Come on.

I laugh.

We stay in my room the whole day listening to Qhawekazi's lies.

The following day I am meeting my soon to be father in law. I walk in a coffee shop he is already here. I shake his hand and sit opposite him.

Me: I'm sorry for being late.

Nkosi: Its okay I just got here too.

I nod and ask for coffee, he does the same.

Nkosi: I got the letter from your family but I though I will discuss that with Ntsika.

Me: Oh yes, yes sir this meeting is not about that.

Nkosi: oh?

Me: Uhm I need your help, I am buying an Art studio for Khwezi.

He stares at me in shock.

Nkosi: Really?

Me: Yes sir, it's a surprise and I want to launch it in a weeks time.

Nkosi: Wow that's too soon.

Me: I will hire professionals to help me.

Nkosi: Wow, I always prayed that my daughter find a good loving man I can see God answered my prayer.

I smile.

Me: So I want to ask you to please borrow me the paintings that are on your house that you know means a lot to her, they will be hanged all over her studio at the day of the launch, I want to show off her work.

He shakes his head with a smile on his face.

Me: and I will also like you to teach me the history of each painting if you could remember.

He takes off his glasses and wipe his eyes.

Nkosi: She is in good hands, thank you so much son.

Me: Thank you for raising a daughter like her, she is a gem, one in a million.

He agrees to help me.

The whole week I am busy looking into the studio making sure it's exactly the way I asked and so far they are delivering.

I walk in the first floor and stare at her beautiful paintings at the wall and the history under it written by her father. He remembers almost all of them, because every painting was inspired by something she would feel, hear or see in front of her.

Me: I'm proud of all the work you are putting in here guys.

They cheer.

I make calls to international Fine art artist even the ones that hired her, I am going all out calling big shots in Fine Art.

-It's Saturday morning, every one I invited came and they are comfortable in Hilton hotel well taken care off, my parents helped me with accommodation because I was running low on cash. My family is so supportive of this and I am blessed to have such amazing people in my life.

I got Nkosazana to help me get Khwezi to come to the studio, I even got her a long red bob tube dress that has a slit from a thigh, there is a thong in the same box with the dress and also there are black high heel shoes, red bottoms.

I am wearing a black suit, with a white shirt and red tie. I look good.

I just pulled up in the studio, I look at the blue writings on the wall outside.

Me: KHWEZI'S ART GALLERY AND STUDIO.

I read it out loud..

Me: I hope you like it baby.

I walk in and the cameras start flashing, it's buzzing inside, I called media but didn't explain what is happening so one journalist ask me what is this about, I tell them they will find out soon enough. I greet the guests introducing myself. I stand and the staircases and look down, people dressed the part there are drinks and it's beautiful in here, most of them are more interested at the paintings which is why we are here. My family walk in, in numbers, when I say numbers I mean even King Phiwokuhle is here with his six cheetahs they grab the attention of everyone with their animal skins hanging over their shoulders. The people from overseas are going crazy asking for pictures they are fascinated.

My phone vibrates, a message from Nkosazana says "we're here".

I take the Mic.

Me: Ladies and gentlemen welcome, Uhm the lady of the hour is here, the face behind all this art in this room, ladies and gentlemen welcome Khwezilokusa Nkosi.

They clap hands, we wait for a few minutes minutes then she walk in looking gorgeous in that red dress and a little purse in her hand, she has long weave on, her make up is on point she looks like a doll.

She is still standing there looking around confused as hell.

Me: Baby...

She looks at me in shock as I walk towards her.

Khwezi: What is going on?

Me: This is for you...this is all you baby.

She looks around again and gasp covering her mouth.

Me: Welcome to your very own art gallery and studio baby.

The cameras haven't stopped flashing.

Khwezi: Sbani what is happening?

Some group people rush to her and she jumps up and down like a little baby they all group hug, it's the people she was working with.

Khwezi: Guys!

She is still in disbelief.

Khwezi: Daddy! Mom.

She hugs them, everyone wants to greet her, she is screaming her lungs out as she sees the artist she once told me she would love to meet one day overseas, most of them are here.

Me: May I have your attention please.

They all keep quiet.

Me: I have a few things I want to say to the lady of the moment.

I am looking at her as she is in the crowd while I am at the stage, all eyes are on me but I am just looking at her.

Me: I can't hold myself anymore.

I go down on one knee.

Me: I am begging you to please marry me my love, will you marry me muntu wami.

Khwezi: Yeeeeees!!!

She screams I get up and rush to her I put a ring on it then hug her spinning her around.

Me: Thank you so much.

She is crying holding me tight.

Khwezi: I have no words....I..I don't know what to say Sbani.

Me: You don't have to say anything just keep loving me baby.

I won't allow anything to break us up not in this life time. This is my forever right here.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 85

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KHWEZILOKUSA

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I am still shocked by what Sbanisethu did for me. Who buys a whole studio and invite famous Fine art artists, the people I have always dreamed to meet. I am looking at the paintings on the walls and the descriptions the emotions that can only mean my dad new about this because I used to explain to him my inspirations from each every painting on this wall except for this one right here, Sbani's painting. "I'm sorry for the hurtful I said on this day, It won't ever happen again". Those are the writings under the paint.

I feel his hands on my shoulders then a kiss on my neck. I turn around and wrap my arms around his neck and peck his lips.

Me: I can't believe you did all this for me.

Sbani: I will do anything for you. Your friends wants to say goodbye.

I hold his hand and we walk down the staircases I feel like a queen as Journalists rush to take more pictures of me and Sbani as we walk down. I stand at the stage with Sbani looking so hot next to me. I have a Mic in my hand, I start by staring at the big rock on my finger then look at the guests.

Me: I am still shaking, I can't believe this is all mine it's just amazing.

I fan my face as my eyes are filled with tears of joy.

Me: Thank you all of you for coming, King of kings, King Gumede, The Princes and Princesses, guys I appreciate each and everyone of you for coming, this is was a great suprise to me it's a dream come true, thank you so much.

I look at Sbani.

Me: Thank you so much baby for doing this for me.

He put his hands on my tummy, kissing me then go down to kiss my belly, it's not that visible yet but there is a little baby bump.

Sbani: You deserve this.

People ask for my paintings and how much they are worth and I haven't thought that far because I didn't even know about this but Sbani tells me that soon there will be websites where they will be able to place their orders and because he has a huge fan base he will share it on his socials.

They all leave now there is just the two of us in here.

Sbani: There is just one more suprise for you.

He picks me up and walk up stairs with me. He put me down and open one room with the keys, I walk in and gasp in shock, there is a huge painting of my mom and dad there is a

chair and desk then two computers in the corner.

Me: Sbani..

Sbani: This is your office baby.

I look at him, he must be a miracle I always asked from God.

I kiss him while I unbutton his blazer then take off his tie.

Sbani: Mmmh I always wanted to know how office sex feels like.

We take off our clothes and he put me on top of the desk and get between my legs, it feels great I am holding on to him as he goes faster I throw my head back as I feel all tingle and intense down there.

Sbani: Come let go..cum for me baby...

His voice drives me crazy as he pounds harder I feel something gushing out I scream sinking my nails on his shoulders, his body is shaking as well. He step back wiping his sweat. He

opens another door in this room I am shocked to see a bathroom he comes back with a tissue he gently wipe me and help me wear my dress.

Me: How long have you been thinking about this?

Sbani: Not long, it was when I woke up at the hospital and realised that you are back here.

Me: That is less than two weeks baby!

Sbani: For you I would even move a mountain in just a day.

I hug him.

Me: I can't thank you enough.

Sbani: There are three more offices but this one is bigger that is why I chose it for you, you will decorate it the way you want.

Me: I like it like this.

Sbani: And you will be happy to hear that your uncles gave us a date for next week for lobola negotiations.

Me: but Sbani we can wait for at least next year you already did so much for me, you can't....this must have cost millions.

Sbani: I want you to be my wife before you give birth baby and

I sleep on his chest.

Sbani: You are sleeping with me right?

I smile.

Me: Yes of course.

We walk down the stairs his hand is on my waist. I have never seen such beauty he went all out to get this place look so elegant. We get to his home I go to bed while he stays with his family.

He wakes me up and give me food, I eat then go back to sleep, I am tired but it was a very special day.

In the morning I wake up and look next to me he is scrolling down his phone. I kiss his cheek he smiles looking at me.

Sbani: Morning.

Me: Hey baby.

He shows me the article they have written about us being engaged, to how he surprised me with a building that costs over 3 million and then they talk about the studio with a brief interview I did with them about my paintings, basically they are talking about how captivating and beautiful my craft is and this is the exposure I need.

Me: This is the most beautiful picture of us, sifanelene (we are suited for each other)

He chuckles.

Sbani: Yeah I mean I'm hot and you're just breathtakingly beautiful so perfect match indeed.

I giggle sleeping on his chest.

Sbani: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

We shower together then I wear his sweatpants and t-shirts I love wearing his clothes. We go check on the studio he hired people to clean. We walk in and go to my office, I sit on the big chair and I feel like a boss. He sit down opposite me smiling.

Sbani: Boss lady!

I giggle.

Sbani: So you need to hire staff to help you around here.

Me: Uhm but I don't have money to pay anyone.

He chuckles.

Sbani: I will be your first investor, take it as a capital just so you can find at least a PA and a cleaner because people will be flooding these premises as soon as I give them the website and tell them you are open for business.

I sigh.

Sbani: I'm sure in the second month it will be generating enough income to run this place.

Me: Ngyabonga Sbani kakhulu.(Thank you Sbani a lot)

He nods. After the staff finish cleaning they leave and we walk out. When we get to his home, he stares at the car in the front yard the plate number is written "NCEDO1". Then a woman who looks so beautiful walk out carrying Esami I notice that it's her mom, I have seen a bit of pictures of her on the internet but I am not much into social networks and media but that will have to change I need fame to get my business moving.

Sbani: Noncedo.

She looks at me from head to toe then back at Sbani.

Ncedo: I came to fetch my daughter.

Sbani: Oh ok when are you bringing her back?

Ncedo: Tomorrow.

He nods.

Sbani: This is Khwezi, my wife to be.

Ncedo: Yeah so?

Sbani looks at her, I look away.

Ncedo: I don't remember you ever doing something so huge for me Sbani, you only bought a car for me but she comes here for two minutes and you invite international Fine Art artists here!

She shouts.

Me: Uhm can you borrow me your car I need to go home.

Sbani: No.

I look at him, he is clenching his jaws still staring at Noncedo.

Ncedo: How much was that building worth Sbani? 3 million! and you only brought me a simple cheap car!

Sbani: Cheap? go make noise to your husband, unganginyeli mina.(don't shit on me)

She chuckles and go to her car. I just stand there looking at an angry Sbani.

Sbani: Let's go.

Me: Uhm I want to go home.

He looks at me with soft eyes I just melt.

Sbani: She is just jealous baby don't mind her, she will get over it.

I nod and we walk in.

-The whole week I am busy at the studio, I want to hire staff to help me running my business, like a PA, cleaner and an accountant which was my husband's idea. I am in my office when I hear a soft knock I think it's the first lady i am interviewing today to be my PA.

The door opens I am looking down at the papers on my desk, I slowly look up when the person doesn't say anything, I am shocked to see Esami's mom standing there in a short white dress looking at me. I get up.

Me: Uhm Hi.

She looks around then sit down staring at me I am getting nervous she seems angry.

Me: Can I help you?

She chuckles sitting opposite me.

Ncedo: I want half.

Me: Uhm half what?

Ncedo: Half of everything, I was married to Sbani and he made me sign antenuptial contract walking out of that marriage with nothing.

Me: What were you expecting? You came in that marriage with nothing mos.

She get up and walk around the table, she turns my chair around, I am shaking in fear. Her hand lands on my face slapping me hard then she quickly put her finger on her lips to tell me to keep quiet, I nod biting my lower lip that has been quivering.

Me: What do you want from me?

Ncedo: Why does he treat you different? What is it that you have that I didn't!

Me: I...I don't know.

Ncedo: He owes me so much.

Me: You are still in love with him?

She chuckles.

Ncedo: I will always love him but this isn't about that, I want this heaven as well.

She look at my belly then place her knee on top of it pressing it down, I gasp.

Me: Please don't..don't kill my baby.

Ncedo: So you're different huh? You are the special type? You are the chosen one?

I shake my head holding on to the chair as she press my belly harder.

Me: Ngiyakucela.(I am begging you) please st..stop.

Ncedo: Here is what you gonna do for me.

I nod vigorously.

Ncedo: You're not going to tell Sbani anything because if you do I will kill the precious baby you are carrying and I am sure it is the only reason why he is marrying you, he also did that with me.

I am breathing heavily now it hurts on my abdomen.

Ncedo: You are going to add my name on the title deed and half of the money you make on these ridiculous paintings is coming to my account every month.

I nod.

Ncedo: If you dare tell Sbani about this oh baby..

She finally moves away and walk out, tears are rolling down my cheeks as I take deep breaths to stop the pain in my belly.

She takes her bag and walk out, I quickly take my phone and call him, my door swings open I drop the call.

Ncedo: I forgot one thing. Don't you dare try to act smart with me little one or I will rearrange your pretty face.

I nod, she walk out after a while I pack my things and run down the stairs going to the car, my hands are shaking I can't even open the car.

I drive to Sbani's home and walk in his room, he just came back from work because he is still wearing formal clothes.

Sbani: Oh hey baby I wasn't expecting to....

He stares at me.

Sbani: Were you crying?

Me: Take back that building Sbani, I don't want it anymore, I don't want you.

Sbani: What?

Me: The building I don't want it!!

I scream at him.

Sbani: Ok calm down before you hurt the baby, sit down baby and tell your man what is going on.

I sit down.

Me: Ncedo came to my office today demanding I add her name on the title deed.

He laughs making me cry harder.

Me: She almost killed my baby, she pressed her knee on my belly.

He widens his eyes.

Sbani: She what!?

Now he is the one getting angry.

Sbani: I am going to kill that witch!

I feel the pain shooting through my abdomen again I groan..

Sbani: Khwezi what is going on?

Me: I don't think the baby is okay Sbani.

His eyes becomes smaller instantly then sweat starts on his forehead.

Sbani: No..we can't lose our baby, let me take you to the hospital.

He takes me to the hospital they check the baby's heart beat and it's seems normal but with the high level of panicking I am putting my baby's life at risk so I need to learn to calm myself down. We go back home later, Sbani is quiet ever since we came back from the doctor. We are three months and two weeks pregnant.

Sbani: awucabangi ukungishiya angithi?(you're not thinking about leaving me right?)

I just look out the window.

Sbani: I will hire security for you.

Me: So you have to use more money on me?
no I can't allow that, we have a baby on the way, there is Esami how are you going to take care of them?

Sbani: I am a man baby I won't fail to take care of you guys.

Me: Please drive me home.

He sighs.

Sbani: Ok.

We get home, I step out first and walk in the house. I don't ever wish to cross paths with Ncedo again I hope Sbani will fix this.

In the morning I shower then rush to work, I have to get things up and running people want to buy my paintings and Sbani's phone is buzzing.

I hear a knock on the door then Sbani walk in looking charming as always I smile. He stands behind me kissing my neck.

Me: Baby.

Sbani: I hate sleeping alone, yesterday you made me sleep alone.

Me: We're not husband and wife yet so we can't be sleeping together everyday, we have the rest of our lives for that.

He sit on the table in front of me.

Sbani: I have two securities with Me, the other one will be at the gate and another one will be patrolling inside.

Me: Oh ok thank you.

Sbani: Don't worry about payments they are still under Lukhele Properties company, they will pay them.

I nod, God sent me an angel.

Me: Let me call the lady the was supposed to do an interview yesterday and reschedule.

Sbani: Ok I need to be at work as well, take care of yourself and my baby ok.

I kiss him.

Me: I will see you later.

He walk out, I call the lady and tell her she can come in today if possible and she agrees.

After a few hours the security walk in he tells me there is a lady outside saying she is here for an interview, I tell him to let her in. A lady walk in, she has too much make up and a weave on.

I clear my throat staring at her, I notice that she looks familiar. I quickly get up when I notice who she is.

Me: Help!

I scream.

She rush to me and pin me on the wall.

Ncedo: That family killed my unborn baby, they took away my brother! I deserve this.

Tears run down her cheeks.

Ncedo: I deserve this not to be thrown away like trash!

Me: You're harbouring too much anger in your heart, you need therapy.

Ncedo: Who are you to tell me i need therapy?

I scream again, she take out a knife and it looks sharp.

Me: I will give you what you want, I promise.

Ncedo: I told you not to tell Sbani but you did and he called threatening me.

She put the knife on my cheek I feel my flesh tearing, she moves it down my cheek I can even feel blood coming out.

Me: I'm sorry..

The door swings open the security grab her away from me, I touch my cheek and come back with a lot of blood.

Security: I will call the police

I nod sitting down, she is staring at me with so much rage

Another security walk in and ask I'm okay, I nod I am still trembling, he calls Sbanj. I am trying to wipe blood on my cheek but it keeps flowing I guess I have a lot of blood.

Sbani run in like he is being chased. The policemen follow behind him. He rush to me and look at my cheek in shock.

Sbani: Where the fuck were you! Your first day at work and you're already fucking up.

He tries to go to Noncedo but the police push him back.

Ncedo: I will always hate you for what you did to me Sbanisethu, you will never find peace in your life and that's a promise.!

They walk out with her handcuffed.

Sbani: I'm so sorry baby..

He says wiping blood on my cheek with his hand.

Sbani: Let me take you to a doctor to look at this cut, it looks deep.

I slowly get up my eyes are teary, I might have to live with this scar for the rest of my life, is that how much love is worth? All this trouble?

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 86

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SBANISETHU

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I am waiting for Khwezi right outside the ward where the doctor took her, I am fuming in anger my armpits are itchy I want to get my hands on Noncedo, I want to strangle her to death, how dare she do this to my woman! How dare she lay her hands on Khwezi, she is innocent she doesn't even know what exactly happened between us so I don't get why she is taking out all the anger on my wife.

I get up when I see her walking out, she has her hand covering her left cheek, I step closer to her, her eyes are filled with tears.

Me: Baby..

She slowly removes her hand, it looks bad she literally cut her opened.

Me: Why didn't he stitch you up?

She shakes her head and look up trying to stop the tears from falling.

Khwezi: I don't...I didn't want to, it will close on it's own, they just cleaned it up.

Her voice is shaky.

Me: I'm sorry baby, I'm really sorry.

She walk away I follow her out. We get in the car.

Khwezi: Take me home.

I nod and drive to her home then park by the gate. I hold her hand she slowly removes it from me again.

Me: Khwezi.

Khwezi: I need a break Sbanisethu, and you can take everything back.

Me: A break or you're dumping me?

I ask looking away, I'm hurt.

Khwezi: I don't think I want to do this.

Me: What's this Khwezi?

Khwezi: This Sbani! This!

She shouts pointing at the scar on her face.

Khwezi: I will have to live with this scar for the rest of my life all for a man!

She cries painfully I feel my own tears filling my eyes.

Khwezi: What will I say to mom and dad? That I got attacked by your ex wife! I don't want this!

She step out of the car and bang my door walking away. I drive home and go to my room. It's supposed to be lobola negotiations in three days so what am I gonna say to my family.

In the morning I drive to her office hoping I find her there and I do find her there but she is packing things in a box.

Me: Baby.

She has a patch on her cheek.

Me: Please don't leave me.

She shakes her head.

Me: You never loved me.

She looks at me.

Me: You never did Khwezi.

She takes her box and walk to the door.

Me: So you are going to ignore me like I don't exist? Is it over?

I take the box from her hands and put it down then hold her hands.

Me: Tell me it's not over please.

Khwezi: What if you do it to me too?

Me: Do what?

Khwezi: You will throw me out once I give you this baby like you did to Noncedo? She told me how you threw her out after she miscarried your baby because of your sister.

Me: That's not how it happened Khwezi, I loved Noncedo I stayed two years single hoping she would come back to me but she didn't so I healed and moved on, I found

something precious, I found my morning star I found you baby.

She sit on her chair, I sit opposite her.

Me: I don't want to lose what we have or I might as well die.

She sighs.

Khwezi: I love you so much but this...

Me: It won't happen again, you will work from home please.

She stares at her ring I quickly hold her hand to stop her from taking it off.

Me: Meeting you was not a coincidence or a mistake, saving you from drowning, finding that key under my bed to meeting you again on your uMemulo it was not a mistake baby, we are meant to be together, you are meant for me, ungowami Khwezi.(You're mine Khwezi)

I feel my body shiver a little, she touch her belly.

Me: Are you okay?

Khwezi: I felt some movements.

I touch her belly and the movements are there its magical, I look at Khwezi smiling she smiles back.

Me: You are my life baby, there is no me without you, just promise me we are walking this journey together for a lifetime.

Khwezi: We are walking this journey together for a lifetime.

I smile and hug her tight.

Me: I love you and tomorrow we are starting gym right.

Khwezi: Why? Am I getting fat?

I look at her confused she is looking upset.

Me: Oh no no no baby, I am teaching you basics of how to defend yourself I won't be too tough since you're pregnant.

She nods

Me: You're getting beautiful by each day.

Khwezi: But I have this scar on my face.

Me: Uhm we can look up for a skin doctor to perform some laser or something.

Khwezi: No, it's fine I guess I will have to live with it.

I can tell she is sad, I mean from being flawless to having a big scar on your face isn't something to get over in just a day.

I take her home then drive to the station to see Noncedo, they are keeping her there Khwezi needs to press charges.

I am sitting down waiting for her, she walk in with an officer, she sit down staring at me.

Me: Hi.

She look at me then tears fill her eyes.

Me: Did I do this to you Noncedo?

They start falling, I get up and walk around the table I pull her up hugging her tight.

Me: I'm sorry..

I brush her back trying to calm her down then we sit I am holding her hands.

Me: Aren't you happy with your husband?

Ncedo: He loves me and our daughter.

They had a baby girl a few months ago.

Me: Then what's wrong Noncedo? Why all this bitterness?

Ncedo: I feel like you never loved me, the things you do for her you never did them for me.

Me: Tell me what do you want then? Will your husband even allow you to take something from your ex?

Ncedo: I don't care Sbani! Give me the life you promised to Me!

Me: How much do you want I will give it to you, just leave Khwezi alone, she has nothing to do with what happened between us.

She mess up her hair, she doesn't look normal to me.

Me: What's wrong?

Ncedo: As if you care!

Me: Of course I care, you are the mother of my children. Esami still needs her mother sane and well.

Ncedo: Did you leave me because I lost our baby?

Me: Noncedo you left me, not the other way around, I stayed for two years hoping you will come back but you got married so I moved on, I found love again.

She nods.

Ncedo: I feel like I am going crazy sometimes, I hear a baby crying in my head.

I look at her as she covers her ears shaking her head.

Me: Noncedo..

I rush to her and hold her.

Me: Open your eyes, look at me.

She opens her eyes.

Ncedo: You killed my baby Sbani, you and your family killed my baby, I feel him, I hear him cry.

She sobs, I don't know what to do or say to her. They take her to a holding cell again. I drive home and knock on maNtsoaki's room. I find her with dad, I bow greeting them.

Ntsoaki: Sbanisethu, sit down.

She says pointing at the floor, I sit and she sit opposite me staring into my eyes.

Ntsoaki: She didn't want us to cleanse her, she needs cleansing or she will lose her sanity.

Me: How do I help her?

Ntsoaki: you need to take her back home, she was your wife, you need to cleanse her.

I nod and get up walking to the door.

Ntsika: Talk to Khwezi about this, don't hide it from her.

Me: I won't dad.

He nods, I walk out and drive to her home, I call her to come out. I look at her as she walk out in her pyjamas, she get in next to me.

Me: Hey.

Khwezi: Hi.

Me: What did your mom and dad say about this?

She sighs.

Khwezi: You have their hearts I guess, the way they were defending you shocks Me, I thought they would have said I should leave you but no.

I smile.

Me: I love you so much.

She smiles back..

Me: Uhm..so when Noncedo and I lost the baby, she left me and didn't even want us to go home for cleansing so now I need to take her back home because she is starting to lose it.

Khwezi: Oh uhm you are going together?

Me: I have to take her there, she is not mentally okay to do this on her own.

She nods, I can see she is not entirely okay with this.

Me: I am just trying to help her, I am the reason she lost the baby, if I didn't chase her out maybe we would have been able to save the baby.

Khwezi: Ok, you don't have to explain. She is the mother of your child you should help her.

Me: Thank you for understanding I just hope she will get help even after the cleansing, she is not okay.

She nods touching her scar, it's slowly healing looking at it still makes me feel like shit.

Me: Uhm I will look at the recommendation for the best doctor who will look into this scar.

She look out the window.

Me: Khwezi.

Khwezi: When are you leaving?

Me: Tomorrow morning.

Khwezi: Are your uncles still coming on Saturday or you're cancelling to help Esami's mother?

Me: I'm not cancelling anything I still want you to be my wife more than anything.

Khwezi: I'm tired I have to go, I hope everything goes well with Esami's mom.

She step out of the car, I do the same going to her.

Me: What's wrong?

Khwezi: You are here telling me you are taking her to your home but not even once have you asked me if I am pressing any charges but you're already planning to get her out of the holding cell!

I shake my head.

Me: Its not like that baby..

She shoves me back sobbing.

Khwezi: It's like that! What was I thinking falling in love with someone who was once married!

She is crying so hard I am trying to hug her but she keeps shoving me back.

Me: Khwezi stop baby, if you get upset you're putting strain on the baby please.

Khwezi: That's all you care about this baby and not me that is why I am like this! I have a fucken scar because of you and your nasty history of using women and tossing them on the side!

I look down in shame, it's true when they say history does catch up with you one day.

Khwezi: I can't do this Sbani, I'm too young to understand all this.

She take off the ring and grab my palm putting it there.

Khwezi: Keep your ring I don't want it or you!

She walk away leaving me standing there, I feel weird, weak on my knees, I sit down leaving on my car, it's at night.

I finally pull myself together and get in my car driving home. I try to call her but she keeps dropping it, I keep trying but she just switch it off, I am tempted to call her father but that will be disrespectful it's late.

In the morning I wake up not knowing what to do, the ring is right in front of me but what I am sure of is that I will never make the same mistakes I made on my previous marriage.

I take a shower then walk out. I drive to Khwezi's house and she is driving out, I stop in her driveway to block her from leaving then step out. I stand on her window she slowly rolls it down.

Me: Hi baby.

She stares at me, I'm nervous.

Me: Uhm I tried calling you several times last night.

She doesn't say anything.

Me: I'm choosing you Khwezi, you can press charges against Noncedo that's okay I choose you, just...please don't leave me.

I hardly recognize my voice because it's shaky.

Me: I don't want to lose you,
Ngiyakucela.(please).

She opens the door, I step back as she step out of her car and get closer to me, I feel her hands wiping my eyes that are teary.

Khwezi: I'm sorry.

She hugs me sleeping on my chest, I embrace her even tighter.

We hear someone clearing their throats, I step back from her, it's her dad, I look away wiping my eyes.

Me: Bab'Nkosi I'm sorry for standing like this in your home, I didn't mean to disrespect you, I'm sorry.

I say keeping my eyes down.

Nkosi: You should be sorry, how do I even allow my daughter to get married to you when you can't even protect her from your history? I am having doubts, second thoughts about you Sbani.

I look at him I can see he is disappointed in me and I don't blame him.

Nkosi: I know you are not capable of anyone's actions but your own, I know you didn't send that girl to do this to my daughter but...

He shakes his head.

Nkosi: Please leave my house.

I look at Khwezi she is crying covering her face.

Me: Ngiyaxolisa baba. (I'm sorry father)

Nkosi: Leave Sbani.

I slowly walk to my car but stop as soon as I hear Khwezi screaming leaning on her car. I rush to her.

Me: Baby what's wrong?

She holds her tummy and moan in pain.

Nkosi: Should I call for help?

He is panicking.

Me: No..

She moans in pain again.

Nkosi: What do you mean no?

I brush her tummy in circular motions.

Me: Gumede...Phakathwayo..Mnguni
kaYeyeye..Qwabe..Ngiyaxolisa
ngokuhlukumeza umama wakho.(I'm sorry for
hurting your mom)calm down boy.

I feel crazy movements around her tummy, I
look at Khwezi she looks at me too.

Khwezi: How did you do that?

Me: We are connected by blood, we are one.

I kiss her tummy.

I look at Mr Nkosi then walk to my car. I get in
and drive home with a heavy heart.

I take off all my clothes and get in bed. I ignore the persistent knock on my door until I hear the handle turning then footsteps.

Khwezi: My love.

Her soft voice makes me sit up immediately.

Me: Baby you're here.

Khwezi: Can I get in?

I quickly shift and move the bed cover for her, she starts by taking off her dress leaving her panty only she was not wearing a bra. Her baby bump is cute with that dark line. She get in next to me and sleep facing up, I can't help but brush her belly.

We are quiet for almost 10 minutes then she put her hand above mine.

Khwezi: When I said yes I didn't only say yes to you but to your family, your friends but most of all to your daughter Esami. I know her happiness matters to you more than anything, and I can imagine what she would go through should she lose her mother so I'm sorry for

being unreasonable, you were right Esami needs a sane mom so do what you have to do.

Me: Bab...

Khwezi: Shhh...right now I don't want you to talk I want you to make love to me.

I grant her her wish, I make slow sensual love to her in all corners of the bed then we end up on the floor covered in just a fleece blanket, She wipes sweat on my forehead.

Khwezi: You should go.

Me: Are you sure about this?

Khwezi: Yes, I trust you.

Me: Then please come with me.

She shakes her head.

Me: I need you Khwezi please.

She sighs.

Khwezi: Ok.

Me: Thank you.

I pick her up we take a shower then go back to wearing our clothes.

Me: Please accept this again.

She look at he ring then give me her left hand, I slide it in.

Me: Thank you baby.

We go to the station I speak to the detective then they release her we are just waiting for her to come in. The door opens and she walk in, I can feel Khwezi tense up next to me i hold her hand. She sit opposite us she is looking at me.

Me: Noncedo.

Ncedo: Mmm.

Me: I have to take you home.

Ncedo: My husband doesn't know I am here Sbani please call my husband!

I nod.

Me: I will call him now give me his number.

She calls out the number I put the phone on the table.

"Hello".

Ncedo: Baby.

"Noncedo why are you doing this to us? I haven't been able to go to work because our daughter has been crying day and night, you're not home, baby what did I do?"

She release a heart wrenching wail, causing Khwezi to cry.

"Mama talk to me you are scaring me".

That sounds like a caring man out there.

"Tell me where you are I will come and fetch you".

She looks at me.

Ncedo: I am coming home..

She looks at me again I nod.

Ncedo: I am coming home now baby.

We all walk out she gives me directions to her house then we walk in. As soon as she sees her husband she jumps on him sobbing on his shoulder.

Once she is calm we all sit down, she is holding her beautiful baby girl in her arms.

Me: Uhm I'm sure you're wondering why we're here sir.

He nods, he looks like he doesn't talk much.

I tell him the story from where she attacked my wife to her landing in jail and now taking her home for cleansing.

Sakhe: I hear you.

Me: Uhm..so you agree?

He nods.

Sakhe: If that means my wife will be okay then yes sir I agree.

Me: You can even come with us even though you won't take any part of it but just your support I'm sure Ncedo would appreciate it.

Sakhe: You want that baby?

Ncedo: Yes, Uhm I'm gonna take a quick shower.

Khwezi: Uhm..can I hold the baby?

Noncedo looks at her for a while then get up giving her the baby, it's the second time I'm seeing her and she is pretty looks more like her mom but has her daddy's eyes.

Khwezi is holding her carefully.

Sakhe: Her name is Kimberly.

He says randomly looking at Khwezi, she nods and play with the baby.

Khwezi: Hey Kimmy.

She is giggling and jumping on Khwezi's lap. Noncedo finally comes out we walk out and I drive with Khwezi while they drive together behind us.

Once we get home we get a goat and do all the necessities for the ceremony led by grandpa Luyolo. Later we drive back to Durban

and step out of our cars as they park at their house.

Me: How do you feel Ncedo?

Ncedo: I feel lighter, it's like a very heavy load has been lifted off my shoulders thank you, Phakathwayo.

I look at her, I wasn't expecting her to say my clan name. She then hugs me briefly then Khwezi.

Ncedo: I'm so sorry for what I did to you, please forgive me.

Khwezi: I forgive you.

I handshake her husband then I take my wife home, I take our food and we go to my room.

Me: I have to drive you home early before my dads go to your house.

She nods she looks tired.

Me: Sleep baby, it's been a long day.

She close her eyes, I peck her lips and sleep next to her.

I feel someone shaking me I open my eyes.

Khwezi: Your phone is ringing.

I take it looking at the time first, it's 23h55 I look at the number it looks like Noncedo's husband's that I called this morning. I answer but all I hear is a voice of a man shouting.

"Noncedo no! Don't do this! What about the kids baby Noncedo!"

I sit up immediately when I hear a gunshot.

"NONCEDO!!!"

Me: Hello..

Then I hear another gunshot I get off bed and stand on my feet it's quiet now. I throw the phone in bed and wear my clothes.

Khwezi: What is going on?

Me: Something is going on at Noncedo's house baby I have to go find out.

Khwezi: I am coming with you.

She wears her dress then we rush to the car. I drive to her house and it's packed there are

police cars and ambulances. I rush towards the door but there is a yellowtape.

Me: What is going on here?

I look at the door as one of the paramedics come out with a wailing Kim, I run inside as they try to stop me I am welcomed by a pool of blood in the dinning room area, there are two covered bodies, I kneel and remove the white sheet I cringe at the sight of Noncedo with a bullet hole on the side of her head.

Me: Noncedo...why?

I am defeated I don't know what to say, I slowly get up walking out. I find Khwezi trying to calm baby Kimberly down.

Khwezi: Kwenzekani Sbani?(What is going on Sbani?)

I huff.

Me: They are gone..

I have this huge lump in my throat so I just walk away so I can calm down. I am thinking

about my daughter who adored her mom, I am thinking about that young baby girl who still needs a mother's love and care. Noncedo what did you do? Why?

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 87

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SBANISETHU

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I am at the police station waiting for detective to give him my statement, since I am the one who received that phone call from Sakhe. I dropped Khwezi and Kim at her house first then came here.

The door opens and detective Jule walk in sitting next to me.

Jule: Gumede, uhm I hope you know that this is just standard procedure we are not accusing you of anything.

I nod.

Jule: So what relationship do you have with the deceased?

Me: Noncedo is my ex wife, we have a baby together.

He nods.

Jule: When last did you see her before the whole incident?

Me: During the day we went home to do a cleansing for a baby we lost three years ago, she was fine after that but was acting weird.

Jule: weird how?

Me: She called me by my clan name, apologised to my girlfriend for cutting her a few days back.

Jule: So what about the call? What was it about?

Me: All I heard was Sakhe telling Noncedo to stop, and think about the kids then a gunshot, he shouted her name again then a few minutes later I heard another gunshot.

He nods.

Jule: Then that means she shot herself first then her husband shot himself right after.

I wipe my face.

Jele: Thank you for your time, we will contact you if we need anything.

I nod and get up. I walk to my car and sit there for a while looking up, my dads are at Khwezi's house for negotiations, they went on with it.

I drive to my house I find Sonwabile sitting on the veranda looking down.

Me: Hi.

He look up, his eyes are red.

Me: I'm sorry.

He get up and put his hands on his pocket.

Sonwa: I let her down man, it has always been us but I left her alone I abandoned her.

I sit down , he sit next to me.

Me: I feel like shit..How am I going to look at my daughter? Kimberly still needed her mom.

We sit quietly, my heart is broken i don't want to lie.

Later my dads come back and tell me everything went well, I should be happy and celebrating but how do I do that when everything is a mess like this. I drive to Khwezi's house and walk in, I can hear the baby crying hysterically. Khwezi's mom is trying to calm her down while Khwezi is sitting on the couch crying as well.

Me: Hi.

MrsNkosi: Oh hi Sbani, we have been trying to calm her down since morning she only sleeps for a few minutes then starts crying again.

Me: Maybe she can sense that her mom and dad are gone.

I take the baby and sit down with her.

Me: It's okay...everything will be fine neh..

I brush her back she finally stops crying and fall asleep.

Khwezi: How am I going to be a mom if I can't stop the baby from crying?

Me: Don't do that baby...not now okay.

She wipes her tears.

Khwezi: What's gonna happen to her Sbani?

Me: I don't know, maybe Ncedo's parents will take care of her.

She nods.

Me: Thank you for looking after her, I am leaving with her now.

Khwezi: Ok.

I smile.

Me: We should be happy, you're my wife now.

She smiles as well.

Khwezi: I guess I am.

She walk me out, I hug her tight.

Me: I love you.

Khwezi: I love you.

I go back home with Kimberly, she sleeps with me and Esami who is delighted to see her sister here.

The next day I bath her then take take Esami's old clothes and make her wear them then I bath my daughter. I go to the kitchen and feed both of them.

The little girl keeps looking around, she has never been here and I am sure she is wondering where her mom and dad are.

I am with my family Kim started acting up again but I managed to calm her down now she is sleeping on my chest Esami is next to me.

Sonwabile walk in.

They sit down.

Sonwa: Sanibonani.(greetings)

Ntsika: Yebo ndodana.(Hello son)

Sonwa: Uhm...we just found out that Noncedo didn't change her last name, she was still using Gumede so I am here to ask for guidance My King. How does all this work I'm clueless.

Ntsika: Where is her husband's family?

Sonwa: I went to see the grandmother today but she said they can't bury her since engabikwanga edlozini.(She wasn't introduced to their ancestors)

Dad sighs looking at Nkanyezi.

Nkanyezi: We will bury her back home, her husband didn't take her from us like he should have. He was supposed to pay lobola to us, so by tradition there was no divorce between Sbani and Noncedo, correct me if I'm wrong King.

Ntsika nods looking at Langa and Sfiso.

Sfiso: You're right traditionally she was still our wife, we have to do things right so there won't be any problems in future for Sbani and his wife.

Sonwa nods looking at Me, he looks like he is carrying the whole world on his shoulders.

Me: I will bury her.

Sonwa: Thank you.

His eyes are glassy he looks up wiping his face.

Sonwa: I told Luzuko and his wife..

He chuckles. That's his mom and dad.

Sonwa: I can't believe them.

He says getting up chuckling in disbelief, he is not okay i don't even think he realises that this is his in laws house and he is in the presence of the king.

Sonwa: They said after the funeral they are going back overseas because...because there is nothing left for them here...so I am nothing.

He says standing in the centre of the room he is still looking at me like he wants me to say something but I don't have any words for him right now.

Sonwa: I wish they didn't come back here, I thought one day we will all talk and mend things but they are leaving, AGAIN! And Noncedo killed herself we weren't even on talking terms....

His voice is getting lower with each word, dad get up and push him to sit down on the couch, it's like he is losing his breath.

Langa: hey! Breathe come on, don't breathe through your nose, use your mouth come on..

He takes long deep breaths, seeing him like this is sad because I for one knows how much he loved his sister even though they weren't talking but he asked about her a lot, if she's fine and all.

Later I walk him out, he get in his car.

Me: I thought your parents will want to take Kimberly.

Sonwa: I don't think they can look after her those people don't care Sbani, leaving Noncedo as an infant proved it.

I nod.

He drives out while I get in my car to go see Khwezi. I walk in her room. Her mother let me in.

I find her in bed sleeping, I kiss her lips she opens her eyes. She has removed the patch on her cheek it's healing thought the scar won't just vanish unless she agrees to go to a doctor.

Me: Hey baby.

She sit up.

Me: You look tired.

She nods.

Khwezi: The doctor called, I had an appointment today and it totally slipped my mind.

Me: A lot has been happening baby so it's understandable.

Khwezi: Yea I told him I will be there tomorrow at nine, will you come with me?

Me: Of course you don't even have to ask.

We sit in silence for a while.

Khwezi: Uhm is everything okay?

Me: Uhm...I have to bury Noncedo.

She stares at me.

Khwezi: But she was married to another man Sbanisethu.

Me: But they didn't do a traditional wedding and she didn't even change her last name, she was still using Gumede.

She chuckles and it's not a good chuckle.

Khwezi: so uwumfelwa wena! Ufelwe umfazi!
(So you are a widower huh? You lost a wife!)

Me: No it's not like that but I can't just defy tradition you know that!

Khwezi: Then leave me alone, uzongithela ngeznyama Sbani, so ngilala nomfelwa mina!(you're going to give me bad lucks, I am sleeping with a widower!)

Me: Nginesinyama mina manje? (I have dark cloud now?)

Khwezi: Oh fuck off man, piss off! Get out of here!

Me: Sukhuluma kanjalo nami manje Khwezi? (Is this how you talk to me like that now Khwezi?)

Khwezi: I said get out!

I get up and walk to the door but I remember I did something similar to this before which led me to a divorce. I go back to bed and sit down , tears are rolling down her cheeks.

Me: This is not meant to hurt you baby, I am doing this for us, so we can have peace in our marriage.

Khwezi: I don't think I want this anymore, it keeps getting worse, it's too much for me.

I look down I can see that all I am bringing to her life is misery.

Khwezi: What was I doing? Leaving boys my age in my village who doesn't have burdens like you do!

That cuts deep.

Khwezi: I have a scar on my face and for what? You? This? Sbani you're not worth it, it's over.

Me: what?

Khwezi: I'm failing to keep up with your life, everyday it's something new, and I only know you, I have only been with you.

Me: You want to try someone else?

She doesn't answer, I shiver at the thought of her with another man.

Me: I'm sorry...ngiyaxolisa I promise after Noncedo's funeral we will start over.

Khwezi: Go and mourn your wife Sbani.

I sigh and get up walking out.

I get home and go straight to bed. The next day I ask for the address of the doctor but she doesn't text back.

Me: "Khwezi come on I want to know how my baby is doing please".

She finally send the address i drive to that place and find her already sleeping in bed with her tummy exposed and the doctor is putting the gel there.

Me: Hi..

The doctor greets back but Khwezi is looking away.

I stand there looking at the scan, the doctor is explaining the heart beat and the health of our baby.

Doctor: Do you want to know the gender or you want it to be a suprise?

Me: I want to know..

I say with a smile.

Khwezi: I want it to be a suprise.

I can see she just wants to spite me.

Doctor: Oh...uhm.

Me: It's okay.

Khwezi get up after wiping the gel then take her bag.

Khwezi: Thank you.

She walks out I follow behind her but find her already in her car.

Me: Khwezi Ngicela sikhulume. (Can we please talk)

She starts her car I just move away from her car going to mine.

I wipe my face, fighting with someone you love so bad hurts.

I get home while Sonwa parks his car. We both step out and shoulder hug.

Me: How are you?

Sonwa: I'm still breathing so...

He says shrugging his shoulders.

Sonwa: I went to Noncedo's house to take important stuffs and Kimnerly's clothes.

I nod.

Sonwa: Can I take her with me today?

Me: Yeah that's okay.

He nods and open his car. He then gives me something that looks like a diary.

Me: What is this?

Sonwa: It's...it's Noncedo's she haven't written much in there.

I nod and walk inside the house, he takes Kim with him.

I sit in bed and open the diary.

"Dear diary

I'm Noncedo Gumede, yes

I am married to the love of my life"

That's the first page, this diary is old I guess she was referring to me.

I open the last page because a lot of pages are blank some are just those motivational messages.

"Dear Diary, Today I am ending it all after my failed marriage I don't think I want to live anymore but at least I know Sbani will be there for my kids, I will be leaving them in good hands."

So she planned this, I go back to the other pages.

"I found out that mom is not my real mom, a year later found out that my real parents were alive but abandoned us when my brother and I were young, how cruel! Then I lost the baby, my husband kicked me out of the house, who can I trust now? I guess I am on my own."

I take a deep breath.

"I thought no one will ever replace me in his heart but he is moving on and he seems so in love, couldn't he just love me the way he loves her, I can see the way he protects her, he

never did that with Me, I blame him for the baby I lost"

These writings looks recent now. So this is all my fault I caused her a lot of pain, she thought she could move on but I guess she was just trying to make me jealous or something or maybe she wanted to find someone who will love her the way I couldn't love her.

I close the diary and sleep in bed, my door opens Esami walk in holding a teddy she has tears in her eyes. I sit up and put her on my lap.

Me: What's wrong baby?

Esami: I want mommy, she was here.

I look at her maybe she was dreaming.

Me: But mommy is not here she...

Esami: I want mommy!

She is screaming.

Me: Esami!

Esami: I want Ncedo! Call Ncedo..

Me: Ok..ok.listen to me baby..mom is not here.

She screams once again pulling away from me then sit on the floor.

Me: Baby listen okay..she...

Esami: I want Mommy...I want mommy!

Mom rush in and stares at Esami.

Ntsoaki: Noncedo leave the child alone! Don't be weak! Go alone! you ended your life so leave the child alone.

I look at Esami she looks like she is having an asthma attack.

Me: Mah..

She rush out the come back burning incense telling Noncedo to leave my daughter alone I am sweating scared out of my mind.

She finally breathes and open her eyes looking at me.

Esami: Daddy.

Me: Yes princess.

Esami: Where is Ncedo?

I look at mom, she nods holding my shoulder.

Me: Uhm...mom went to heaven?

Esami: Where is that?

Me: Up above the sky, she is an angel, she is with God.

Esami: Am I going to visit her?

Me: Uhm we can't she will stay there forever but she will always watch over you up there.

Esami: But I miss her.

Tears fill my eyes, mom shakes her head, I blink them away I have to be a man, a string daddy.

Me: I know..but we are all here, granny is here and great grandma is here.

She wraps her arms around me.

Me: We gonna be fine I promise.

I put her to bed and cover her with a blanket then brush her hair so she can fall asleep again.

Ntsoaki: You did good.

Me: She is okay?

She nods.

Me: What about Kimberly?

Ntsoaki: They are both okay don't worry.

I nod.

Today we are at the palace for the funeral of Noncedo, she will be buried just outside the yard because she used a weapon to kill herself therefore she can't be buried in the yard. I haven't talked to Khwezi ever since we came back from the doctor. She blocked me and didn't want to open the gate for me.

The coffin is opened for the family to view the body. Sonwa walk up there first and look down at her, he stands there for a long time until Nkosazana get up and go to him, they walk back to their seats. Then her parents do the same the mother is wailing.

Ntsoaki: Take Kimberly first and tell her what is going on.

I nod and take Kim from Miyah going to her.

Kim: Ma..ma.

I smile it's the first time hearing her say those words.

Me: This is the last time you're seeing mommy in flesh baby...she is resting in peace now.

She stretches her hand to touch her face, I walk back to my seat and take Esami. She stares at her mom.

Esami: Ncedo..

I hear people moaning in sadness.

Me: Mom is gone baby, we won't see her again.

Esami: Wake her up daddy.

I look away as she starts crying, I feel a hand on my back. I look next to me it's Khwezi I didn't think she would come, her cheek still has a patch I think she is really insecure about

it because now it's healed. She takes a crying Esami and walk out with her. The rest of the family sees her then dad closes the coffin.

We take her to her final resting place then throw soil.

Me: I hope you will finally find peace, goodnight..

I walk away. I stand next to my car looking at Khwezi, she is carrying Esami I can see she is tired, Esami is heavy and a big girl now. I walk up to them, Sami is not crying anymore.

Me: Can I take her?

She nods.

Me: Thank you for coming.

Khwezi: It's okay, this was a beautiful send off.

I nod.

Khwezi: Sbani.

I look at her.

Khwezi: I'm sorry for everything, the way I talked to you was uncalled for.

Me: I understand.

Khwezi: So we are starting over.

Me: Yes.

Khwezi: I'm Khwezilokusa Nkosi soon to be Gumedede.

I smile and hug her causing Esami to giggle.

I hear noise and sound like Sonwa is cussing. I go to him, people are watching, he is fighting with his dad.

Sonwa: You are both useless! I don't even know why you came back because all you brought was bad luck, Go to hell! Amathanga ahlanzela abangenamabhodo. (Pumkins multiplies even for those who doesn't have pots) you didn't deserve to be given fertility when there are women who would do anything to have that chance.

They get in their car and drive away leaving Sonwa boiling in anger.

Me: Calm down brother.

Sonwa: I need my wife, where is my wife?

Nkosazana slowly walk up to him they hug, I can see he is calming down.

I look at Khwezi now she has Kim in her arms, I stand in front of her staring at her until she moves her eyes away smiling.

Me: MaNkosi.

Khwezi: Gumedede.

God damn!she looks at me like she is reading me.

Khwezi: You will walk me through it as we raise all three of them together.

I look at her confused.

Khwezi: Esami, Kimberly and our unborn baby.

I have no words because I wasn't expecting this from her, she even wants to mother Kim after everything?

She hold the back of my neck and kiss my lips causing my girls to giggle.

Khwezi: I know it won't be easy especially on my side but I am willing to do it with you by my side.

Me: Thank you so much baby..thank you.

"In one lifetime you will love many times but one will burn your soul forever". I finally found the one.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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Insert 88

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SBANISETHU

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It's amazing how kids can sense a positive energy and create a bond with someone they

have just met, I have seen it with Kimberly and Khwezi, they get each other in a way that she stays at Khwezi's home because that's the person she wants to see every time she wakes up. She is juggling being a parent, to being a business woman and planning our wedding which is a month away.

I just woke up, Esami is next to me sleeping. It's been two weeks since her mom's burial, sometimes she just doesn't wanna eat and if I ask her why she tells me she will eat once Noncedo comes back, she is just a child so it will take time for her to get all of this. She is losing weight and we have tried everything with her but it's not working.

Esami: Daddy..

I blink looking at her, I didn't realise she is awake. I am holding my breath hoping she doesn't ask about Noncedo because the tantrum will follow then she won't eat at all.

Me: Yes princess.

Esami: Can I go see my sister and auntie Khwezi?

I smile pulling her into a hug, she didn't want to even go out except when she goes to school.

Me: Of course you can go, I will drive you there go ask granny to bath you.

She nods getting out of bed, my heart breaks as I see how tiny she looks compared to how she was before. She is losing weight massively.

After our bath I drive her to Khwezi's house. We walk in and find toys scattered all over the living room then Khwezi walk in carrying Kim who jumps in joy at the sight of us.

Esami: Kimmy...

She says stretching her arms, Khwezi put Kim down then they hug, it's beautiful to see, but then I hear Esami sniffing, my daughter is crying while holding her sister.

Khwezi: Sbani, she is still like this?

I sit down defeated.

Me: I don't know what to do anymore.

Khwezi: Sami..

She looks at her.

Khwezi: Come here baby..

She sit on the couch and pull her to her lap, her tummy is a bit big so that must be uncomfortable.

She wipes Esami's tears then kiss her forehead.

Khwezi: What do you want me and daddy to do to make you feel better? See daddy is sad that Esami is always crying..do you like seeing daddy sad?

She shakes her head.

Khwezi: Then don't cry anymore just tell us what you want.

Esami: I want a mommy like Kimberly, you are her mommy.

Khwezi looks at me.

Khwezi: But I can be your mommy too because Kim and you are sisters that means you can share a mommy like you did with Ncedo.

Esami: So you are my mommy too?

Khwezi: Yes I am.

Esami: Then please come stay home with me and daddy at home.

Khwezi: Uhm I can't stay with you yet because we have to get married first then you will be a flower girl looking like a princess that you are.

She giggles I feel my heart melt, it's been a while I last heard that giggle.

Esami: Will Kim be a princess like me too.

Khwezi: Yes, you are both princesses, daddy and mommy's princesses.

She nods and hug Khwezi, this is getting me emotional so I just get up and walk out to get some air. I sit outside for a while then go back in. I find them sitting on the carpet eating snacks.

Me: Can I join you guys?

Esami: Yes..

Khwezi: Yes..

I smile sitting down then pull her to my lap.

We eat together while playing with their toys.

Khwezi: Are you okay?

Me: Thank you for everything Sthandwa

Sami.(my love)

She smiles.

Khwezi: I love you Phakathwayo.

I smile.

Me: Uvusa izinto ezilele maNkosi.(you're waking up sleeping things maNkosi)

Her eyes move to my crotch then she giggles looking away I am really hard, there is nothing I find sexier like a woman who calls me by my clan name, that just turns me on.

After an hour of so much noise and playing we finally put them to sleep in Kim's room then go

to her bedroom. I help her take off her dress then kiss her tummy.

Me: My baby is growing huh.

She smiles brushing the back of my head.

Khwezi: Sbani..

Me: Mmmh..

Khwezi: Uhm...You still want to know the gender of our baby?

Me: No I will wait till birth.

Khwezi: I'm sorry for what I did on our last appointment.

Me: I was disappointed but it is what it is.

She bite her lower lip.

Me: It's okay but we need to talk.

She nods.

Me: When ever we are having an argument it doesn't always have to get loud, we are adults we talk in a respectful manner and no swearing, I hate being shouted at because I

hate shouting but if you're going to be above me I really get uncomfortable.

Khwezi: I hear You, I promise I will learn to communicate in a calm way even when we don't see eye to eye.

Me: Good.

I take off my clothes, we make love and it feels different I love her even more now the connection is intense. Once we are done I hold her tight.

Me: I love you.

Khwezi: I love you too.

-

A month later...

It's our wedding day I am sitting next to my brothers and Sonwa, we are all wearing black tuxedos with white shirts, you wouldn't know which one of us is getting married.

Sbonga: You're doing this one last time brother, yeah?

I look at him and smile.

Me: One last time brother, she is the one.

We get up and shoulder hug, they walk out leaving me with my best man Sonwa.

He stares at me for a while then laugh.

Me: What?

Sonwa: I can't believe you once said you won't ever get married again.

Me: I guess it's true when they say "never say never".

He nods.

Sonwa: I'm proud of you boy..for the respect and love you have for your family, Love you man.

We shoulder hug again.

Me: Thank you for being there for me as a friend I appreciate you.

Sonwa: Let's do this..

Just then Nadia walk in carrying a crying Kim.

Me: what's wrong?

Nadia: We tried calming her down but she's having none of it, she wants daddy.

I smile taking her, she calls me daddy and that's because I am the only dad she will ever have, Sonwa allowed me to adopt her so she will be using a Gumedede and of course I will have to do a ceremony to tell my ancestors about her.

She has stopped crying just clinging on me.

Me: Princess.

She hides her head on my neck.

Me: You are supposed to be getting ready to throw petals for mommy remember?

She shakes her head.

Sonwa: I guess we have to go with her.

I walk out with her, I stand at the entrance as my brothers stand there at the altar looking at Me, the. Sonwa walk in before me, he is feeling himself like he is walking on a runway.

I follow shorty after him and people start whistling clapping and ululating it's crazy. I stand in the middle of my brothers and look at the entrance. Three of Khwezi's friends walk in they look gorgeous in their white dresses designed differently.

Then the music changes into Sam Smith's song Stay with me..Esami stands there in a white princess dress and a tiara, she is carrying a basket then she starts throwing the white petals on the isle. My beautiful wife emerges then her dad stand next to her I can't help but smile, her baby bump is cute she looks breathtakingly beautiful i just want to jump and take her from her dad but I hold myself, my daughter is still in my arms I don't even know how am I going to do this.

They finally stops in front of Me, Khwezi is laughing.

Nkosi: Take care of my daughter Gumede.

He whispers.

Me: For the rest of my life sir..

He walks away.

Khwezi: Hey baby, go and sit down with Sammy over there mommy will take you now now ok.

She nods i put her down and she walks away.

Me: I guess she was waiting for you.

We smile and turn to look at the pastor in front of us. He does the sermon read a script then we say our vows keeping it brief I mean, I will spend the rest of my life practicing my vows so I don't have to say everything right here, she knows what's in my heart I tell her everyday. We sign then go for a photo shoot we are having so much fun but we can't stay for long because my wife's feet are swollen now so she has to rest.

We go back for the reception but I have already taken off her shoes bow she is in her sleeper shoes.

Grandma gives us her blessings in a very few words and also grandpa. As Sbonga is about to talk someone walk in, she looks really dirty wearing torn clothes.

I see Qhayiya waking up to her then grab her roughly. Sbonga throws down a mic and take out the gun, I didn't even know we had to carry guns to my wedding, he goes straight to them and out the gun on her head.

Sbonga: What are you doing here Zipho after trying to kill my wife years ago?

I didn't even realise that it's Zipho the way she is so skinny, dirty and have scars on her face it's scary.

Zipho: I just want to talk to Sniko please.

Monde: Talk to who now?

She says walking slowly towards them in her red dress that has a slit from her thigh down.

Zipho: Nomonde please, I have nothing on my name, I have been living in the streets for years..

Sniko: You have a nerve showing your face here!

The Mageba princesses are hot no lie, the way they keep emerging one by one, you can't help but admire their beauty.

Sniko: After everything you've done, after killing my father right in front of my eyes..

She stands next to Nomonde.

Khwezi: What is going on Sbani?

Me:Uhm..I will tell you all about it later but relax they will fix this.

She nods looking worried.

Zipho: Nomonde we are sisters, we are of the same blood please, help me..

Sniko: Blood!?

She says chuckling.

Zipho: Qhayiya please...I want to see my daughter..Pride! Pride!

She shouts looking around.

Nomonde: Your daughter?

Zipho: Yes! I am her mom let me see my daughter Pride.

Lonele get up and go stand next to her dad.

Loni: Dad..who is this?

Zipho: It's me Pride, I'm your mom.

She tries to get closer to her but Loni steps back.

Loni: I have only one mom, that is Nomonde.

Zipho: You've grown, you look so much like your dad..please hear me out.

Qhayiya: Hey this is Sbani's wedding and you won't come here with your stinking self to ruin it, get the fuck put Zipho!

He says grabbing her arm but she swiftly moves to where Sniko I see something like blood drops on the floor, I get up running to her, Zipho has a knife right on her tummy Sbonga pulls Zipho away from Niko then empty all the bullets on her. The kids are

screaming the guests are running out, a lot is happening.

Kim: Mommy!!!

I hear my daughter scream I look behind me and Khwezi is kneeling down holding her tummy.

Me: No..no..no..no.

I run to her and I can see blood on her white gown.

Me: Baby..

She look at me with tears in her eyes.

Khwezi: We still have two months to go, what is happening...Aaah!!

I am sweating all over my body I am thinking of the worst.

Me: It can't be..you're not...you're not losing...

I can't get the words right, dad pull me up.

Langa: Sfiso let's get her to the hospital now.

He picks my wife up and run out with her I am just stuck in the same position, I won't be able to handle it should I lose this baby.

Kim: Daddy...

I look at them holding hands looking at me, they look scared, I kneel down hugging both of them, they are shaking.

Esami: What's wrong with mom? Is she dying like Ncedo?

I look at her, her voice is shaky and tears have already started flowing they must be traumatised all this happened right in front of them, the guns and blood it's a lot to see for kids their age.

Me: No..no baby your mom is not dying, she is okay..

Miyah: Come on let me take you home. Sbani you need to go to the hospital.

I nod and walk out, I find Letho in his car he just drives me to the hospital all this way I am praying for my wife and kid to make it.

I rush inside and find my dads sitting down.

Me: Where is she? How is the baby? Are they going to be okay..is...

Dad hold my shoulders.

Langa: Calm down...they took her to theatre we have to wait for the doctors.

Me: But she...what if the baby...

Langa: Be positive man, be strong for your baby, they need a positive energy from you.

I nod biting my lower lip.

Me: Can't I be with her?

Langa: Uhm I don't think so, they probably have started the operation now.

I sit down.

Sbonga sit next to me, he has blood all over him.

Me: How is Niko?

Sbonga: She is...she is a fighter I know she will be okay...she gotta be okay.

I can see how much he is trying to keep it together but it's hard his tears are so close, I know him, he is my twin brother.

Me: She's going to be okay.

I hold his hand, he looks at me.

Sbonga: Khwezi will be okay as well.

Langa's phone rings he answers the call but he is not saying anything just putting a phone on his ear.

Ntsika: Langelihle..

Langa: Pink just called crying...

They all get up.

Langa: Qhayiya is arrested, and mom is not taking it so well.

Me: This day is a curse more than it is a blessing, maybe I shouldn't have gotten married today! Everything is a mess!

The doctors stand in front of us, my heart is beating so fast I am expecting the worst.

Doctor: So the operation was a success, we managed to deliver the baby.

I nod vigorously so he can continue to tell me if they are okay.

He chuckles.

Doctor: The mother kept saying she is 7 months pregnant but..

Me: Yes..yes she was..

Doctor: Yes we confirmed it, It's a miracle because we deliver a bouncing baby boy who has been crying his lungs out ever since.

I look at him.

Me: It's a boy?

I can't help but smile.

Doctor: Yes sir, I will ask the nurse to take you to her ward shortly.

I nod, I want to be happy, I am happy but so much is going on and I don't know how Grandma is right now when her son is locked up.

I walk in the ward and find Khwezi sleeping and my son is on his bed next to his mom. I walk over to his cot and pick him up, he is wrapped with a blue sheet, he looks like a fully grown baby.

Me: Gumede..Phakathwayo...

I feel the ground shake a little bit I smile looking around.

Me: Mnguni kaYeyeye,
Khondlo..Ngyabonga.(Thank you) I'm so proud of you...showing warrior traits already,
Mnqobi kaBaba..

I kiss his forehead.

Me: I love you already, I will live for you, your sisters and your mom, ngyiabonga boy.(Thank you)

Khwezi: Sbani..

She says with her eyes closed I stand next to her, she touch her tummy then open her eyes.

Khwezi: My baby..where is my baby?

Me: He is right here baby.

She turns her head looking at me then tears rolls down.

Khwezi: How is he here? Shouldn't be be in the Incubator?

I smile shaking my head.

Me: Nop he is right here.

Khwezi: Can I hold him? I think I went unconscious before seeing him.

I give her the baby I see her beautiful smile creeping in.

Khwezi: Oh wow..

She whispers.

Khwezi: He is so beautiful baby.

Me: He is perfect, thank you maNkosi..Thank you so much.

I take her left hand with my left hand and I smile looking at our rings. Now this is my always and forever.

FLAMES OF THE PAST

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SNIKO

*

THE END....

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I feel like I have been in a very long dream as I force my eyes to open. I look around I can see I am in a white room. I close my eyes again and open them I can see someone looking out the window my vision is a bit blur because of the lights in this room.

Someone else walk in and stand next to him.

"Sir it's been three weeks we don't see any progress."

"So what huh! So what!" He snaps, I know that's my husband's voice.

Sbonga: She can't die and leave me with our kids, she will wake up, she has to.

My body feels heavy, I move my hand and I touch something next to it and it breaks into pieces causing them to rush to me.

Sbonga: Baby...baby..I knew you gonna wake up, I knew it..

I look at him and my heart breaks, he has eyebags and the cheekbones are visible with an unshaved beard.

Me: Where is Shaka?

Sbonga: He went home but he is coming back ok..you're okay...thank you so much.

Tears are rolling down his cheek.

Me: I'm sorry..

Sbonga: I don't understand, you were okay after I rushed you here but suddenly you were in a coma.

Me: I need to go home.

He nods.

Sbonga: The kids have been asking about you.

I nod.

The doctors check up on me and I go freshen up since I can now go home.

Shaka walks in and rush to me, we hug very tight.

Shaka: I thought I am losing you.

Me: We have to go home, you're ready.

He shakes his head I touch his cheek.

Me: You are ready King.

I ask Sbonga to drive us back home to the palace then Letlotlo calls the Zulu elders so Shaka can take his rightful place.

Me: Elders I am stepping down now from the throne, I believe the rightful heir is now ready to be your king.

I go to my brother and pull him up then take him to his throne. He sit down and I give him the crown and a spear.

Me: Zulu, Magaba....Ndabezitha.

"Ndabezitha." They all chant our clan names bowing their heads on our new King.

I see mom from a distance she looks bad as she walks towards us, I stand in front of Shaka I don't trust her she was working together with our enemies.

She throws herself in my feet and cry.

Nombuso: I'm so sorry..please forgive me..I didn't mean to hurt you, I see now that all your intentions were pure you didn't want to take the thrown away from my son but you did it because he wasn't ready.

I look at her as she cries painfully on the floor.

Nombuso: I disappointed your father, he left you with me, he trusted me with you but I...

I go on my knees and hug her tight. She gave me a home once. She showed me what a mother's love means so I can't overlook all that because of one mistake even though that mistake almost costed me my life not once but many times but I am here and she is here asking for forgiveness. Everyone needs a second chance I was once in her position so I understand.

Me: I forgive you mother, I have dreamed about this day for so long, I wanted you to come back and see your son Shaka sitting on that throne just like dad always wanted.

I get up and pull her up taking her to the king. Shaka get up and hug her.

Nombuso: I'm so sorry please forgive me.

Shaka: We all make mistakes mother but the question is, Did you learn anything from them.

She nods and heave a deep sigh. She joins my hand with Shaka's hand.

Nombuso: I learnt that no matter how much you fight but when something doesn't belong to you it will slip right through your hands. I wanted to sit on the throne but it wasn't meant for me even when Zipho took it I still didn't sit up there because it was meant for the both of you. You will rule this kingdom together and I am proud of how you stuck with your sister Shaka even when I your mother turned on her.

I look at Shaka and hug him tight then go on my knees bowing before him.

Me: I ask for your blessings my king, I believe you are the voice close the higher beings, bless me and my family, I ask for peace from here on. I want my husband and I to be granted with more kids.

I look where Sbonga is stranding he smiles nodding his head.

Shaka touch my shoulder.

Shaka: All that you desire shall be granted to you sister.

He help me up, I go to my husband and hug him.

Me: I'm happy you're mine.

Sbonga: Thank you for coming back to me Niko, there is no me without you.

I kiss him then hug him once again.

Maybe the flames of the past are not meant to burn us but are there to make us stronger after all what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

THE END

*Next read “born with a purpose”.