

Nelly Page



**THE LEGACY
WIFE**

THE LEGACY WIFE

Chapter 01

I think they're making a mistake. My mother wouldn't set terms and conditions for us to have access into our inheritance. I didn't grow up a spoilt-brat but I've never had any hustles getting money from my mother. Why would she start now when she's dead? And it doesn't make sense, whichever way you decide to look at it.

"Excuse me?" I say, my voice soft but my glare colder than ice. What are they trying to say and why is my brother quiet?

"For you to stay in the Mshazi legacy you have to marry Mpatho." The man saying this is the person I've called my grandfather for 24 years. There's no flinch, no hesitation, and certainly no sympathy on his face. Next to him is Mr Crawford, my mother's lawyer. He's not disputing any of this.

"Say something, Mpatho is my brother," I'm desperate for someone to jump into my defense, anyone. I can't be the only sane person in this room.

"It's what your mother said and wrote down on her will," Mr Crawford says.

God show yourself, I don't know what kind of devil is possessing these people.

"But we are siblings, Mpatho is my brother." I look at him as I speak, he's been glued on that chair not saying a word. We've never been close, he spent most of his life in the army, only came back when he turned 30, that was after our father's death two years ago. He lives his life here, looking after the businesses and property as an heir should. He's my half-brother, our father's only son.

"Tell them this is madness," I plead.

“I think this is only about you. I’m okay with whatever decision you take, whether I marry you or not, I’m still a Mshazi, better you ask what is the reason behind all of this,” he says.

I look at everyone, obviously there’s something I don’t know.

“Mkhulu?” I focus on my grandfather.

He looks at his 37 year-old wife who took over two months after our grandmother’s death. Everyone calls her by name, just Beauty- with no beauty.

“Beauty call her aunt in,” he says.

My aunt? My mother had only one sister, I last saw her when I was 9 years old. She wasn’t here for the funeral, I don’t know how they got hold of her for this, they never got along with my mother.

She comes in, she has aged but not so much. To this day I don’t know what made her and my mother hate each other so much.

She’s greeting everyone, I wasn’t even aware of her relationship with the Mshazis. I’m confused by everything that’s happening here, I just want her to go straight to the point. What does she know about this ridiculous condition being given to me?

“Phume, you’ve grown,” she’s looking at me.

24 years, obviously I’ve grown.

“Why are you here, aunt Brandi?” I ask.

“Your grandfather called me, there’s something your mother didn’t tell you.” The room is dead quiet, I feel like everything I thought I knew about myself and this family is about to change.

“You’re my husband’s child, that’s what drove your mother and I apart, she slept with my husband on my wedding day. You’re not a Mshazi but you were raised as one because Mshazi

married your mother while she was pregnant. You and Mpatho are not related, your mother was the only reason you had access to the life you've had."

Someone has to tell me they're joking. I'm a Mshazi, my father loved me and treated me even better than Mpatho. I was his princess, he told me that everyday.

"That's not true," I can't help the flood of tears pouring down my face. I want to stand up and scream at them, but I'm physically weak.

Mr Crawford produces a document and passes to my grandfather, he gives it to me. It's DNA test results that were taken from me and my father, Mshazi. It says we are not related. Another one follows, my hands are trembling. Beauty takes it from my trembling hands and reads it out loud. It's an agreement that was written by my both parents saying that Mpatho and I will get married in order for me to stay a Mshazi and be part of the inheritance after their death.

I don't think anything could've prepared me for this a month after my mother's funeral. I haven't healed from the loss, and now I've lost my identity as well. Everything I have is in the Mshazi name. I don't have anywhere to go, aunt Brandi cannot, and I don't think she's willing to help me. She's here on behalf of her husband, my so-called real father, and she's ready for lobola negotiations.

"Mpatho please stop this," I beg.

He can stop this, I've always looked at him as a brother. He's 32, I'm 24 years old, how can he sit there and not defend me?

"I want you to stay a Mshazi, a comfortable life is the only life you know. I don't want you to go out there and be homeless," he says.

My lungs are closing off, I need to get some fresh air.

I walk out, leaving Mr Crawford reading the rest of the will.

I lie on my bed, hugging the pillow and crying my eyes out. I hate my mother for doing this to me. I don't care what intentions she had agreeing to this, she could've found another way. She could've stored money somewhere for me and secured my future. Why do I have to marry Mpatho? I don't care what the DNA says, in my eyes he will always be my brother.

I have a boyfriend, he's all I've known ever since I was 17, he's in Durban looking for a job. All the love I've learnt; I learnt from him. He gave me his word, that he will find the job and be, not just a guy in my life, but a man for me. I love him, I cannot switch those feelings off. I know he loves me too, regardless of our different backgrounds and frictions that existed between my late mother and his. Maybe it's what they call forbidden love, only my friends and his siblings know about us. He's old enough to introduce a woman at home, maybe that could've been my refugee, but he's unemployed and his mother would never take a Mshazi in.

I don't even know how I'm going to tell him this. We have our own plans of getting married once I turn 28. And he will never accept this, under no circumstances. Neither will I, that's my stance for now.

I feel something moving under my arm, it's my phone vibrating. I'm in no condition to have a phone conversation, I check the screen, Sphakamiso. I should've expected it, he has this thing of calling me everytime my emotions are high and leading me to a hopeless place.

I don't answer, but I know he will call 30 times if needed, he's a very obsessive and persistent guy.

There's a knock at the door, I put the phone on silence and wait for the person to walk in.

It's my grandfather. I turn and sleep on my stomach avoiding looking at his face.

"I know this is hard on you, my child. But you have to make a decision, I'm just glad that you are a fully grown girl and able to think for yourself," he says.

He's fuckin' serious! How the hell is he glad that I'm being asked to marry my brother? Blood or not, Mpatho is my brother.

"He's my brother, mkhulu. How can you say that?" I look at him, feeling another lump rising to my throat and rage rushing through my veins.

"You and Mpatho are not related by blood. Look at this from a business point of view, I wasn't hands-on raising you up but I think being part of this family has taught you something. I love you both equally, that's why I want this arrangement to work, it's for the interest of you both," he says.

It's time I wipe the bloody tears and stand up for myself because clearly I'm on my own.

"I have a boyfriend, I'm not going to marry Mpatho," I tell him.

The shock on his face!

I'm that innocent girl in the family who's never been involved in any scandals. Nobody thought I have a boyfriend, even my mother didn't know, I know how to keep secrets.

"Is he going to marry you?"

"Yes," I confidently say.

"When? If you say no to the agreement that makes you part of the Mshazi legacy, then you will be taken out of everything that you have, and I will have no choice but to find another wife for

Mpatho because he can't single-handedly run an empire," he says.

"But I've worked for this family for two years helping with the rental apartments management, surely there can be compensation for that. Even if it's just R100k for me to start over," I'm helpless, I never thought there would be a day where I beg for money.

"Don't you think raising you for 24 years is enough compensation?"

I'm caught between the rock and a hard place. Either decision I take, I won't be happy. But I have to decide; marrying Mpatho and keeping the portion of my inheritance or choosing Sphakamiso and losing everything that I have and probably suffering in love.

"Can I have a week at least? This is all a shock to me," I surrender.

He nods, gives me a shoulder rub, and walks out.

I release a sigh as he closes the door and then check my phone.

6 missed calls.

What am I going to tell you Phaka, sthandwa sami?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 02

I didn't have the guts to answer the phone. He's looking for a job, that on its own is stressful enough. I have a week to make a plan, I just need to sleep off this pain and wake up tomorrow with positive energy and call him back.

Someone is at the door, I'm here hidden with a bottle of my mother's red wine. I've only drunk twice in my life, I don't like nor condone alcohol as a solution, but fuck I need to numb the pain in my heart. It's just a lot, there's only so much one can take.

"Dinner is ready," it's the family helper, Aunt Nomsa.

I don't want to sit with those people on the table.

"I'm good, thanks," I say.

"I made your favourite pasta, please Phume." She was close to my mother, she probably knows what's going on, but unfortunately she's just a helper, there's nothing she can do.

"Must I bring it here and tell them you're not well?" She's still at the door and she won't leave until I agree.

"Yes," I say just to get rid of her.

The last thing I care about is pasta, I don't even have appetite.

Minutes later she's back, I open the door and let her in. She puts the food on my study table and looks around.

"Phume are you drinking?" she asks.

"Uma ngingaphuzi ngizokwenzani aunty? Please close the door on your way out, thanks for the food," I say.

She exhales heavily but doesn't say anything further. She walks out and closes the door.

I pour another glass, I wish I can get drunk sooner so that I will fall asleep.

My phone rings. Phaka is not going to stop calling anytime soon.

I take the phone, ready to swipe the screen and reject the call. But it's Malibongwe, his brother. He only intervenes when there

are problems in our relationship. All the alcohol washes off, my heart is racing, I can't reject his call. I don't answer him, he calls again.

I ignore.

He texts; "We are outside."

Who is "we"? If mkhulu and Mpatho go outside and see his old Tazz parked there will be a problem. With everything that this family has in terms of businesses, security is always taken seriously. They know this, I don't know why they like testing the devil.

I have no choice but to call him back.

"MaNongweni," he says when he answers.

"Hello bhuti," I definitely shouldn't have ignored Phaka's calls, he's blown things out of proportion.

"Sphakamiso can't get hold of you. If your phone has a problem receiving his calls can you come outside and use my phone?" he says.

This is something Phaka would do; sending his brother to give me his phone because I'm not answering mine. I should've thought about all the stunts he's pulled to get hold of me before ignoring him.

"I will call him back, I was just going through something," I say.

"Okay, I hope it's not something bad. He's worried about you, tomorrow he has an assessment at Hyundai, you know that you're his peace," he says and I suddenly feel selfish.

"I promise, I will call him, I'm sorry you had to come all the way here," I say.

"It's okay, be well," he ends the call.

Phaka will just know that I'm not okay. He knows me even when he's on the other side of the world.

Another glass of wine will do!

I call him, it doesn't even ring twice before he answers.

"Are you okay?" that's the first thing he asks. I can hear the worry in his voice.

"Just a little bit," I say, controlling the wobbliness in my voice.

"Have you been crying?" He's figured it out.

"I miss my mother," I say.

"I'm sorry sthandwa sami, I didn't mean to be pain in the arse, I got worried when you didn't answer. It's going to take time for you to accept that she's gone, I understand," he says.

"Thanks," I shut my eyes but the tears couldn't be locked in, they're rolling out.

"What about you? Are you ready for tomorrow?" I'm trying my best to sound strong. I can't distract him, if he can get the job tomorrow all my problems will be solved.

"I'm just anxious, I don't think I will be able to sleep, I want tomorrow to come with whatever it has in stored for me."

"You will get the job, don't worry." It's my duty to give him hope, for some reason he's been getting turned down everywhere he goes. It's been a year now since he lost his job and became unemployed. I didn't mind because I didn't need any financial support from him until now.

"Thank you sthandwa, I will call you in the morning. Sweet dreams, I love you."

I smile, "Sweet dreams babe, you're loved as well."

I'm still in love with him the same way I was six years ago. Our love still has an attachment of innocence, I still get butterflies when he says he loves me. I'm no longer a virgin, I've had sex twice with him. The goal was to get married first but life had its own plans. We started seeing each other a lot after he came back to the village after losing his job. I still remember the exact date and time last year when he took my virginity. It was painful, I was crying throughout the deed. I didn't agree to try again until New Year's Eve, I gave in again, it was better the second time, I felt less pain.

He's my first and last, I don't think I can have what I have with him with anyone else.

I'm woken up by his call in the morning. We chat a bit, I wish him good luck and promise to pray for him. My head is heavy, it must be the wine from last night. I'm taking a shower and going to the kitchen to make myself a toast and black tea, then I will take painkillers.

I step out of the bathroom wrapped only in a towel. I don't expect to find anyone in my room, more especially Mpatho because in my eyes he's still my brother.

He's sitting on my bed, I freeze at the door.

"Oh, sorry." He turns his face to the wall. If he really respects my privacy he should be walking out.

"Can I help you?" I ask.

"I brought you breakfast," he says, with his face turned away.

"Thanks but I was going to do it myself." I don't have to be grateful for anything. He's never made me breakfast before. Even going out with me as his little sister, he only did if it was the whole family going out.

"You've never loved me, have you?" I'm still not dressed up.

He turns his head back and looks at me.

“What do you mean?” He’s acting dumb.

“You were always distant, you knew I wasn’t related here, right?”

“Yes, I knew about everything,” he says.

“Everything? You mean you knew that I’d be sold to you when my mother dies?” I ask.

“I’ve known since I was 16 years old. That’s why I went to the army, it wasn’t going to be easy to transition from being a brother to a husband, that’s why I didn’t even start.” He sounds sick like the rest of them. When he was 16, I was 8 years old. He was already looking at his wife?

“You’re a pedophile. You, your family and your stepmother. All of you are sick.” I’m disgusted, my mother could’ve easily sent me to an orphanage.

“How? I’ve never tried to do anything to you. I waited for the right time, and I’m not going to force you into doing anything. Your mother was not my mother, the same way my father was not your father, they both sealed our fates, which put you and I on the same boat. The only difference is that I’m okay with it. I will marry you and take care of you if you agree.”

He’s so good-looking and sophisticated to settle for this bullshit. Can’t he pick a girl of his choice? It’s 2020, he was trained as a soldier, he’s not scared of anyone. He has big muscles, he’s tall, he wears size 11 shoes. And you mean to tell me he can’t tell mkhulu to go to hell?

“Don’t you have a girlfriend?” I ask.

“We broke up before your mother’s funeral, it wasn’t something serious. I’ve always known who I might end up with, I did everything with that in mind,” he says.

I don't think he can ever charm me, even if he claims to be a virgin, I wouldn't give a damn. He's older than me and I don't love him.

"I won't marry you," I tell him.

This is my final decision, Phaka will get the job and I will move in with him and start my life from scratch.

"Phume, I know you're stubborn. But they will take everything from you. Let's just try, give it a few months, then if it doesn't work we will separate and I will settle you out generously." He's stood up, he's in front of me looking at me in the eyes. I know arranged marriages from movies and books, they all start like that and then next thing there are babies and second wives.

"Please Phumelele," he begs.

I've never been this close to his chest and breathed his cologne. He's in a black suit dressed for work, I don't know what his hand is doing on my face.

I push it off. "Please get away from me, Mpatho."

"Know me on an emotional level, please. We don't need to do anything uncomfortable, just know me."

"I've known you as a brother for 24 years Mpatho." How does he expect me to see him as a suitor?

"And I've seen you as my future wife all these years," he says.

I attempt to push him out of the way but it's like I just poked the wall. I move to the side and make my way to the closet.

"What can I do to make this comfortable for you?"

"You can start by leaving my room," I say.

"Phume," he's so annoying.

I turn, "Mpatho, I think you know the law."

He briefly sighs before walking out. I follow behind to the door and shut it.

Fuuuuck!

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I don't have a week of Mpatho coming to my room and trying to convince me that he's a husband material, not a brother. I have told mkhulu that I will move out in a week's time, I'm not getting into an arranged marriage. This is my life and I won't be decided for by two dead lovers.

Aunt Brandi can go back to sucking cocks to feed her husband. Mpatho is not paying lobola for me, only Phaka will do, on his time and definitely not to them. Why hasn't the so-called biological father come to check up on me? I'm not going to entertain this, people live without luxurious houses and flashy cars. I will be okay.

Speaking of being okay, my phone rings and my happiness' name flashes on the screen.

"Mcineka," I answer.

I'm in a bright mood. I know I made the right decision.

"Yebo sawubona," that's how he usually talks when answering friends phone calls. What happened to 'sthandwa sami'?

"Are you okay?" I ask a bit worried.

"Yes, I'm okay. Can I see you?"

I'm confused.

"Are you not in Durban?" I ask.

"No, I just got home about an hour ago. Can we meet behind the old containers?" That's our usual spot by the way, I never

drive when meeting up with him. I don't like the idea of me driving a man home, I prefer we both walk. They still haven't taken the car keys yet, but I won't drive the car this week, just so they know I will survive.

"Okay, give me 10 minutes," I say.

"Okay, I love you," he says before ending the call.

I have a bad feeling about this. If he didn't pass the assessment it means I will have no where to go.

I only told Aunt Nomusa that I'm going out to see a 'friend'. Others don't matter, it's not like they care about me. I find Phaka already waiting by the old containers. He's wearing jeans and brown poloneck, there's a jacket on his arm. He knows me very well, I knew we'd be here until late and it's a bit cold today, but I still didn't think of wearing a jacket. Seeing him makes me happy, for a moment I forget about the ups and downs of life. I stay in his arms, smelling his heavy masculine cologne.

"How are you?" he asks in a husky voice. He started smoking last year, his voice has changed ever since then, he used to sound normal.

"I'm okay," I say, tearing my eyes away from his. Did I mention that I still get shy around him? Yes, six years later, I still act like a teenager who just started dating.

He lifts my chin up, forcing our eyes to meet, my lips voluntarily crack into a smile.

"You look beautiful, but sad. What's going on?" he asks.

I take in a deep breath. "Did you get the job?" This is what important to me right now.

He doesn't answer, his eyes are everywhere but on me. I feel my heartbeat slowing down.

"Sphakamiso," my voice cracks with grief.

He shakes his head, no he didn't get the job. I feel warm drops on my cheeks, he was my last hope, why did he fuck it up?

"Why are you crying?" He holds my hands, I push him away.

"What's wrong?" he asks.

It feels like my world has come to a standstill. I'm crying and forgetting that he still doesn't know anything.

He holds my hand and wipes my tears. He's confused.

"I don't have anywhere to stay, you were my only hope," I tell him.

He frowns, "What do you mean?"

"They want me to marry Mpatho, I'm not a Mshazi," I say.

"I don't understand," he lets go of my hand and creases his forehead.

"I'm a child my mother brought into marriage, I didn't know that until yesterday," I say.

"And the marrying Mpatho part?" He's looking at me like he will strangle me at any minute.

"For me to continue being part of the family, my mother and the man I thought was my father arranged for me to marry him after both of them have died."

"Igqe leyo, they must sleep and dream again." Okay.

I'm angry as him but I don't subscribe to that kind of language. He clicks his tongue and pulls my hand. He's angry, somehow I'm at the receiving end as well, his grip is very tight around my wrist.

We stop behind the container, I stand with my back against it, he stands in front of me.

He grabs my boob and squeezes it with minimum gentleness. I lift my face to him, he smashes his lips on me and kisses me hungrily.

I'm running out of breath, I push him off and breathe. He wants more, he's leaning to my face, I tilt my head to the side.

"You're not going to marry anyone, okay?" He chases my eyes, daring me to say otherwise.

"Where am I going to live? My mother's relatives didn't like her, Aunt Brandi wants to sell me off." I never thought I'd be in this position, alone and poor.

"I will talk to my mother about you crashing in while I go and look for the job," he says.

Now it's him who needs to sleep and dream again. His mother letting me live in her house?

"She won't agree, you know that. And besides, what are people going to think?"

"I don't care about people, leave this to me and tell that dog he's not getting any piece of you."

Now I feel like a piece of meat. I nod, he comes for another kiss, he's gentle this time. We kiss for quite a moment, I feel a funny sensation on my clit, I'm getting somewhere I don't want to be.

He reads my discomfort and stops.

"Look, I know it's been hard on you. I haven't been able to treat you the way a princess is supposed to be treated. Sometimes even if I do get a little money I have to fulfill my other duties, I don't afford to spoil you and..." Honestly, I don't care.

“I just need temporary accommodation, I don’t need you to be my blesser,” I say.

“Ngiyak’thanda Phume,” he says, dropping his forehead onto mine.

Our eyes lock, he’s sad.

“I love you too, that’s why I refused,” I say.

“Thank you for that, maybe I would’ve ended up in jail or dead if you agreed to it. I just wish I can be more than what I am to you.” He caresses the side of my face, his eyes are on me, I have no doubt that these eyes were only made for me. I kiss his lips, he starts by smiling and then kisses me back.

“You’re growing up,” he says in a low whisper.

“The best part of it is that I’m growing with you. I had my first kiss with you, and my first...sex.” He chuckles, he knew I’d be shy to say it. “And we will have our first wedding and first child together,” I say.

He pulls me into his arms and tightly embraces me. “I’d be so happy, sthandwa sami.”

I don’t know how his mother is going to accept me being her son’s girlfriend, but I will go home and start packing, I don’t have any other choice.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 03

I don’t know why they’re pretending to be sad that I’m leaving. They literally said it’s either I marry their son or become a street kid. Oh, I’m 24, I can’t be a street-kid, maybe a young street-aunt. I was a bit relieved that my arranged husband is not here.

But God always provide the opposite of what I ask for. He walks in wearing a grey double-breasted suit, looking worn-out with his laptop bag and car keys and cellphone in the hand. He sees the bags and walks in looking at me with a few lines furrowed on his forehead.

“She’s leaving,” the gold-digging Beauty tells him.

“Today?” He looks at me, clearly shocked.

He thought I’d be here the whole week being ambushed by him in the bedroom. Phaka called and said I must be ready, his mother agreed. It was very unexpected given that it’s been only three days since he said he was going to talk to her. I don’t know how she’s going welcome me when I get there, the only thing I look forward to is being out of this evil mansion.

“Phume, you’re making a mistake,” Mpatho says.

“Okay, thanks for letting me know. I want to go, where’s Aunt Nomusa?” I drag my suitcases, looking around the kitchen. A hand grabs my arm, it’s him. I don’t know if he’s pressured because mkhulu is here, so he’s acting like he can try to win me over.

“Please let me go,” I say, gently pulling my arm.

“I love you,” he says.

I freeze, and so does he.

It doesn’t look like he believes he just said that either.

Unfortunately, I hear those words everyday, my soul didn’t move.

“Can I go?” I ask.

“I know this is not normal, but my whole life I’ve been preparing for the day I become your husband. I stayed away from home so that you can have freedom throughout your teens. I didn’t

want to make things awkward for us, please help me build this family, you're my legacy wife."

I stop myself from saying whose wife I really am. It's too soon and he doesn't need to know.

"Aunt Nomusa," I call, she's the only person I care to say proper goodbye to.

Mkhulu will get a little hand wave, nothing much. I despise them, all of them even their ancestors.

Aunt Nomusa appears with her arms congealed with flour. Mkhulu must've asked for dombolo, his favourite thing after ruining people's lives.

"I'm so sad to see you leave," she says with sadness in her eyes.

"I'm sad to leave you too, but I'm not leaving the country, or the village for that matter, I will see you around."

"Where are you going?" She's coming to help me with the bags, nobody cared in the lounge.

"I'm going to eMaCinekeni," I say.

She stops and looks at me with a frown.

"KwaMcineka?" she asks.

I nod, "Yes."

"Who do you know there?"

"Everybody," I say.

"That woman didn't like your mother, keep your eyes open. Exactly why don't you come and stay with me? I don't have a big family, you know that."

She didn't invite me on time, nevertheless, I wouldn't have gone to the same family that's under the Mshazi charity. I'm

sure mkhulu would've gone out of his way to make my life miserable even there.

“Don't worry, it's just temporary, I will get a job and find my own place. If not, Sphakamiso will find it and we will move to Durban,” I say.

“Which one is Sphakamiso?” How is this going to help her though?

“The cute one,” I say.

She gives me a blank face, what is she trying to insinuate? The Mcinekas are cute, it's just that sometimes when you don't have a luxury life your cuteness becomes a 'P' in 'Pyschology'. She leaves me outside the gate and wishes me well.

I don't stand too long, the silver Tazz arrives. It's a show-stopper car, you can hear it coming from a mile away, sometimes you're not even sure if it's a car or a thunder cracking. It belongs to Malibongwe, he had it before he was even employed. He hasn't been arrested and it's been almost three years since he had it, so I will rule out the possibility of him stealing old cars. Also, he doesn't look like a criminal, he has two dimples and squinty eyes.

Oh, he's here as well, sitting at the back. He's three years older than Sphakamiso, we don't act anyhow around him, even hugging it's like we are church brother and sister.

“Are you okay?” Sphakamiso asks, his voice lowered.

“Yes,” I nod.

“Let's go home.”

Am I going to feel at home? I have only 10 minutes to find out.

He loads my luggage at the back, then we get inside the car. I sit at the front, he's driving.

“Sawubona bhuti,” I greet Malibongwe at the back.

He looks up from his phone, “Hi, how are you?”

“I’m good,” I say, not mentioning that I’m hell nervous.

I hoped that 10 minutes would be longer, I’m not in anyway prepared to meet with Sphakamiso’s mother. MaVilakazi, she’s not a friendly woman, she’s thick like a farm Brahman cow and very loud. She’s not a fan of my family, or should I say ex-family. Maybe she knew the side of them I just discovered a few days ago. The evil side, I apologize to God for siding with my mother and calling her names in the past.

The car parks next to the out-built two-room that Sphakamiso shares with his younger brother, Mkhuleko. Malibongwe has his own rondavel at the far side of the yard, he’s a man of privacy. Then there’s a big brick-house for the whole family. Luckily, nobody is outside, they walk me inside the two-room with my luggage peacefully.

I’ve never been here before but I know most things because Sphakamiso can talk for Africa on the days that he decides to be open. I’m not shocked by anything, he did tell me that he doesn’t have a wardrobe, he prefers keeping his clothes in the suitcase, just in case he has to run away, and his shoes under the bed. He has a single bed, luckily I’m medium-sized, we will both fit. Instead of buying a wardrobe he invested in two big speakers and a Sony amplifier.

“Feel at home,” Malibongwe says before walking out.

I don’t know where my bags are going to stay, I sink down on the bed and sigh.

He leaves them on the floor and sits next to me.

“I thought the day you come here you’d be accompanied by your parents and welcomed with inyongo and a lid of impepho to introduce you to the ancestors,” he says.

“It will still happen, right?” I look at him, he’s wearing a white hoodie jacket, pulled over his forehead.

“It will happen,” he says.

“Take your hoodie off, I want to see you.”

He frowns, but there’s a little smile cracking out. He removes it, now I can appreciate my dark-bone.

His beard is kept short, his facial hair is trimmed into a thin line. His hair is short and combed, I don’t know why he’s not cutting it.

“You’re making me shy,” he says, smiling and looking away from me.

I thought I was the girl in this relationship.

“Thank you for providing me with a shelter,” I say.

“There’s no need, you’re my girlfriend, it’s my job to help you. Can I go and get you something to drink?”

I nod, he kisses my cheek and leaves. It was going to be peaceful if it was just him and I living together, but he didn’t get the job, so I have to mingle with his family. I don’t mind Mkhuleko and Malibongwe, those are his spokespersons. They’d come with him and beg me to become his girlfriend. I was only 16 when he started asking me out, I was two classes ahead of Mkhuleko but he’d come to my class regardless of him being my junior and pass his brother’s messages. It’s the mother and the big sister I’m uncomfortable sharing space with. Worse their sister is divorced, I’ve heard a lot of stories about people who return back home after marriage, they are said to bring fire to hell.

God does it again, instead of Sphakamiso walking in with my juice or whatever, it’s his sister and mother behind who walk in.

I didn't know their sister face to face until now. She's her mother's weight and height, two bulls walking into a calf. I don't know why I feel like I'm about to get attacked, Lord help me.

"I know her," she says to her mother before they even sit.

I'm a celebrity, aren't I?

"Sawubona ngane yami," MaVilakazi says.

That's not the tone I expected.

"Yebo mama," I greet her back.

Nombuso greets me too. She looks a like Malibongwe, a lighter version of him.

"Sphakamiso told us what happened, shame we didn't even know he was dating you. Are you okay?" Her tone is different from her mother's, she's a bit condescending.

"I'm okay," I say.

"Did your mother really sell you off?"

MaVilakazi looks at her, "Hhayi-bo Nombuso, Sphakamiso asked us to be nice."

"I'm just sorry for her, she probably didn't know what kind of a person her mother was."

I'm not going to defend my mother, she deserves to be bashed. But hey, can we talk about why you cheated on your husband?

"So how long are you staying?" Nombuso again.

"I will leave as soon as I get a job," I say.

"Okay, but we don't mind you staying because my mother has no daughter-in-law yet, you're the first."

I'm a daughter-in-law now? LOL.

“We were just here to greet, you can rest today, we will show you around the kitchen tomorrow,” MaVilakazi says. They stand up and walk out.

Culturally I’d be offended, they have no right to ask me to be in the kitchen. But literally speaking I’m here living rent-free, I didn’t come with one bag of rice, the least I could do is to be useful and help with the chores. God will help me, it’s been years since I did laundry or cooked my own food.

He comes with two plates of food and cold-drink. I’m picky when it comes to food, and I have to eat a plate of samp and tripe. I don’t want to come off as disrespectful so I pick the spoon and start eating.

“We have a bathroom outside but if you prefer bathing inside the house I will get a kettle and a basin,” he says.

“I will bath inside here.” I’m still shy about getting naked in front of him but I’d take that over bumping into his sister in the bathroom.

“You know I will look at you, right?” He’s smiling.

“I don’t mind,” I say, trying to be a big girl.

His nod is like a threat, I’m not trying to challenge him here.

There’s a toddler walking in, I didn’t know someone has a baby here.

“Ba...baaa!” he’s running to Sphakamiso.

I see a huge resemblance between them. He wants food, he must be 2 years old or so, I don’t think he can eat samp. But why is Sphakamiso ignoring him?

“The child wants to eat,” I say, nudging him with my elbow.

He does the unthinkable, feeds a toddler samp and tripe. I thought he'd go and get him his mash or whatever soft porridge he eats.

"How old is he?" I'm scared for his little stomach.

Before Sphakamiso replies, the little one has swallowed, he's opening his mouth for the second spoon. Ok, I know nothing about kids.

"Babaaa, aaah!" he opens his mouth.

Sphakamiso shoves in another spoon.

"Whose child is this?" I ask in amazement.

He clears his throat and accidentally drops the spoon.

I notice that his hand is trembling as he picks it up. Is he scared of kids?

This child calls him ba-baaa, obviously they're related.

"Malibongwe's," he says.

"I see, he looks like you."

"Everyone says so," he says.

We continue eating, he's sharing his plate with the little one.

"What's his name?" I ask, I can't forever call him a little one.

"Aphelele," he says.

I look at Aphelele and smile, "Hey Aphe."

Ummm, he's more interested in the samp.

"How old is he?" I ask again.

"Two and a half," Sphakamiso says.

I don't think he likes kids as much as he claims to. It doesn't look like he wants Aphelele to even be here and finishing his

food. Kids are adorable, I can't wait to be stable in life and have our own version of Aphelele.

Eventually Aphelele shakes his head, he's full now. I wonder if it's legal to feed a two and half year old samp. Sphakamiso wipes his mouth and tells him to go to his grandmother.

"You're very awkward with kids," I say after Aphelele has ran out.

"No, I'm not," he says with his head dropped.

I'm not bashing his uncle-ing skills, I was just saying.

I'm full as well, I managed to eat half of my plate.

Him on the other hand, it doesn't look like he ate much after Aphelele walked in.

"I will take these to the kitchen," he stands up and walks out with the plates.

"Bring the kettle and a basin," I say before he disappears.

I need to take out my pyjamas. This room has no TV, just amplifier and speakers, I guess we will have an early night.

I knew it was going to be awkward, he's lying on the side facing me and I'm supposed to squat inside this basin and wash my body, naked. But I said I don't mind and I'm not a girl to back down from her word.

I wash myself, conscious of his eyes glued eyes. Washing my cookie-jar is the most uncomfortable; I have to change water and he's not looking away.

"Please look away," I say.

He chuckles, "But I want to look."

"No," I say.

He sighs dramatically and looks away.

My privacy granted, I finish bathing in peace. I lotion myself and put on my pyjamas.

It's dark outside, Mkhuleko is still not home, I go and throw the water outside.

Then I join him in bed, he's lying in his shorts, naked on top.

"Are you cold?" He's looking at my long pyjamas.

I don't respond, this is how I usually dress up when I'm sharing a bed with him.

He pulls me closer and passionately kisses my bottom lip. I know he's a man, he has feelings, and I appreciate him for respecting me and my body and not rushing me into anything.

"I miss you," he says.

"I'm still not your wife," I remind him.

He links his fingers into mine and plays with my hand.

We had agreements and promises to each other. We broke them here and there but I still want us to stick to our plans and dreams.

"I will make you my wife, I just need a bit of time and patience," he says.

I'm not sure if he's bruised or not, I meant no harm with that statement.

"Do you still love me?" he asks.

I don't understand, why would I be here if I didn't?

"Of course, I love you," I say.

"Don't you miss me?" He nudges me with his erect penis.

I almost choke on my breath.

“Because I do miss you, every day, every night,” he says.

I blush, dropping my eyes.

“I know I’m still indebted to your family for what I did to you. But sthandwa sami, just one more time, I want to make love to you.” His voice vibrates on my skin, I’m getting goosebumps.

“You said the last time was going to be the last time you ask,” I say, allowing him to put my leg over his thigh and gets too close to my waist.

“I thought I was going to get a job and pay my dues. It didn’t happen, but my body still craves for you regardless. I love you, ngeke ngidlale ngawe Phume.” He drops his head and kisses me on the neck. His hand is pushing down my pyjama pants. I knew something like this might happen, I just didn’t think it will happen today.

When his hand slides inside my panties, he splashes into wetness and looks up with a smile.

“You also missed me, sthandwa,” he says, happily.

I don’t think I missed his penis, no I haven’t felt the sex magic that everyone hypes up. I just missed him holding me and looking at me like I’m the center of his universe.

He takes off my pants and then pushes down his shorts. I catch a sight of his penis, I won’t lie it’s ugly, the sac of his balls is long, his whole area is darker than the rest of his body. The funny part is that he doesn’t seem bothered, he doesn’t care that his penis is ugly. On the other hand I’m scared to even open my thighs because I haven’t shaved in a while.

“I love you babe,” his voice is barely above whisper.

He’s right between my thighs, penetrating my vaginal lips, he’s big and hard down there.

No, no, I need us to do this safely!

“Sphakamiso where’s the condom?”

“Icondom yani manje?” He inhales sharply and drops his shoulders.

“I want you to wear a condom, I don’t want unprotected sex,” I tell him.

“But you’re my girlfriend, I can’t be using condoms away and using them at home.”

Away and at home? Is sex a sport to him?

“I beg your pardon?” I push his shoulder, I need to see his face.

“I will get it, I’m sorry.” He’s rolling to the side without looking at me.

He can’t make such statement and then run away.

“Can you repeat what you said?” I ask.

“I don’t remember what I said.” He’s trying to act dumb.

“You said you can’t use condoms away and use them at home, which is with me I suppose. So you engage in sexual activities with other people?” I can’t wrap my head around this, my emotions are all over the place. Sphakamiso and I can fight about anything in the world, but not cheating. I’ve never cheated on him, so I’d hope that the same respect is given me too.

“I made a mistake, there’s no truth in that, I’m just horny,” he says.

I sit up, “Try something else.”

He fakes a laugh, I know him too well.

“Phume come on, you know me better than that. I had a tongue slip, it didn’t mean anything, you’re the only woman I’ve been with since I was 21 years old,” he says.

“So you’ve never cheated on me?” I ask.

“No, why would I cheat on you? You’re everything I need in life.”

“Fine, can I see your phone?” That’s where I will get my closure. I know it’s his personal belonging, but so is my heart, I need to get to the bottom of this.

“That’s extreme, what have I done so wrong?” He sits on the bed, his penis now soft like a rotten banana.

“I just want to see it, you can take mine as well,” I say.

My instincts tell me I’ve been fooled. For his sake I really hope I’m wrong. He’s taken the phone out, but he doesn’t give it to me straight away, he’s still busy. Deleting, I guess. So he’s really not faithful to me, my boyfriend of six years has been doing things behind my back.

He finally gives his phone to me, he’s not happy at all.

For some reason I go straight to his pictures. I know he doesn’t know anything about the recycle bin, I will find everything he just deleted. I click in, only to get confused.

“Why did you delete Aphelele’s pictures?” I mean, these are good pictures of the kid, in some they’re posing together, looking all happy.

“I...I don’t know, let me see.” His eyes are full of guilt.

It’s not possible, Sphakamiso wouldn’t do something like that to me. There’s a knot sitting below my stomach. My temperature rises, I get flu within a minute.

“Why are you deleting that child’s pictures Phaka?” I ask again.

He fails to answer my question. Instead he’s apologizing for something I don’t know.

“I made a mistake,” he’s saying.

“By doing what?” I’m shaking with anger.

He shifts closer and snatches the phone from my hand.

“Is he your child?” I ask, grabbing his arm before he gets away.

“It was a mistake, I didn’t know how to tell you.”

I was hoping it wasn’t true, that he had fooled me but not to that extent. He has a two and a half years old son? So I’ve been a fool for over two years.

“Take me home,” I stand up and look for my pants.

I’m glad this time I didn’t let him have sex with me. I wish I can have the two sexes that I have already given to him back.

“You don’t have a home, I can’t take you to Mpatho.”

That’s totally not up to him to decide.

“Take me home, whore!” I’m screaming, I can be louder than this if he wants me to.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 04

He’s not giving me my toiletry bag. There’s nothing he can say to make me stay, I’d rather go back to the Mshazis and figure out what to do next. I followed my heart, unfortunately it wasn’t the best route, I chose the person who didn’t choose me.

“I made a mistake, Phume. Just one, I didn’t even know I had a child until he was 18 months old, I was scared to tell you,” he says, standing against the locked door.

“Where is the mother?” I don’t know why I even care, but he owes me answers.

“She passed away,” he says, not looking at me.

“Were you dating?” I ask.

“No, it was a one-time thing, I never saw her after that, I found out about Aphelele through her uncle,” he says.

For some reason I don't believe him. He's still not telling me the truth. How did the uncle know him if he wasn't dating the mother? If he knew about Aphelele from the age of 18 months, that means he's been lying to me for a year now.

“Why did you do that to me?”

He stutters, “I...I'm sorry.”

“Am I not enough?” I ask.

I don't know if I will ever recover from this, he's broken me.

“Phume, I'm 28 years old and you've only let me have sex with you twice. Do you really think there's a man who can stay that long not having any sugar?” Wow.

So he's justifying him cheating on me. I'm also 24 years old and I've had sex twice, yet I've never cheated on him.

“So I should've slept around too?”

“No, I'm just saying that...I'm trying to...”

“You're trying to say nothing, shut up!”

His eyes widen, I've never spoken to him like that.

“Phume?” He's shocked.

“Let me go home, don't make me cause a scene.”

“So you think Mpatho has never slept with any woman? You think he's perfect and he's going to have sex once a year?”

He's trying to play down my emotions.

I don't care about Mpatho and what he's done in life.

“He's never slept with anyone behind my back, I haven't been in a relationship with him, and he doesn't have a samp-eating

kid with a dead woman.” Ok, I’m a very mean person. I know he didn’t ask to be brought onto this earth, but I don’t like him.

“So you’re going to him?” he asks.

I don’t respond. I can see the twinge of pain in his eyes.

“It means all along you’ve been wanting to fuck your brother. It’s impossible that you’re horny for him within a week of finding out that you were sold off to him. You’ve always wanted him.”

I’m not bothered, he can think whatever he wants to think.

“You’re not going anywhere,” he says.

He’s angered by my nonchalance to his insults.

I will leave, he’s not going to keep me here against my will, unless he ties my hands and feet.

I pick his DVD player, he drops my toiletry bag and charges towards me.

I break the DVD player on the floor.

“Phume don’t break my things,” he’s shaking with anger.

“Unlock the door,” I say, turning to the speaker.

He comes and grabs my arms. This is a war, he mistook the respect I have for him for stupidity. He’s holding my arms, I’m kicking his speakers and screaming.

He wasn’t expecting me to fight back. “Please calm down, I’m not fighting with you.”

“Let me go!” I yell.

“If I let you go, won’t you destroy my things?”

He cares more about the cheap radio set, I want him to take me home with that stolen Tazz.

There’s someone at the door, I don’t care because I told him I was going to make a scene.

“Sphakamiso what’s going on?” that’s either his sister or mother.

He looks at me, almost teary.

“Please don’t do this, I made a mistake.”

I’ve never seen him like this, but I’m not feeling sorry for him.

“Open the door!” the person says, it sounds like Nombuso.

He lets go of my arms and tries to take a kiss. He’s so stupid, why would I let him kiss me? This guy hasn’t bought me flowers in decades because he was busy buying purity. I was so understanding, I remember this other time last year I donated my old phone to him after he lost his. I’m sure he was communicating with the babymama using my phone.

He goes to the door and opens. Nombuso walks in with Aphelele strapped on her back, she’s here to test me. Why is she coming here with that brat?

“What’s all this noise?” She’s looking at me, like I was making all the noise by myself.

“Sphakamiso doesn’t want to take me home,” I tell her.

“You want to leave?” She looks at him with her eyebrows furrowed.

He drops his eyes.

She looks at me again, “What did my brother do?”

“He cheated on me and had a child behind my back,” I say.

“That’s all? You’re screaming because of the innocent child? What do you want him to do? Kill Aphelele? Hhayi-bo sisi, if you really love him you will accept his child,” she says.

Can her ex-husband divorce her for the second time? I can’t believe this coming from a woman.

MaVilakazi walks in as well, this is getting tense.

She wants to know what's going on. Nombuso explains, putting all the blame on me.

"If she wants to go home, then Sphakamiso must take her home," MaVilakazi says, looking at Sphakamiso.

He lifts his eyes to me, I boldly hold his stare.

"I love her Ma," he says, turning his eyes to MaVilakazi for pity.

"She clearly doesn't love you the way you deserve. How do you think we are going to live with someone who hates Aphelele?" – MaVilakazi.

"She needs time, she doesn't..." What is he denying?

I don't need time to do anything.

"I will never accept him, I don't like him," I tell him.

He shuts his eyes, clenching his jaws. Did he think I was a stepmother material? No, not me, if his first child is not my child, then it's over.

"Take her home," MaVilakazi says and walks out.

Nombuso follows.

They leave the door open. He's standing in the same position, looking at me with red-rimmed eyes.

My bags? I have three of them and one suitcase.

He watches me struggling with them out of the door.

The Tazz is still parked in front of the house, I drop my bags next to it and wait.

It's cold and dark outside, Malibongwe and Mkhuleko are not home.

He takes his precious time coming out of the house. He loads my bags inside the car, I open the door and sit. I don't know

what explanation I'm going to give mkhulu, I don't know if he will accept me back, but I have no other choice but to go back.

He's angry, music is always his therapy. He's playing some shady maskandi song; "Dali usungaze ungishiye ngempela dali wami. Usubone abangcono wasung' shiya mina. Abahlakaniphile kunami wasung' shiya mina. Abanemali kunami wasung' shiya mina."

I'm not moved by that song, he's not going to gaslight my feelings with stupid lyrics. I sit looking outside the window until he parks outside the gate, right in front of it. He doesn't lower the music, it's late, he's disturbing not only the Mshazis but the whole neighborhood.

I switch it off, he turns his angry face to me.

"Thanks," I say opening the door.

"Phume you're really leaving me?"

Did he think I was playing? I don't answer, I climb out and wait for him to take out my bags

He comes and takes them out, dumping them at the side.

"I wish you luck," he says.

I will embrace that, I need luck.

"Thank you," I say.

"I hope you never make any mistakes in life, that you're always going to be this perfect."

There's nothing he can say to make me feel like he deserves forgiveness.

"Phume," he says, standing in front of me and blocking me from picking my bags that he threw on the ground. He holds my waist, I sigh heavily and turn my head to the side.

“Ngiyazi ngiyinja futhi awungifanele. I’m just a dog that doesn’t even deserve to be alive. But everyone deserves a second chance, please don’t leave me.” He’s doing what he should’ve done right after he found out he’d made someone pregnant. Now him accepting his mistakes and asking for forgiveness is not real, he’s only sorry because he got caught.

“Please move, I want to go,” I say, gently.

“I know you’re angry, but I will wake up tomorrow and go look for a job. I will take anything I get, then I will keep all the promises I made to you. I’m going to marry you, Phume. I’ve never imagined my life with anyone else, you’re the only woman who’s ever going to have my heart.” He says and moves to the side.

I take my bags and leave him standing. I can’t believe he did that to me. That boy, I can’t even call him a man after what he’s done, he introduced me to womanhood, if that’s how to put it. We did a lot of growing up together, I thought we were not only lovers, but best friends as well. I’ve been very naïve, I hate myself for that.

The gate is locked, I have to call mkhulu and ask that they let me in. This is an embarrassment, after that grand exit now I’m back with my tail tucked between my legs. I wear my big girl pants and make a phone call.

I didn’t think he’d just open the gate, but it’s like everyone expected me to fail and come back. They’re gathered in front of the TV, I make my entrance of shame with my bags. Mpatho gets up and comes to help me. I don’t say anything to him, I stand in front of mkhulu and ask if I can have a roof to sleep under.

“What happened at your boyfriend’s place?” Beauty asks.

I didn't tell them where I was going, it must be Aunt Nomusa begging porridge with my name.

"Nothing," I shrug.

She chuckles and turns back to the TV.

"You can go to your room, we will talk in the morning," mkhulu says.

I nod and head to my room. Mpatho is behind me with one bag and the suitcase.

He walks me in and then stands, looking at me.

"Are you okay?" He's probably celebrating inside.

"Yes, I'm okay," I lie.

It's obvious on my face that I've been hurt and I will break down as soon as I have a chance to.

"What did he do?" he asks.

I don't trust him, I don't like him, but right now I need to vent, even if it's to my worst enemy.

"He had a child behind my back. Six years, the whole six years of my life! He played me."

He's looking at me, I don't know if he's pitying me or actually celebrating.

"He said he was going to marry me, I gave my innocence to him, only for him to break my heart."

He takes my hand and sits me on the bed. He lowers himself and sits next to me.

"You're still young and you grew up in this mansion being protected from everything. You're not experienced about the realities of this world. I'm sorry you had to go through that, I really am."

I look at him, I'm not sure if he's being genuine or not.

"Why do men hurt women?" I ask him.

"I don't know, Phume. In life people hurt people and people get hurt by people. That's why some parents try to secure their children's future and make sure they will be taken care of when they're no longer around," he says.

"But children deserve a chance to make their own life choices, it's not fair for someone to live her life based on dead people's decisions," I say.

"I know," he nods.

I rest on my back and look at the ceiling. What the fuck am I going to be in this life? No parents, no home, and no boyfriend. There's loneliness, then there's me.

"They want me to marry another woman," he says, his tone heavy.

I don't say anything, I don't really care.

He inhales sharply and says, "My mother remarried, she has other children in Swaziland. I last saw her when I was 19 years old, she had come to stock in Johannesburg, my father took me to her. I didn't remember her face, your mother had destroyed all her pictures in the house, but when I saw her I knew it was her. I ran to her, I was happy, but she just sat there and looked at me like I was a stranger."

I don't know anything about him, he was rarely home growing up. He was already in boarding school when I started school, from there he was in Durban, then in Pretoria, and army after that.

"Do you have a relationship with her?" I ask.

“No, I’ve never had a mother, I only know the warmth of an old woman from Aunt Nomusa. Your mother was...she didn’t like me,” he says.

“Really?” I’m not even shocked because that woman didn’t like me either, I just learned that.

“Yes,” he says.

I can hear that he has a void and he despises my mother.

“So I’ve always wanted a proper family structure for myself. To be someone’s husband and have kids, with both of us under one roof,” he says.

This is the longest conversation we’ve ever had.

He glances at me, I’m looking at him, then he chuckles.

“I never considered you a sister because I never considered your mother my mother. To me you’ve always been someone I was going to come back home to love and cherish,” he says.

I don’t say anything, he stands up and looks around.

“Need help with the bags?” he asks.

“I’m not unpacking,” I say.

“Okay, I will just put them here.” He picks the heaviest bag with one hand and puts it on the top shelf.

He’s actually nice, I’m always a bad judge of character.

I need to pee, I leave him in my room and go to the bathroom. Sphakamiso has been flooding my Whatsapp with messages. He’s starting to look crazy, I’m not going to forgive him. His brothers are not home yet, otherwise I’d be receiving everyone’s call right now. I’m sure Nombuso is over the moon right now, I suspect she told Aphelele to come and introduce himself, she knew it would destroy our relationship.

I walk back to Mpatho talking on the phone.

“No, the cars come Friday 1pm...I will get two more security guards and station them at the dealership while the guys receive the cars...I will confirm the routes on Thursday and let you know...thank you Steve.” He drops the call and turns to me.

“Oh sorry, business calls inside your bedroom,” he says.

I shrug and sit on the bed. Yes, they sell cars, expensive cars. The dealership brings more money in the family, it has birthed most of their other small businesses.

“Don’t you want something to eat?” he asks.

“No, thank you.” My stomach is full of MaVilakazi’s tasteless samp and the tripe that had sand particles in it.

“Okay, I will see you in the morning,” he says and walks out.

I go and close the door after him....

The cars come Friday at 1pm. I know what they’re worth, millions. I’m sweating and unable to sit still. I know I’m not going to get a cent unless I marry Mpatho. Tomorrow morning they will want to know if I’ve changed my mind, which I haven’t.

I log into Whatsapp, I have more messages from Sphakamiso. This guy owes me six years of my life back, and my virginity, and that other sex I gave him on New Year’s Eve.

I text him: CAN WE MEET TOMORROW AND DISCUSS BUSINESS? IF YOU'RE NOT BUSY FATHERING.

He responds right after the second tick. He’s available to talk, at whatever time I set.

I will never turn anyone into a criminal, but him, he owes me. I need money and he has to get it for me and get some for himself and his big-bellied son. Who’d think it’s me if a robbery happens outside of KZN, while the delivery is still on its way?

I'm just a naïve 24 year old girl who doesn't know anything about life.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 05

Morning came, I had to have a talk with mkhulu. I didn't know what to tell him because I need shelter but I don't want to marry Mpatho. I want to marry for love, if anyone ever decides to truly marry me. I don't want to get married for money but I need money. I had to cook up a story to avoid being in the house.

I said I was going to get my pills from the clinic and coming back. He didn't ask a lot of questions, he knows girls have their constant visits at the clinic.

Because I don't have anything to do, I pay a visit to my local clinic. I need to check my HIV status, I've had sex twice with a man who sleeps around without protection. Who knows what I've contacted along the way?

I take a test, listen to the rehearsed counseling, and then get my results back. I'm still negative, God is great.

I step out of the HIV examination room and bump into someone I'd rather not see for the remaining years of my life. She stops with a frown on her face.

"Phume?"

Fuck.

"Hi," I say, coldly.

"I heard about your drama. What do you think you're doing?"

"What drama?" I ask, knowing exactly what she's talking about.

I don't like Aunt Brandi, I don't respect her, I don't like people who like her. I just wish my mother would've gotten me from someone else's husband. My aunt is also my stepmother, imagine that.

"You running to people's houses because you don't want to marry Mpatho. A great boy with manners, you want those local pharas who do nothing but sit on the road from morning to night."

"Marry him to one of your daughters, or stepdaughters," I say.

Mzimela, my so-called father, has been cheating on her since Mandela came out of prison and bringing kids for her to raise.

"Aren't you my stepdaughter as well?" She chuckles.

My blood is boiling, she knows how to press buttons, just not her husband's otherwise he wouldn't be forever cheating on her.

"They want him to marry you because they know you'd never survive being married elsewhere. Do you know how to cook? Clean? Wash clothes?" she asks.

She's humiliating me in front of people. I turn and walk away before she insults me more.

"They spoiled you for a reason," those words follow behind me.

When I get on the road and start walking I think about everything she said. Especially me being spoiled for a reason. I remember I wasn't allowed to do a lot of things, even the things I wanted to learn. After matric my mother convinced me to take a gap year, the following year January we took a 3 month trip to Jamaica. I was given everything I wanted; expensive clothes, a car, luxurious mid-year trips, irregular business meetings that I partook and felt like I was into business. Mshazi would ask me to go with him to the office and shadow him. I took some online

business management classes, I didn't get anywhere, my mother needed me with her on another trip. All that was done for a reason. I was convinced I didn't need to do anything to secure my future because everything was already stored for me. But in fact, I was being prepared to become Mpatho's housewife, just like my mother was to his father. They knew if I had many options I wasn't going to agree to it. I hate them even more, I hope they're being roasted by the devil where they are.

I check my Whatsapp, Sphakamiso hasn't been online since last night. I need to call him, I want to start planning today. His phone rings unanswered.

I call again and stay patient as it rings.

He finally answers, it sounds like he's still asleep.

"Sthandwa sami," he says.

"Hi Sphakamiso, can we meet right now behind the containers?"

"Like now?" he asks.

"Yes, now," I say.

"Okay, I'm going to get up and come."

I drop the call, I have to take another route, one that won't lead me closer to the Mshazi household. I haven't eaten anything since morning, I last ate the samp from MaVilakazi. I buy two apples from the woman by the local primary school's gate and continue walking.

I walk a short distance and hear a familiar car driving behind me. It's the Tazz driven by Malibongwe, he stops and rolls down the window.

"Need a lift?" he asks.

“No, thanks,” I say.

I feel like he betrayed me too. He was always intervening and convincing me to work things out with his brother after little fights knowing very well that he’s hiding a whole human being from me.

“I will drop you wherever you’re going. It’s not safe for you to walk around with that expensive phone in your hand.” He’s just scaring me, there are no cellphone robbers here.

But I give in and get in the car. There’s a pharmacy brown bag between the seats, I wonder who’s sick now, I hope Nombuso.

“Where are you coming from and where are you going?” he asks.

“Coming from the clinic, I was checking if I don’t have HIV. Now I’m going to the containers.” I think he knows who I’m going to there.

“Okay,” he says and fixes his eyes on the road.

He drives for a moment, not saying anything.

Then he says above the engine noise, “He never stopped loving you.”

“No, he stopped the moment he felt attracted to another female,” I say.

He glances at me and then shakes his head.

We arrive at the containers, Sphakamiso hasn’t arrived yet.

“I will wait with you,” he says.

“Thanks,” I say.

At least I’m waiting in the comfort of a car. I text Sphakamiso, telling him to hurry up.

Then I stay on Whatsapp to distract Malibongwe from having any conversation with me.

Finally, Sphakamiso arrives. I notice that he's limping, when he gets closer his right eye is swollen.

I get a fright, he was alright yesterday, what happened?

"Ndoda, I got some painkillers," Malibongwe says, giving him the pharmacy bag and a bottle of water through the window.

I climb out of the car, he's drinking the painkillers, then he gives them back to Malibongwe. Malibongwe drives off, I'm still shocked by the state he's in.

"What happened to you?" I ask, feeling bad that I demanded to see him while he's in this state.

"The police happened," he says.

I don't understand, he's not explaining either, he just limps towards the back containers. They used to be a local tuck-shop connected to a bar at the side. Unfortunately the owner died, now it's just our mjolo spot.

He pulls a broken brick and sits on it, flinching in pain.

"What did you do?" I ask.

He exhales heavily, "They wanted a gun, someone told them I have unlicensed gun."

Okay, that someone wasn't me, I hope he knows that.

"Did you give it to them?" I ask.

"No, angis'thengelwanga wonina," he says.

"But who told them?" I'm confused. Out of every guy in the village, he got pimped out.

He shrugs, "Probably the same person who sent them to arrest me at work and cost me my job."

Wait a minute, now what?

“Didn’t you say you were retrenched?” I ask.

This guy has lied to me about everything. His name is probably not even Sphakamiso.

“What was I supposed to tell you? The police came and accused me of shooting people and arrested me for one week, not allowing me to contact my family, and then released me. Were you going to believe me?”

“Yes, I was going to believe you,” I say.

He shakes his head and looks away. Maybe his enemies are coming after him, maybe one is a police, I don’t know what to think.

“They beat me in front of Aphelele,” he says and clicks his tongue.

There’s something about him. I can’t call him rude but his head...ukhandashisa.

“I’m sorry about that,” I say.

He’s angry, I didn’t think I would feel sorry for him about anything, but I do.

“You said you want us to talk,” he says.

He’s not looking at me, I think because of the swollen eye, he’s not on his best looks.

I don’t have the guts to say it, he’s already the police’s target.

“Never mind, I didn’t know you’re injured,” I say.

“I will be okay in a few days, this is not permanent.”

Okay, breathe Phume.

“I need money,” I say.

Silence...

“So I need your help,” I say.

“Phume, I’m...I don’t have anything right now. Just give me a day, I will see what I can do.” He thinks I want him to give me money. He’s living off Malibongwe’s salary and his mother’s old pension grant.

“I have a plan,” I say.

He turns his head and looks at me.

“What plan?” he asks.

“I heard Mpatho talking with someone over the phone. He’s expecting a delivery Friday, cars worth millions, brand new. I can get more information, you have a gun, if we get two security guards on our side we can have those cars, we will sell them and have money.”

He looks at me, his brows furrowed. He seems shocked.

“Phume uright?” he asks.

“No, I’m not alright. Everyone around me has been taking advantage of me, I need money, I want to start my life over, somewhere away from everyone,” I say.

“Nothing guarantees money. I will go and steal the cars, then who do we sell them to? Where do we keep them? How do we hide from the police? Which bank do we use to receive the money?” He’s complicating this whole thing with his questions. But they’re valid.

“And are you a criminal now?” He looks at me, snapping his brows again.

“I need money,” I say, dropping my eyes in embarrassment.

I’m really not that intelligent, how did I think I can plan a hijack in one week and succeed.

“Your brother was a soldier, he’s not stupid, and he knows people. If you want to steal from him, you have to plan it

properly and have someone like Malibongwe on your side,” he says.

“So you’re scared of Mpatho?” I ask, disappointed.

“I’m all that Aphelele has. I know you don’t like him, but he’s my child. His life is hard while I’m still around because I don’t have a job. What you saw yesterday is what’s always happening, ‘go and eat with your father’ because they can’t feed me and my puppy at the same time. What would happen to him if I get arrested or die?” He’s struggling not only financially but emotionally as well, and I didn’t know any of this. I’m pretty sure it’s Nombuso doing all that, she has a voice over them being the eldest and the only daughter at home.

“So I was going to get abused if I stayed in your mother’s house anyway?” I ask.

“You know how families are, but we were going to survive, my mother agreed, that’s what important.” He must be really thinking I’m strong and patient. Aphelele is two years old, he doesn’t understand anything they say or realize how he’s being treated. I would’ve been a different story, Nombuso and I would’ve fought before breakfast time. I’m glad I left, I don’t regret it.

“Mkhulu is waiting for me at home, he wants an answer,” I tell him.

A moment of silence passes, then he asks, “Are you going to marry him?”

“I will ask for a chance to get to know him, meanwhile I will be trying to figure out how I’m going to get money and get out,” I say.

Silence...long moment of silence this time.

I clear my throat and ask, “If I plan properly, will you and Malibongwe help me?”

“Planning properly includes you sleeping with Mpatho?”

“You know I don’t just sleep with someone,” I’m taking offense.

“Not every man out there is like me once you get in bed with them. I take a thousand no’s, I masturbate while I have a woman in the room, I allow you to share a bed with me while you’re wearing tights and tracksuits, and turn your back on me the whole night. I’m patient with you because I love you, ngak’shela, you weren’t given to me on a silver tray. I stood in the rain waiting for you outside the school gate, I survived months without connecting to you because you were not in the country with your mother.”

I keep quiet, I didn’t come here to be reminded about the things that happened in the past, things that I discussed with him beforehand. I didn’t leave the country without telling Sphakamiso, I gave him conditions before agreeing to be his girlfriend, he didn’t have any problem. Yes, sometimes I’d go away for a few months, I’d tell him and he’d promise to take care and wait for me.

“I wasn’t dating Aphelele’s mother, she happened while you were away. It was business, I was alone, I got tempted and started...buying. She’s still alive, Aphelele was brought to me by a security guard named Khulekani. When I returned to Durban to ask for the baby’s documents I was told she moved to Pretoria and she didn’t leave anything behind. I tried looking for her on Facebook, I saw a lot of Snenhlanhla Mzimelas.”

I’m lost for words. I don’t know what I would’ve preferred, her being a dead chick he had a one-nightstand with or that she’s a prostitute and she’s still alive, selling her vagina in Pretoria now.

“Kuhlangahlangene nje, I’m fucked up,” he says, heaving a deep sigh.

“I’m a Mzimela, you know,” I say.

He looks up, I'm no longer angry, just disappointed in him.

He drops his eyes, "I'm sorry."

Well, I hope it's not one of my half-sisters that I've never met.

Who knows, Aunt Brandi is capable of raising prostitutes.

"I will keep you posted," I say, I want to leave now.

He tries to stand, his leg won't let him. I have to be human and help him.

"Thank you," he says once he's on his feet.

Then he touches my arm, my eyes widen.

He pulls his hand back. "Can I ask you a favor?"

I raise my eyebrow, "What favor?"

"Don't give up on us, getting to know Mpatho mustn't be you sharing yourself with him."

"But you shared yourself with a prostitute and had a whole human being as a product."

That shuts him up. I'm not planning on having sex with Mpatho, he doesn't look like the type that could take advantage of the situation either.

We walk towards the road slowly because he's limping. There's a car coming, it looks like a police van. My heart start pumping fast, I'm scared for him because now I know that he's their enemy. I don't think about it, I just grab his hand and stand.

The van stops in front of us. His hand becomes moist in mine.

One tall police officer climbs out and comes to us.

"Sphakamiso, right?" He's looking at him.

"He didn't do anything," I say first.

"Well, that's my job to figure out. Ndoda, you need to come with me to the police station, it's about a house robbery that

happened in the early hours of the morning,” the mean police officer says.

“I was home since last night, your colleagues came and did this to me, I don’t know anything about a house robbery,” Sphakamiso says, letting go of my hand.

“Police station. Or you’re refusing arrest and need me to handcuff you?”

This is ridiculous, how did he rob a house while he can’t even walk.

“This is against the law,” I say.

“Usisi ngabe uwummeli yini?” (are you a lawyer)

I keep quiet, Sphakamiso is abiding with the instructions.

“Please tell Malibongwe that they took me,” he says, the police officer shoves him towards the van.

“Which police station, sir?”

Nobody answers me.

What am I going to say to Malibongwe? What if he thinks I’m behind all of this? I know about Sphakamiso having a gun, almost every guy here owns one or two, and yesterday out of all days he got pimped. Now, I called him to the containers and the police appear and take him.

(PDFs you can buy are:

Baby Momish (Ndabuko sequel)

Loving Beyond The Temple S2

Bhambo The Homecoming

Zibulo

They are R50 each. You make payment to N Magwaza, Capitec 1685366919/ linked 0637108652. FNB 63013517959. Then send proof of payment to 0742805596. That's my assistant's number, it's attached on the page. I don't use Whatsapp regularly and I don't check my inbox everyday, I'm not ignoring you, these PDFs are always available for purchase, I can't respond to everyone, please make use of the number provided on the page so that I can focus on writing)

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 06

I find Beauty alone in the house. She's in the lounge going through a big file, flipping through the pages like she's rushing somewhere. She doesn't see me coming in, she's so focused on reading that thing.

I stand silently and watch her. She grabs her phone and take pictures of one page. What is she up to? And why is Aunt Nomusa not at work today, I'm starving.

I clear my throat and ask, "Is Aunt Nomusa coming today?"

She jumps up, terrified. The document drops down on the floor, her hand is shaking.

I walk in, confused. I want to see what file is this but she quickly grabs it and hides it behind her back.

"Why didn't you knock?" she asks.

"But you know that I'm here, why should I knock? And why do you look so frightened?" I'm curious, it's not like her to lose her nerves like this.

"You scared me. Why are you tiptoeing like a cat. Were you planning on stealing here?"

These are serious accusations.

She's not holding the file properly, a certified copy of mkhulu's ID drops.

It's her husband, it's not abnormal for her to be in possession of his ID copy

But the file she has in her hand has mkhulu's names and it's written; CONFIDENTIAL in big words.

"Go to your room," she says, trying to be firm with her dismiss.

"I'm here to watch TV," I lower myself down on the couch.

I look up at her again, she still looks shaken.

"I will tell mkhulu you were reading his file and taking pictures." I've never ratted out on anyone, she's just unlucky because I will tell mkhulu for real, she shouldn't have accused me of coming to steal.

"What makes you think he will believe you?" she asks, confirming my suspicions that she was up to no good.

"How would I miraculously know about John Mvimbeni's black file with his certified IDs and all?" I ask.

I see her inhaling sharply, she sits next to me with a calmer face.

"Look, I wasn't doing anything, he's my husband and I have the right to know his plans and all his dealings," she says.

"Okay, I'm sure he will understand," I say.

"Phume come on, it's not like you like this family. Neither did your mother, we are all here to secure the bag," she spills the beans.

I knew something was off, this woman could've easily dated Mpatho, she's his age. Mkhulu is 72 years old this year, old enough to be her grandfather, yet she's wearing his ring.

“But you know that you can’t secure the bag and take it with you. Here you secure the bag and keep it in the family, that’s why I’m in this position,” I say.

“Don’t compare me to your mother, I’m Beauty, the Greek deviant,” she says.

Okay, she’s gangster, the Greek deviant.

“What is your plan?” I ask.

She flaps her long eyelashes, “No plan.”

“I can be useful,” I’m desperate. If I can get her on my side or be on her side, we can work as a team.

“With your naivety? No,” she laughs.

“I can be level-headed if I’m not angry,” I say.

She continues laughing, “I’m sorry, no thanks. You don’t have much of a struggle here, just marry Mpatho and figure it out along the way. It’s not like he kisses with his whole tongue out and can’t get his dick up.”

My mouth drops open. Things like that happen?

“How can it not get up?” I’m confused because Sphakamiso’s stands up the moment he walks through the door and sees that I’m in the room.

She rolls her eyes, “Pshhh, I forget that you’re a princess that knows nothing outside the castle.”

I don’t know why everyone thinks I don’t know anything about life. I’m curious about penises that don’t get up though.

“Is it not a blessing in disguise if it’s like that?” I ask.

I mean, I’d be over the moon if that happened to Sphakamiso, we’d just sleep without him trying to poke me with his hard rode.

“Girl are you serious? Vitamin D is important than oxygen,” she says, getting off the couch.

I really didn’t know this side of her. Maybe I am what everyone says I am, I live in my own world and have no idea what’s happening in the general world.

“If you prove yourself to me we will work together,” she says.

I stand up, “Wait, how do I prove myself?”

“By keeping your mouth shut and showing interest in building the Mshazi legacy with Mpatho.”

“I love Sphakamiso, not him.” I can’t believe I’m saying, but feelings don’t just die over the night, and today was different, there’s a part of me that’s attached to him.

“Can he take care of you? Nobody marries for love these days.” She turns and walks away.

I sit back on the couch and sigh. We are all different, I don’t think I’m strong enough to marry someone for a coin, even though it’s the right choice to make right now.

I’m not going to rat Beauty out, I want her to trust me.

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Mkhulu comes home around mid-day, she welcomes him with a big smile and a plate of food. She could’ve been an Emmy-winning actress, I can’t do all the things she does for him. Worse he kisses with his whole tongue out, I wouldn’t stand that.

My phone rings, it’s Malibongwe. I don’t know want them to know that I’m still communicating with the Mcinekas. I hide in the bathroom and answer.

“I found him,” he says.

I release a sigh of relief.

“Is he okay?” I ask.

“Not really, but he will be fine. I need a favor from you,” he says.

I’m not in a position to give favors but I listen.

“Can you remember the police officer who took him?”

“Ummm he was tall,” that’s all I remember.

“Phume there must’ve been something setting him apart from other tall police officers. Can you identify him?” he asks.

I feel like I’m being dragged into problems now.

“Yes,” I say.

“Can I fetch you?”

“No bhuti, I can’t leave the house right now.”

“Someone is using power to abuse my brother, I need your help. He wasn’t even at the police station, they beat him again and dumped him at the clinic.” He’s angry.

I understand it’s something bigger than what it looks like. But if it’s someone using power and hiring the police, then who are they? Fighting back might put them in more danger.

“Sphakamiso and I have plans that need me to lay low, I can’t come, I’m sorry.”

“Hhayi, okay,” he says, disappointed.

“Is he coming home or going to the hospital?”

“I’m taking him home with me, they gave him meds and covered his wounds.”

“I will call him,” I say before he drops the call.

My heart breaks for him regardless of where we stand with our relationship. Now he can't even focus on the fact that I dumped him and feel my absence consequences because of this police nonsense.

I walk out of the bathroom, the Greek Deviant has finally left mkhulu's side. I sit on the couch and connect my phone to the charger.

"You're still here?" he says.

"Yes," I say with a heavy exhalation.

"Mpatho says you guys talked last night and you were friendly." He looks at me below his eyeglasses.

"Yes, we talked, he's not a bad person," I say.

"And he doesn't have a child, you and him can have children who will continue this legacy for generations to come. I know it doesn't sound easy, but believe me Mpatho will know how to treat you. You don't have to fall in love with him now, it's his job to make you fall in love with him."

"There are a lot of things I'd like to know about him as a person before marriage. If love is not a foundation, can we at least have a chance to know each other?" I look at him innocently.

He's hesitant, such a selfish man.

"I will talk to him about that so that he can be more open with you. But the arrangement has to start soon, he's already above 30, he needs to have an heir," he says.

So I'm not only expected to marry him, but give him a boy child as well? I know I'm fertile because my mother insisted on the tests, but how can I be sure I will give birth to a boy child?

"Thank you mkhulu," I have to be nice.

“Is Aunt Nomusa coming today?” I ask, I’m worried because I’m hungry.

“No, ask Beauty to make you something to eat?”

Weee, Beauty and her 5 inch nails!

I will find something I can throw in the microwave and eat.

Beauty is in the kitchen texting, when I walk in she looks up frightened.

She needs to know when and how, because this is thing of her losing her composure everytime someone walks in will sell her out.

“Mkhulu said you must make me something to eat,” I tell her.

She cracks up, I stand with my arms folded.

“I will ask someone to come and cook, he will pay,” she says and goes back to her phone.

Being a Mshazi wife must be really nice, only if you have a freezer to keep your real feelings in.

But I think her and I have a lot in common.

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SIS’ NOMBUSO

She has a lot burden on her shoulders. It’s her daughter’s payday, she was collecting her grant and planned on buying her a cake because she couldn’t celebrate her birthday last month. But she got a call from MaVilakazi saying she should

buy pain tablets for Sphakamiso because he was beaten by the police again.

As if that didn't ruin her day, the taxi drops her off and she can't see Mkhuleko with the wheelbarrow. Must she carry everything on her head? She didn't come home to carry everyone on her back and receive nothing in return.

She sits by the side of the road, sending a dozen of callbacks to Mkhuleko, 'estobhini'. He takes his sweet time coming, he was still looking good for the streets. He appears wearing a Nike cap, he's slower than a snail. He's 21, still living at home. Malibongwe is better because he works and helps with everything. Sphakamiso is worse, he badly behaved at work and got fired, then decided it was time to have a child. Too bad the child doesn't even receive grant because nobody knows his mother.

"Are girls more important than fetching the grocery?" She's fuming.

Mkhuleko doesn't respond, he's actually listening to music via the earphones. He loads everything in the wheelbarrow and pushes it home. Nombuso is behind him, she's still shouting because nobody ever thinks for her, regardless of everything she does to support them.

Yoli comes running when she spots her mother, Aphelele is behind her trying to keep up. Nombuso picks Yoli up and pulls Aphelele by his hand. She's tired, all she needs is a good rest. They fight over her shoes as she throws herself down on the couch.

MaVilakazi enters and looks at the shopping bags she bought.

"So much food, did Yoli's father send something?" She's in awe.

“Yes, it would’ve been more if I didn’t buy expensive medicine for your son.” She tells Mkhuleko to take out the medication and give Sphakamiso because it’s said he’s in a lot of pain.

Then she tells Yoli to take out her yogurt. She’s her only child, turned 4 years last month.

“Didn’t you get anything for Aphelele?” MaVilakazi asks.

“Did I have millions? You can see the medicine I bought for his father, I didn’t have anything left.” She pulls Yoli to sit between her thighs and feeds her with a teaspoon. Aphelele sits on the floor by the wall and watches. He never touches if he’s been told not to.

“Where did the police get him the second time?” Nombuso asks.

“Didn’t he go to meet up with that Mshazi girl again?”

MaVilakazi says, she’s annoyed. If he didn’t chase someone who didn’t want to be chased none of this would’ve happened. It’s clear who set him up, he’s a fool not to see it.

“So she called the police on him?” Nombuso asks.

MaVilakazi shrugs, “Who knows?”

“It’s too much of a coincidence, even last night after she left because of Aphelele the police came. I wouldn’t be surprised if she’s dating a police officer behind Sphakamiso’s back.”

“There’s nothing we can do if he’s not seeing it, love is blind,” MaVilakazi says.

“Well, I will do something, she better prays not to cross path with me in her life again, because I will beat her so bad she will throw up salads from her mother’s wedding,” Nombuso says, crossing her fingers in the air.

“Now you want trouble with the police too?” MaVilakazi asks and shakes her head in disappointment.

Yoli is finally full, she takes her yogurt to the fridge. “Aphe don’t touch,” she warns her cousin.

Then she goes through another shopping bag and takes out a packet of chips.

“Must I give Aphelele?” she asks her mother.

Nombuso releases a deep sigh. “Okay, give him a few, then go and play outside.”

The two leave after sharing a packet of chips.

“What are we going to cook?” MaVilakazi asks.

“I don’t know Ma, I don’t even have appetite, check in the bags.” She leans back on the couch and burps KFC.

MaVilakazi empties all the shopping bags.

“Hawu mntanami you bought 5kg of frozen chicken,” MaVilakazi exclaims. She didn’t expect Nombuso to bring the whole Spar home, she’s such a helpful child.

Nombuso frowns, “5kg?”

“Yes, and a big tray of wors.”

No, she doesn’t remember buying all that. She must’ve mistakenly took someone’s shopping bag when she got off the taxi. But what can she say now? MaVilakazi is already celebrating and yelling for Mkhuleko to go and start the fire to grill the meat so that they can eat with bread.

“You’re a blessing Nombuso, I’m proud of you despite what everyone says about you.”

She smiles, “Thank you Ma.”

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 07

I haven't sat with them like this ever since they told me I had to marry Mpatho. Today we are having dinner together, Beauty called some woman to come and cook since Aunt Nomusa didn't come to work. I'm sitting next to Mpatho, I was in my room when he came back from work. He leaves 7am and comes back home when it's dark. At least he won't be all over my face like mkhulu is to Beauty.

We eat in silence, then Beauty announces that she's about to serve dessert. Her dessert is the chocolate cake that was baked by Aunt Nomusa and kept in the fridge. She serves it with custard. I have a sweet tooth, I stop eating my food to leave space for the cake, and then indulge with no care in the world. I'm not fussy about whether I gain weight or not, I enjoy life.

"Mpatho we have talk after this," mkhulu says, breaking the silence.

They're going to talk about me, I know.

He pushes the bowl of his untouched dessert to me.

I turn my eyes to him, he locks a stare and doesn't say anything.

I pick my spoon and dip it in. I will have to reflux this week, I'm consuming so much sugar in one night.

I feel a stare on my face and look up, he's staring. Okay, he's making things awkward for me.

I drop my eyes and stop eating. I'm full anyway, I was just eating because it's illegal to leave a piece of cake untouched, it's insulting to the person who baked it.

Beauty starts taking dishes back to the kitchen. They're going to stay there over the night because Aunt Nomusa didn't come. Mpatho holds the bowl of dessert that I ate and didn't finish because of his stare.

"I will sort this one out," he says.

Beauty disappears to the kitchen, I'm left with these two men and I'm feeling very uncomfortable because I know the conversation hanging over our heads. I excuse myself and go to my bedroom, I don't want to hear it, they must discuss it in my absence.

I check my Whatsapp, particularly Sphakamiso. His last seen was in the morning before we met up. He hasn't been online since then, I'm worried. I confirm that the door is firmly closed and then call his phone.

He answers in a sleepy voice, "Yebo sawubona."

"It's Phume," I say.

"Oh, sorry babe. I didn't check who's calling."

"How are you feeling?" I ask.

"I'm okay, I just need to rest and take care of myself," he says.

My heart breaks, he doesn't sound like himself.

"I don't know when I'm going to see you, I have to play the script and maybe get Beauty on my side. I think tonight I will have another conversation with Mpatho and see where his head is at."

I hear him groan in pain, then a child waking up next to him. It's Aphelele, he tells him to sleep. I can't believe nobody offered to sleep with the child for one night while he's injured. I don't accept that he has a child but I do feel sorry for the situation.

“I’m not happy with how things are between us and what you’re doing. But I don’t have a voice, I fucked up our relationship and I can’t help you out of the situation you are in because I don’t have much right now. It hurts, kakhulu,” he says.

“I have to do this Phaka. It’s not something I want to do, but I don’t have a choice. Did you talk to Malibongwe?” I ask.

“No, I will talk to him when I get a chance,” he says, then I hear a yawn.

“Let me not keep you awake, I was just checking up on you,” say.

I’m about to drop the call...

“I love you, Phume,” he says.

He just has to make things awkward, we were having a good conversation.

I keep quiet, I haven’t forgiven him.

“I just want you to remember that in whatever you’re doing. I love you, I will never intentionally hurt you but I will make mistakes and learn from them. My present situation doesn’t define my tomorrow, money goes, things change, but what we have will last forever.”

“Sphakamiso please don’t, allow me to deal with my emotions and your betrayal. Don’t corner me with your feelings,” I say.

“I’m not cornering you, I’m expressing how I feel about you. Nothing has ever changed from my side, I’ve always carried you in my heart, even when my decisions were poor...”

The door handle moves, I quickly drop the call and shove the phone under the pillow. It’s Mpatho with the bowl of dessert I left.

I sit up straight and pull the pillow to my lap. I suck at acting normal when things aren't really normal. I have to look at him as my suitor and notice what I like about him. The height is quite intimidating, he always looks neat, his eyebrows thick and long. His muscles...he'd just flip his knuckles once and knock a person down. Hence I don't want to set a fight between him and Sphakamiso, I need to thread carefully.

"Why did you stop eating?" he asks.

"I was full," I lie.

His lip curves into a smile.

"I know you have a sweet tooth, I was here when you celebrated your 17th birthday, you delayed cutting the cake until half of the guests left," he says.

This is not funny but I laugh. That did happen but it wasn't intentional.

"Eat your cake, I was just appreciating your beauty," he says, taking a seat next to me.

I get a puff of his cologne, I'm getting familiar with it.

"I'm really full," I say.

"What if I eat a little piece too?"

He doesn't eat cakes, I've never seen him eat any. As if reading my doubtful mind, he cuts a piece with a spoon and shoves it into his mouth. Then another one, but he brings it to my mouth. I don't want to be childish, I open my mouth and eat. Now feeding each other cakes? This is taking another direction that I didn't expect.

He eats and feeds me until we finish the bowl. Then he puts it away, smiling.

"Mkhulu told me about the conversation you had with him," he says.

“I said I want to get to know you better first,” I say and look away.

He stares boldly, without a blink.

“Thank you, that’s all I wanted,” he says.

I force my eyes back to him and notice his serious face.

“I will cut my day short tomorrow and come home so that we can go out,” he says.

“Okay. But I could come with you to work and help if you need help,” I say.

“There’s no need for you to stress yourself out and work. I’m a man, I should work for you,” he says.

Until now I didn’t have a problem with sitting at home and getting fed and given everything on a silver tray. But now I see it as being indirectly oppressed for certain reasons.

“So you want me to be a housewife?” I’m a bit annoyed, visibly so.

“That wouldn’t be a bad thing,” he chuckles. I keep a face straight, he leans onto me and puts his arm around me.

“What is your passion?” he asks.

My passion?

“Making money for myself,” I say.

“Through which channels? I think those are the things that you need to figure out, without a rush. Before then, I’m here for you, you will never be short of anything,” he says.

I need to be interested in something that’s going to be car-related to gain access to the dealership. This might be a complicated game, I might need to be more vulnerable than I am.

“I want to teach you something, come.” He stands up and pulls his hand out to me.

Remember Phume, none of this is real. He holds my hand and takes me to the kitchen. He rolls his T-shirt sleeves to his elbows and fills the sink with water. He squeezes drops of Sunlight liquid inside and takes two sponges.

“Come, the water is warm,” he says.

“You want me to wash dishes?” I’m beside myself with shock. Sphakamiso would never!

“In life there are no guarantees, you have to learn a few basics. Tomorrow we may wake up with no dishwasher and no house helper. Life is like a wheel, it turns,” he says.

I didn’t know he was a motivational speaker beside being a soldier. I drag my feet and take the sponge. It’s a damn pile of dishes and the real woman of this house is gone to bed with her husband and getting tongue kisses.

I pick a plate, he gently pulls it and puts it aside. I look at him confused. Doesn’t he want me to wash dishes?

“Cups and glasses first, then bowls and plates,” he says.

“Oh, my bad!”

He chuckles and then gives me a cup to wash. These are the basic things he wants me to learn to do, not going to work with him and learning basics there.

He keeps taking glances at me, but doesn’t comment. I’m one open book, I think he can see that I’m not happy with what he’s making me do.

I don’t know how my anger subsided, by the time we finish washing I’m enjoying it. He gives me a cloth to wipe, then he

packs them inside the cupboards because he's tall and he knows where everything is.

"Well done," he says.

The sink is now empty, wiped and clean. It's a good sight for the eye, I'm kinda proud of myself.

"Was it hard?" he asks.

I laugh and shake my head. He pulls me into his arms and hugs me. I'm tense, I didn't expect it. I don't know, it feels differently from any hug I've ever got. He's far tall and bulky for my size. We don't look compatible at all.

He puts his hands on my shoulders and looks at me with a smile. "Now that you've done your first chore you can have your first glass of wine."

First? He has so much faith in me.

He opens a bottle of wine and pours two glasses. "Let's go outside, the moon is out."

I follow him out, we sit outside sipping on the wine. I'm not interested in the moon, I have more important things to think about than having a 'movie couple's night.

"What was going to happen if my mother didn't die? Was I ever going to marry you?" I ask, it's just a random thought.

"Yes," he says.

I look at him, he has to explain.

"We were arranged to marry when you turned 21, in the presence of our parents. But I said no, you were just too young and innocent. You've always been that type, I didn't think you'd be allowed to have a boyfriend..."

"I wasn't allowed, I never took permission and I kept my relationship private," I say.

He looks at me, I can't read his face. "Have you broken up?"

"Yes," I nod.

He doesn't look away, maybe he doesn't believe me.

"Do you still love him?" he asks.

"He betrayed me," I say.

"Phume answer the question. Do you still love him?"

Phewww, okay.

"No," I say.

He chuckles, "It's not nice being someone's second option but don't lie to me. I know it's going to take time for you to fully open your heart to me. Given how your relationship ended and this arrangement."

I'm not sure he's an easy book as he said. I don't trust this understanding side of him, I feel like he's only letting out a side that he wants me to see, not his true personality.

"Please do me one favor though, stay away from Beauty," he says.

My heart skips a beat. He knows that I'm getting closer to Beauty?

"I thought Beauty was a family member. Is there something I should know?"

"She's troublesome, the only reason she's still around is because she warms mkhulu's bed and he's attracted to fine women, so she keeps him grounded at home," he says.

"Is that your perspective or mkhulu's?" I'm freaking out because he's such a calm person who seems to mind his own business most of the time.

"Take a warning Phume, any other thing doesn't matter, I want you to be on a safer side," he says.

“Safer side?” I’m worried.

“A safer side is not doing something that’s going to cost you mkhulu’s trust, he’s not the kind of man you need to have on your back,” he says.

Ok, now I fear for Beauty. Is she being trapped? Are they watching her moves?

“Okay, thanks,” I say.

We sit in silence, I’m gulping down my wine like an old drunk.

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SPHAKAMISO

He drags himself to the stove and warms water to give Aphelele a bath. His first bath on the day, it’s already 3pm and he’s been listening to all kinds of shaming from his sister. He’s not in a good state, he can’t check if Aphelele looks presentable and doesn’t have a running nose. He’s been in bed since morning, Malibongwe offered to take him to the clinic so that he can get more painkillers but he refused. He’s going to be fine.

Aphelele manages to take his clothes off and gets inside the basin by himself. Despite of how Aphelele came into his life, he’s now his pillar of strength. He’s learnt about life at a very young age, he understands not to want what baba doesn’t have. He’s learnt not to cry over other kids’ toys.

“Bubbles, bubbles!” he says, splashing water.

Sphakamiso takes the bar of soap and throws it inside the water for more foam.

Nombuso walks, he knows she's going to find something to complain about. They don't get along, it's been going on for years, way before he got unemployed and came back home. It's easy to say he's just been never her favourite brother. She loves her look-alike, Malibongwe, and tolerates Mkhuleko because he's their mother's favorite child with the last born vibes. Mkhuleko is one person who doesn't care, he puts everyone in their places, whether you feed him or not. Sphakamiso wasn't their father's favorite either, he was constantly called out for being unruly and disrespectful. He ended up having a cold relationship with his father and wasn't present when he fell sick and died shortly, he was studying in Durban. Was he hurt when their father died? Yes, but not as much as others did simply because they weren't close. Now, must he wake him up for his grown-ass daughter who never stop throwing tantrums?

"Niqeda insipho," Nombuso says passing. (you're finishing the soap)

Sphakamiso doesn't take the out.

She stops, "Hhayi-bo Phaka, why are you finishing the soap?"

"Ngiyiqeda njengesmilo sakho," he says.

This is what he always does, he starts her and shames her for her failed marriage and calls her a bitch.

"Only, Ma, Malibongwe and I buy soap here. You don't have any right to speak to me like that if I'm trying to reprimand you," she's livid.

He still doesn't take the soap out.

"Awuyona inja yok'fuywa wena," she says.

Sphakamiso stands up, "Did you call me a dog?"

"If I did what are you going to do about it?"

MaVilakazi hears the noise and rushes in. They're at it again. At this point she just wants to die and rest. No children fight like hers in this village, there's no unity, she's tried everything she can.

"What's going on? Sphakamiso why are you standing like that?"

"Is Nombuso not standing as well?" – Sphakamiso.

This is how his relationship with his father ended, he took sides before hearing both sides.

"I'm in my father's house, I have a right to stand," Nombuso says.

"Didn't you leave here with a kist?" – Sphakamiso.

They're still arguing even in front of MaVilakazi.

"It doesn't concern you, go and look for your real father in Mandeni," Nombuso says.

MaVilakazi freezes. Nombuso always takes things too far.

"Nombuso are you crazy?" she roars.

"I'm just saying, maybe the dark cloud over him will unveil." Nombuso says and walks away. Sphakamiso pushed her buttons, she wasn't going to say anything about this.

MaVilakazi is breathing heavily, sweating even. Out of all her children, Sphakamiso has the darkest heart, this might make him even worse.

"She's talking nonsense," she says.

Sphakamiso doesn't respond, he's not even loping at her.

"I will send Yoli to go and buy you cigarettes," she says.

Still, he doesn't say anything. Nombuso has opened a can of worms, the day he demands explanation about this everyone will feel his wrath. He's just calm because of Aphelele.

He dries him with a towel and pulls him out to their room to change.

When he's done dressing him up Aphelele goes to the mirror and admires himself. Despite everything that just went down he's smiling. This boy could be gay, he loves mirrors way too much.

His phone rings, he's feeling a bit better after doing a physical activity, maybe he shouldn't lie in bed and allow the pain to control him.

"How is my god-grandson?" she asks.

At times he gets tempted to just tell her the truth, but then again he made Aphelele, he can't just say he's failing as a parent.

"He's okay," he says.

"And you?" she asks.

In pain, beaten black and blue by the police for no reason.

"I'm fine, thank you Ma," he says.

"I want to see him, it's wrong of me to go this long without seeing my precious god-grandson. We are coming on Wednesday, me and his god-grandfather, he bought him a big-ass bicycle I'm not even sure he's going to know how to ride it. I told him toddlers have their own plastic bikes." She's chatty, that's one thing Sphakamiso noticed from the very first day they met. She didn't even know who he was when she arrived with Khulekani at the garage to give him Aphelele, whom Sphakamiso didn't even know existed before Khulekani made a phone call a week before, but Thembelihle gave him an earful for sleeping with a prostitute and having a baby while at it. That was before she dragged both him and Khulekani to the shops and bought every necessity that Aphelele didn't have. Then she let him take his baby and promised to be in touch.

“Where is he?” she asks.

“He’s admiring himself in the mirror,” Sphakamiso says with a chuckle.

“Aah, he’s like Nzuzo, I don’t understand boys who love mirrors,” she’s laughing. “Give him the phone, I want him to tell me what he wants us to bring him.”

Aphelele comes running when he hears that someone wants to talk to him over the phone. He always watches Yoli talking with her dad and never had anyone wanting to talk to him over the phone.

“Ba-baa,” he says what Yoli says when she picks the phone.

“Is that my Aphelele? This is not your father, it’s gogo.”

“Gogoo,” he’s happy either way.

“Yes, I’m coming to see you on Wednesday. What do you want me to bring you?”

He starts counting endless things, some he can’t even pronounce properly. But one thing he mentions over over again is ‘yogurt’. Now he has something to say when Yoli counts things that her father will buy for her.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 08

I’m confused, I don’t know who to trust between Mpatho and Beauty. If I tell her that she’s being watched obviously Mpatho will know that I ran my mouth. If Beauty is being watched then it’s not safe for me to associate her with my plans. Should I even go ahead with this? This is real life, not a movie. I’ve

never hijacked a bike, how am I going to get away with hijacking cars?

“Phumelele,” that’s Beauty.

I’ve been avoiding her all morning.

She’s wearing tight lace-up jumpsuit and heels. Yes, heels indoors.

“You were up till late with Mpatho,” she says, sitting next to me and crossing her legs.

Today Aunt Nomusa came, she woke up and did her face glam and sat pretty like a madam.

“Yes, I washed the dishes and he rewarded me with my first glass of wine,” I say.

She cracks up, laughing.

“Mvimbo tried and failed with me, I can’t be domesticated,” she says.

It’s so awkward hearing her call an elder by name and shortening it like she’s talking about a 2000. Oh, it’s a husband to her.

“I actually enjoyed it,” I say.

“Next thing you will be doing laundry, mopping the floors and cooking,” she says.

“Beauty there are people who do all that to earn a living and they don’t die,” I say.

She lifts her eyebrows, looking at me with shock. “Wait, what did Mpatho do to Phume?”

What does she mean? I’m still me.

“I’m afraid for you,” she says, with a serious face.

I laugh, "I'm fine, I just have more important things to worry about."

"Like your boyfriend? Don't worry, you will see him soon," she says.

I'm confused, even though Sphakamiso wasn't the biggest of my worries.

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"Business trip, they're going away the whole weekend, s'yatshabaza," she says, flipping her hair and chuckling. This woman is wild.

"Mpatho didn't say anything to me," I say.

"They're leaving Friday and coming back Sunday, their flight lands back in King Shaka at 7pm, so they will be home around 10pm. I will come back before 7pm and rehearse a lonely wife role." She's something else.

I can't help but laugh. This one doesn't rate mkhulu even one star.

"You can go and see your boyfriend too, I will pick you up on my way back," she says.

Sphakamiso and I are not officially over. I still call him and ask how he is. And he still insists on calling me babe and uses any chance he gets to remind me that he loves me. Do I want to visit him and spend the weekend with him? No. I'd like to see him though, just to see how he's doing after his unfortunate encounters with the police.

"What are we going to do here the whole day? I'm dressed up, I need people to see me." She's nothing close to what I thought she was.

"Mpatho is coming back from work early, he said he wants us to go out," I tell her.

“Date?” she asks, standing up.

“Yes, kind of,” I say.

“Good for you, you’re going to win his trust.”

I don’t know, all of a sudden I’m scared of Mpatho, in fact of this whole family.

“Do you know them well?” I ask Beauty.

She’s more concerned about her hair.

“Mpatho does whatever he’s told to do. Desperate to fit in, mother issues, stingy with money, and not sociable,” she says.

Then she looks at me like something just came into her mind.

“Mother issues! Yeses, why didn’t I think of that? That’s your way in,” she says.

“My way in?” I’m confused.

“Play a warm mother-like role, make him vulnerable.”

Okay, I don’t have to be anything for Mpatho, he already said he loves me.

“I’m not trying to win his heart,” I say.

“But you want something, right? Make him desperate and vulnerable, cut the cord from Mvimbo, with him out of the picture trust me, you will be out of the house with 50% of everything.” She’s sitting down again. More advices are pouring out.

“See, I knew from the start that Mvimbo had an eye for sexy, young women. Don’t cry, but he was cheating throughout his first marriage. He’s kinky, loves being stripped for and worshipped in bed...” I’m about to throw up, I don’t even want to imagine their sex life, I’ve heard enough. “Coming here I knew his weak points, I submit in the bedroom and fulfill all his

fantasies. That's exactly what he's wanted ever since he was young, someone he can do as he pleases with."

Jesus Christ, Fifty Shades Of Mvimbeni!

"Mpatho has always needed a mother's love, give him that. Look at me, soon I will be a shareholder of the Mshazi Enterprises for sitting at home and rubbing old wounds," she says.

I'm not sure what she means by old wounds, but damn she's clever than I thought.

"But how do I play a mother role to someone who's older than me?" I ask.

"Take care of him, pretend to worry about little things in his life like how mothers do," she says.

Yoh, not me, I'm not an actress. I couldn't even mother my dolls growing up, a whole grown man.

"He said we could get married, if I decide to separate he'd settle me out generously," I say.

She laughs her ass off. "And you believed him? First thing he's going to do is get you pregnant, that's the plan."

"Me, pregnant?" I'm scared to even utter the word, wtf.

"Yeap, don't say I didn't tell you." She stands up and heads out.

"I'm going to town," she yells outside the door.

So Mpatho has his plans as well, he's not playing all his cards on the table. I was right about him, he's not what he looks like at all. But two can play that game, I will continue with my plans too.

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I'm naturally a shy person, unless someone provokes me, then I will get out of the shell and show them crazy. I'm annoyed with him after hearing that he plans to get me pregnant, but I don't show it. He's set up a picnic in the park, he came with red roses and a gift bag I haven't opened. It looks very romantic, I feel like an Instagram influencer. Beauty told me that he's a stingy person and I believe that, I mean he's still driving a Jeep he was driving three years ago and it's his only car. Mkhulu buy cars every year, earlier this year he bought a G-Wagon, Beauty flexes with it everywhere.

"Why are you no longer driving your car?" His question comes right I think about him and his Jeep.

"Ummm, I just like being a passenger, it wasn't my car anyway," I say.

He looks at me and doesn't say anything. My mother had three cars, she gave one to me when I turned 18, but I use none of them anymore because everything was tied to that will.

"You look beautiful, thank you for coming, I haven't had a picnic in years," he says.

I don't reply, I'm drinking the champagne, I haven't touched the finger-foods.

He clears his throat, "So, how did your love for fashion end? I remember you were always picking outfits for your mother, she'd count on your opinions before taking a trip or attending her high-tea parties."

"One of her friends asked me to come and style her before an event, then paid me. That was the last time she allowed me in her friends' space, she had a personal stylist that she hired," I say. Now everything makes sense, I was blocked from dreaming bigger than being a Mshazi.

"Is it something you'd want to pursue again?" Mpatho asks.

“No, I’m good,” I say.

I will pursue it on my time, I’m not a damsel in distress that he’s going to save.

“Okay, be my personal stylist ke,” he says with a smirk.

He’s always presentable when going out. But I’ve noticed that he’s into long-sleeve T-shirts more, and suits for work. I can upgrade his looks but I won’t.

“Please,” he pokes my cheek, sitting closer to me.

“No, I’m busy,” I say.

“Busy with Whatsapp and Facebook?” He’s close to my face.

I don’t respond, he’s get way too close. His hand is on my cheek, he’s turning my face towards his.

“What are you busy with?” His voice is lowered into a whisper.

I’m looking at him so closely, he has a little scar above his left brow.

His lips brush against my cheek, he’s coming for a kiss. I swiftly move my face and look at the side.

“Phume,” he says and clears his throat.

I’m not ready for this part of the script, the only man I’ve ever kissed is Sphakamiso.

“I didn’t lie about anything,” he says.

I want to scream at him, he’s lying about everything.

I said I want to get to know him, not his kisses.

“I have a trip on Friday, I’m coming back Sunday. Would you like to come with me?”

And share a hotel room or whatever with him?

“No, I’m good,” I say.

He's disappointed, I don't care. I said I want to go with him to work, he said no, why must I then go to his trip? This was the best set up picnic but our vibe was just dead. We pack and go back home.

We are on time for dinner but I will skip and have an early night.

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Sphakamiso called and left me a long text. I'm tempted to call him back but my mood is not right, he's going through his own shit, I don't want to stress him with my problems. I just update him with a text, I'm okay. I take a shower and get in bed, I'm browsing through Facebook under the blanket.

There's a knock at the door. I don't answer, the person enters.

Remember, I no longer own this room.

"Are you asleep?" he asks next to my bed.

I don't answer, then I feel him sitting next to my legs.

"Did you talk to Beauty?" he asks.

I remove the blanket and put my phone under the pillow.

"Last night we were okay and today your energy is off. What's going on?"

"Nothing, I'm just tired," I say.

"I know you talked to her, maybe she said something that upset you, and that's why I asked you to stay away from her," he says.

It's been what, barely one week, but I'm already being told who I can and can't talk to.

"I have the right to talk to anyone I want to talk to," I say.

“I’m not disputing that, I’m just saying be aware of the energy you invite into our relationship.”

Yebaba, relationship? I said we are getting to know each other.

“How do you expect me not to talk to someone we live in the same house with?” I’m confused, he talks to Beauty as well.

“Oh now you don’t know how to do that? Why weren’t you friends with her before the marriage situation came up?” he asks.

“So now I can’t make new friends?”

“Phume!”

“Mpatho!”

He keeps quiet, I pull the blanket over my shoulder and sleep on the side, facing away from him.

“Friday I’m leaving, I want us to be on good terms, whatever you heard about me just confront me.”

“I heard nothing,” I say.

“Then what’s going on?”

I have nothing more to say.

He gets off the bed and comes to the side I’m facing. He looks at me, I close my eyes, then I feel his cold lips on my forehead. I don’t move, he walks out and closes the door.

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Things are very awkward at the table. He didn’t leave early for work, he’s here for breakfast, not even dressed up. Beauty is in black leggings, T-shirt and cap. I assume they will be going out,

beside the kinky stuff mkhulu loves nature. Aunt Nomusa has arrived, I will keep her company after they've left.

I leave the table first and go to my room to check my phone in the charger. Someone is behind me, he walks in and closes the door. I quickly lock my phone without reading the text that Sphakamiso sent.

"Can we talk?" he asks.

"Yeah, sure," I'm standing by the bed.

He comes over and pulls me down to sit.

"I'm sorry if I upset you yesterday," he says.

"It's okay, I just think it's strange that I only agreed less than 72 hours ago to get to know you and you're already telling me who I can't be friends with. I know I have no right to make decisions in my life, I take orders, but don't make it too obvious," I say.

He nods and takes my hand. "I understand and I really hope you don't make bad decisions that are influenced by people who have nothing more to offer than their bodies."

Okay, that's shady.

"I wanted to put you in bed last night but you were angry with me," he says.

"Put me in bed? I'm not a child," I say.

He smiles and shifts closer. I shift away, he expected it, he pulls me back and brings me closer to his chest. Eventually I will have to kiss him, I close my eyes and feel his lips on mine. He slowly sucks my bottom lip and wraps his hand at the back of my neck. I think the fights and hate that took place coming to this moment helped me see him in a different light. The kiss doesn't feel like an incest, his deep breaths as he smooches deeper have me closing the gap between our bodies and wanting more.

He breaks the kiss, looks at my lips and comes for another one. I'm quite surprised I enjoyed both kisses, he's still holding me close.

"I'd like to spend some quality time with you before I leave for Pretoria."

He wants to try and get me pregnant before he leaves. I think I will listen more to Beauty, she will save me from a lot of things.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 09

SIS' NOMBUSO

Sphakamiso didn't tell them that he's expecting guests. The guests arrive in a quantum, they've heard about them, they're actually the ones who informed Sphakamiso about Aphelele's existence. Nombuso rushes to get Aphelele outside the door and rushes to wipe his face and change him into cleaner clothes. Sphakamiso wants to embarrass them and make it look like they aren't taking care of the child. She lotions Aphelele's face with Vaseline, a lot of it. Then she picks him to her hip and goes to the room where they entered.

They don't look poor, they came with a lot of shopping bags and a blue bike. Surely Sphakamiso didn't tell them that Aphelele is not the only child, there's Yoli as well.

She greets and sits, putting Aphelele on her lap.

Yoli rushes to her, ready to throw a fit. But she gives a mother's evil eye, Yoli resets really quick.

"We didn't expect you," she says with a low chuckle.

“I told Sphakamiso we are coming,” Aunt Teekay says and looks at Aphelele smiling. “He’s grown so much. Does he even remember us?”

Nombuso puts him down and fixes his pants. “Go to your other gogo,” she says, giving Aphelele a little push on the back. “He’s used to me, he calls me mama.”

Aunt Teekay has to take out her phone to lure Aphelele, he comes running. She picks him up and kisses him all over the face. “Look at this boy, you’re so grown!”

“Why are his cheeks so dry?” asks the tall man next to her. He’s so judgmental.

“It’s winter, that’s normal,” Nombuso replies bitterly.

Aunt Teekay gives her man a reprimanding look.

“Where is Sphakamiso?” that man again, he’s looking around.

“He’s probably in the street with his friends, smoking,” she says.

MaVilakazi clears her throat, “No, he’s not, I sent him to take the stokvel money to MaJobe.”

“Okay, I’m sure he’s held up with his girlfriend, that’s his main priority. It’s us who live with Aphelele 24/7,” Nombuso says.

“Is he getting any luck with the job?” – the man.

“No, nothing yet, I take care of Aphelele for him,” she says.

“Does he have winter clothes?” Aunt Teekay asks, worried.

Nombuso glances at her mother first, then she says, “No, I haven’t afforded them yet, but there’s a lay-buy I put for them, both him and my daughter, they’re like my twins.”

“I’m glad he arrived in such a warm home, I was a bit worried because Sphakamiso has been home for a very long time, not

finding a job,” she’s protective of anything that concerns Aphelele.

“Any contact from his mother?” MaVilakazi asks.

The man clears his throat, “No, nothing yet. I also haven’t looked enough because I don’t think it’s wise to force someone who doesn’t want to be a mother to be a mother.”

“Yeah, that’s true,” MaVilakazi nods.

Aunt Teekay sighs, “I was hoping we’d see Sphakamiso. But I’m glad I found this young man home, I heard him talking like an adult over the phone. When is he starting creche?”

“He will go when he’s 5, that’s when most kids start around here, then they go to Grade R,” – Nombuso.

“Is it a good school?” They’re here to conduct an interview, not to see Aphelele.

“Yes, it’s a good school,” she says.

MaVilakazi asks her to go and make them some snacks and drink.

As she leaves the room Yoli runs after her and starts crying in the kitchen. She saw a slab of chocolate in the shopping bags that came and as usual, she’s a princess that gets the first of everything. Nombuso manages to calm her down by giving her R1, she goes and serves them some cookies and icy Oros juice.

The man has left with Aphelele, they’re in the quantum to fetch more of his toys. They’re all boy toys, Sphakamiso should’ve said something to them and not make it look like his son is the only child that deserves good things.

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Aphelele is the happiest child, when his god-grandparents leave he starts crying. They bribe him with money, the man literally gives a 2 and a half year old R200. There was money that they left with MaVilakazi as well for winter clothes, good Samaritans. Nombuso straps Aphelele on her back and promises them that he will stop crying. By the time the quantum disappears she unwraps the towel and puts him down. He's very heavy.

"Let's divide these toys," she says.

Yoli is already crying, she gives him a car toy and gives Aphelele one as well.

"You will take turns with the bike, Mkhuleko will teach you how to ride later," she says and starts distributing items from the shopping bags. It's mostly goodies that will be shared between Yoli and Aphelele, they also share when Yoli's father buys something.

MaVilakazi walks in, she looks stressed than happy.

"Sphakamiso has been gone since morning, it's not like him not to even come back to eat," she says.

"He's still angry, you know how he is," Nombuso says, waving her off. It's really not that deep.

"He still hasn't asked me anything about the statement you made. That was very low of you Nombuso and unnecessary, I didn't take you back home for you to cause me trouble,"

MaVilakazi.

Nombuso raises her eyebrows, "Hhayi-bo Ma, sooner or later you have to take him to his real father. Look at his life, maybe he died years ago and Sphakamiso didn't even get cleansed, now bad lucks are onto him."

“I can’t embarrass myself like that. Sphakamiso was raised by Mcineka,” MaVilakazi says.

Nombuso raises her hands up, “I’m only trying to help, I also don’t like arguing with him but he has a way of provoking me.”

“All I’m saying is control your tongue, I don’t know what he thinks of me now and what he’s silently planning, you know how your brother is,” MaVilakazi says and sits down with a heavy sigh.

She needs to find a way to control the damage that was done by Nombuso’s tongue.

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SPHAKAMISO

He should’ve been home when Aunt Teekay and Khulekani arrived, but he’s just so drained emotionally and being around his family doesn’t help. He knew Aunt Teekay would call and demand an explanation that he doesn’t have. Because what do you say in a situation like this? ‘I might be a bastard child, that’s why I was treated differently growing up?’. His mother is alive, she’s had 27 years to come clean to him but she didn’t. Even when Nombuso insulted him with it, she didn’t verify or deny.

“How are you coping?” Her question is perfectly structured, because right now it’s not a matter of living, but coping.

“I’m trying,” he says.

“Don’t you think you should move to Durban for better chances?” she asks.

“I do, but I still have a child to look after,” he says.

“Your sister looks after Aphelele and it’s not like you will take years to go home and see him.”

“My sister?” He chuckles.

“I’d rather take him with me, wherever I go,” he says.

“Okay, is there anything I should know?” she asks with concern.

He’s quiet for a moment, then he sigh heavily.

“No, everything is okay, I just prefer to be closer to him,” he says.

“You made a child Sphakamiso, you don’t have a choice when it comes to taking care of him, there are uncomfortable sacrifices you have to make. My niece worked at Shoprite as a cashier for years with her degree, right now you need to survive,” she says.

“Ma, there’s nothing I haven’t tried except selling weed,” he says.

“Usuyahlanya-ke manje, let’s talk later when Khulekani is back, maybe you will hear it better from him,” she says.

“Okay, thanks for coming, I’m about to go home as well, I’m sure Aphelele is happy.”

“Wait, before I forget, how is your girlfriend?” Another sensitive topic!

“She’s okay,” he says.

Phume hasn’t responded to his calls and texts. It’s another thing stressing him out because he doesn’t know how far she’s taken things with Mpatho. A part of him just wants to go there sometimes and kill those people. But he has Aphelele to live for, jail and death are not an option.

He tries her one more time after Aunt Teekay's call, it rings unanswered.

But a text follows this time, she's saying she will call him later, this means she's with Mpatho. Bloody fool!

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PHUMELELE

He didn't go to work, he's been in my bedroom since morning. Mkhulu left earlier, Beauty drove him to the airport. In the house it's just me, Mpatho and Aunt Nomusa. He brought me breakfast in bed, then started working on his laptop, getting me snacks in between. I don't think he's truly being himself with him. He only does the good things and apologizes quickly when I'm upset. I mean, Sphakamiso had a child behind my back and apologized for it after two years.

He puts the laptop aside and checks his wrist-watch, "I still have time."

"Is there anything you'd like us to do?" he asks.

"No," I shake my head.

"Ok, I do have something I'd like us to do."

BTW, I went to the clinic and had them put an implant, I'm not taking any pregnancy risk.

"What is it?" I'm a bit scared. I'm not sure I want to take things further than kissing with him.

I'm probably a fool, but Sphakamiso is still the only man I prefer to sexually know. Him and I had incredible connection, we had dated for years before he deflowered me, but I still felt no

pleasure. How much more with someone I don't have any feelings for?

"I'm not going to do anything," he says, trying to calm me down with a smile.

I don't believe him, why he's getting so close then?

"I just need you to trust me," he says.

I don't trust him one bit.

"Just allow me to touch you in your precious places, with my hand, I won't hurt you," he says.

"Mpatho, it's too early for us to do that," I say.

"I'm not going to have sex with you," he says.

I'm not convinced, I look down and notice a third leg standing up.

"I really don't want to have sex," I tell him.

"I respect that, relax," he says.

I breathe in and out, then I allow him to hold me.

We kiss, that's been happening a lot lately. This time he's touching me, feeling my boobs and running his hand down to my waist. His clothes are on, even though he's erected his tent, I believe he won't do anything to me. "Relax," he says, lowering his voice.

I'm still tense, he kisses me again. I focus on his lips more than his hand sliding into my mound.

My body shivers when I feel his finger on my clit. He pushes me down on my back, I cross my legs, locking his hand in. He moves his fingers anyway, then he's kissing me again.

"I love you," he says, breathing warm air against my neck.

His words send tingles down my legs. Or is it his voice? He sounds very mature and in control. I don't even know why that appeals to my sexual senses because I don't like anyone to take control over me.

"You're so soft down here," he says.

I turn my head to look at him. He's keeping his eyes shut, there's a vein on his forehead. It seems like he's enjoying this more than me. His finger slides down to my opening, he just taps on it repeatedly and doesn't stick it inside. "You're so sweet," he says.

I have a throbbing feeling on my clit. His fingers are elsewhere, not where I'd like them to be. I act out of character; I grab his hand and put it on the right spot. He rubs me, it's the best feeling. He starts moaning, very deep and low. I feel the vibration from my toes and grab my hair and bite my lip to stop myself from embarrassing myself. I don't know how I lose my senses and tell him that I'm feeling like I'm in heaven.

My panty is soaked, I even have some moist between my thighs.

"Please marry me," he says.

He's squeezing my hip and butt-cheek, running his hand all round my thighs.

He opens his eyes, you'd swear he's been crying or deeply asleep. His lips are dry, he moistens them with his lip and continues staring at me.

"Let's go to Pretoria together," he says.

As much as I enjoyed what he just did, I'm still not open to a full relationship with trips and sex.

"No, I don't want to go," I say.

He sighs, "Okay, I understand. Can you do me a favor?"

“Yes,” I say without thinking twice.

“Take good care of yourself. And the favor is, can you please touch me kancane?” He’s rubbing himself against me. His erection is big and hard like a rock.

“How do you want me to touch you?” I ask.

“Fak’ isandla and play with him,” he says.

No, I’m not doing that.

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He’s leaving, I don’t know how I feel. I know him differently now, I know how he talks when he’s horny. I didn’t touch him or give him any sense, he wasn’t angry but he kept some distance after walking out. He’s dragging a small suitcase, wearing a white T-shirt, long sleeves obviously. He hugs me goodbye.

“What must I bring you?” he asks.

I smile, “Anything.”

“Have you opened the gift I got you at the picnic?”

Ummm, no. But I want more gifts.

“I will open it,” I say.

He looks disappointed.

“Take good care of yourself. Call me if you need anything,” he says.

I nod, “Thank you, bye.”

He goes and stops at the door. “About earlier...”

My eyes widen. Is he really a kiss and tell? Even though he’s only telling me.

“I’m hungry for more,” he says.

I get shy and look away. Is this really the time?

“Thank you for letting me touch,” he says.

He’s on a mission, I don’t know where to move my eyes.

He finally leaves, I stand and watch him disappear out of the door.

“Phume,” someone says.

I turn, it’s Beauty, she’s coming out of her bedroom. I thought she was still held up in the traffic.

“We have temporary freedom. I will drop you off at the Mshazis,” she says.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 10

PHUMELELE

“Girl, you’re still watching TV!”

I just sigh. I’ve packed my bag and dressed up. I just don’t know where I’m going, but I’m definitely not going to the Mcinekas to eat the samp and have Nombuso throwing shades at me. I thought about visiting one of my friends but everyone thinks I’m a high-maintenance girl, she will spend money to accommodate me and I’m not looking forward to that kind of special treatment.

“I’m leaving, get up unless if you’re going to take your car and drive yourself. But we aware that all cars have trackers here, except the Audi I’m driving,” she says.

That's another bombshell to me, I'm glad I stopped driving any of the cars.

"I don't want to go to Sphakamiso," I say.

She frowns, "Your boyfriend. Why?"

"His family is not nice," I say.

"Then book and invite him over. Get a lodge in town, two days will be less than R1000. You have some money, right?"

"Okay, but drop me at my friend's place for now, I will talk to him later."

Mpatho and I haven't established anything, but damn I feel like I'm doing something behind his back and betraying him. The same thing I condemned Sphakamiso for doing, I'm an honest person. But I feel like Beauty will keep on pushing and I don't have a sound reason why I prefer being home alone.

When I'm in the car I call Ntombi and tell her I will be popping in. I haven't seen her since the funeral, there's a lot of catching up to do. I hope her mother is not home because it's a lot to unpack.

My phone beeps, I check thinking it's Sphakamiso, he's been texting the whole day. But it's Mpatho, he's sending pictures of himself in the plane. He's boarded, so he's letting me know that he will switch his phone off and be available after an hour. I feel bad, just a little bit.

"He has boarded," I tell Beauty.

"He will probably go to a strippers' club there, don't feel bad, he's not a saint." She seems to hate Mpatho, I don't know if I'm reading too much into it. Whenever she's bashing the Mshazis it's never her husband, but Mpatho receiving the most of it.

"Does he like strippers?" I ask.

“Yes, yellow-bones, portable bodies, freaky, and all that urban shit,” she’s basically mentioning everything I’m not. Obviously I’m bruised because Mpatho has been pretending to be attracted to me. I’m not big but I’m definitely not the type she just described. Not freaky, not a yellow-bone, and don’t even know how to strip.

“He said he was dating prior my mother’s dead. Did you know the girl?” I ask.

“Yes, we hung out a few times,” she says driving with one hand and taking out a packet of cigarette.

Damn, she smokes too.

“How did she look like?” I don’t really care, I’m just asking.

“Like Pearl Thusi,” she says.

Okay, I’m not even close to what he likes. Me with my fish lips and stiff waist that has never been shaken.

“Does Ntombi still attend a reed-dance?” she asks, changing the top.

I’m suddenly very heartbroken, I tell her she still does.

However, Ntombi broke her virginity two years ago, it’s none of anyone’s business. She lives in the same village with her no-nonsense mother, I’m one of Ntombi’s few friends she actually approves of because, well I’m a cold young girl with a small circle of friends and I never had adolescence pulling me by tits like others.

“I think you need outgoing friends, an introvert can’t be surrounded by other introverts,” Beauty says.

She might have a point but I’m not going to make new friends.

“You need introvert friends too because you’re very outgoing. Too many of you’s might be toxic,” I say.

“My second husband will be an introvert,” she says.

My eyes widen. “You want a polyandry?”

“No silly, after I become a widow,” she says and laughs.

I shake my head, she still shocks me. Do I judge her? Absolutely not, the Mshazis have proven to be self-centered people, she might as well get from them whatever she wants to get. Unlike my mother, she can actually use her pussy simultaneously with her brain.

Ntombi gets me from the gate, she’s on some weight-losing journey and it’s evidently working perfectly. I envy her body, she looks sexy and ‘portable’. I can’t help but wonder if Mpatho wouldn’t have his eyes on on her, plus she’s his preferred skin type.

“You’ve gained weight,” she says.

She’s that type of friend, exactly like a black family aunt that reads every family member’s look when she comes home. I didn’t take physical comments personal until now. I’m just triggered.

“You look hot, why the long face?” she asks.

I roll my eyes, “You’re such an ass, I regret coming here.”

“Okay, come, I have milkshakes, we’ll talk about it.” She grabs my bag and goes to her room with it.

She comes back and asks that we sit in the kitchen.

Milkshake?

“Where is your sister’s wine?” I ask.

Her eyes widen. “Wine? That’s alcohol, are you okay?”

She puts her hand on my forehead, as if checking my temperature. I slap it away and laugh.

“Bro, there’s a lot going on,” I say.

She pulls the chair and sits. Give her news, any time of the day, she's in.

"Is it Sphakamiso?" she asks.

"Forget that one, he has an almost 3 year old child and I didn't know about it until last week."

Hands on her mouth, she buries in a scream.

"A child?"

"That's not even my main cause of depression. Mpatho and I have to get married, otherwise I'd be kicked out because I'm not a biological Mshazi."

"Please stop! So you're not a rich kid?" she asks hilariously.

I can't help but laugh. Life is so unfair.

"Nope, my father is Aunt Brandi's husband, that's why her and mom didn't get along."

"Okay, I will steal the wine for you," she says.

"Wena ungenaphi? You have no problems, everyone thinks you're still a virgin."

"Girl! Listen, a lot of things have happened since we last hung out. My mother wants to do a memulo for me and I've had sex, like 50 times, I can literally fit a XL dildo down here," she says.

Now I'm feeling better, my problems are not that life-threatening. Her mother is a lioness and an anaconda all in one.

"Have you come clean?" I ask.

"No, I thought she'd figure it out since I've been dodging the Reed-dance, I'm 23 years old for heaven's sake!" She's taken the wine from the rack.

She opens it and pours one glass. It's hers, she gulps it down.

Another one, for her again.

“Hello?” I wave my hand.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Waiting for taxis is not even one of my quarter-life crisis that concern me the most. It's actually waking up and going to work that I hate. Yes, I hate my job, who likes working for a Muslim man and following customers around the shop like a personal guard. They hate it too, some even stop shopping and leave the shop when they realize you're behind them. My job isn't checking if they're not stealing, that's what they don't get, I follow them to make sure they get what they want and to throw in a little motivation for them to buy. I've been employed by Singh's Fashion House for 3 months and I've ruined about 200 people's wardrobes. We are not allowed to tell customers that the clothes they buy won't go with their bodies or that the fabric is actually ugly. Compliment, recommend, and motivate.

“Oh, that would be perfect on you.”

“Take it with that shirt, you will look like Rihanna.”

And more lies.

I look up from my phone, still no taxis. I'm shouting at whoever driver comes now because I'm late. It's 6:40 in the morning, they should be on the road, they know it's a busy hour, people are on their way to work. I don't get paid full amount if I get to work 30 minutes late.

There's a black Fortuner coming. My slayqueening dream revives, I strike a pose. It slows down, God is so fuckin' great.

Cars aren't sexually transmitted, but gosh I need a man who own wheels. I'm tired of taxis, maybe I'd hate my job less if I had a comfortable transport taking me from the door of shack to work.

Just when the driver is about to stop next to me, when my ancestors finally do what they died to do, some fool in a Tazz comes on a crazy speed and hoots behind the Fortuner. My future husband drives away, he has no choice. These demons with ugly, old cars think they own the road.

I'm so pissed watching my Fortuner drives away.

"Hey queen," the person says.

He's rolled down the Tazz's window. He's showing his face outside the window, smiling with dimples.

"Come, I will give you a lift and drop you wherever you're going," he says.

My blood just boils. He chased the Fortuner away, hooting like he was on some emergency drive, only to stop after him and offer me a ride.

"I can come and carry you," he says.

Can't he read my face? I'm angry.

I look away, clutching my handbag on my chest.

"Taxis are on strike, unless if you're waiting for a private jet," he says.

Taxi strike? I look at him, my eyes widen. No wonder none have passed since I stood here 10 minutes ago.

"Until when?" I ask.

"I don't know, I work at a hardware," he says.

Being stubborn won't help me, I have to take his lift and pretend like he didn't cost me a good Instagram life. I go to the car and

open the door and get inside. He's wearing a branded work shirt, I greet trying to be humble.

"Are you comfortable?" he asks.

"Yes," I say.

Deep down I know I'd have been more comfortable in the Fortuner he chased away.

"Town?" he asks.

"Yes," I say.

"Okay, same destination. I work at Jim's Hardware."

"What do you do there?" I ask.

"I lift cements and blocks," he says with a smirk.

I don't think he's telling the truth, but whatever.

"I work at Singh's Fashion House as a fashion customer director," I tell him.

I have no fuckin' idea what a fashion customer director is. Does the name even exist?

He runs his eyes over me, looking for 'fashion', I guess.

"I need new T-shirts, must I come later?"

Here we go, I knew he was going to hit on me, it's never just an innocent lift.

"If you want to," I say.

"I want to. What's your name?"

"Miyanda," I say.

"Just Miyanda?"

"Miyanda Mthethwa."

"Mthethwa? Hhayi, I'm not related to the surname."

Gosh!

“I’m Malibongwe Mcineka, my mother is a Vilakazi, my wife is MaMthethwa,” he says.

“Really? That’s awesome, you married my sister.” I don’t know his wife but this makes us related and him my brother-in-law.

He chuckles, “I’m talking about you. I’m speaking it into existence.”

I roll my eyes, he’s such a bore.

“I can charm you, forget about the Fortuner guy,” he says.

So he knows, he did that on purpose.

“Why did you chase him away?” I ask.

“Why would a fool with NN registration give our women a lift? There are women in Newcastle too,” he says.

Very bold of him to think we want local attention!

I don’t know how we got to the shop so fast. I don’t even know what we talked about but I know his name. When he’s about to pull up his engine thunders, my colleagues will ask a lot of questions.

“Thank you. Should I pay?” I ask.

“Yes, with ten digits,” he says.

“Seriously?” I can’t even say I’m surprised, men always do this.

“I’m kidding,” he says.

I’m relieved, I take my bag and open the door.

Then, “I have the 0.”

I look at him, he’s handing over his phone.

I release a sigh and then put it in and mix the last two digits.

“I will see you later,” he says.

I close the door and cross to the shop's entrance.

I'm late but Singh is not around. I rush to put my bag in the backroom and come back to a shoe rack. He won't know when I came, I'm sorting out sizes and putting shoes in their stands. Mornings are always less busy, there's no shadowing to do.

Well, except for today. There's a customer who just comes and stands next to me.

I look up, what the fuck.

"Malibongwe what are you doing here?" Gosh, is he trying to make me lose my job. The Fortuner guy wouldn't have done this.

"It's not ringing," he says.

I'm confused. "What's not ringing?"

"The number you gave me, it's wrong."

Oh wow, does he know how many men I've given wrong numbers to and they've never pulled this stunt.

"I'm at work," I say in a low, firm voice.

"And I want to rush to mine, just give me the correct number and I will leave and come back later for my T-shirts," he says.

If I know what's good to me, I will give this man the correct number.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 11

PHUMELELE

Ntombi's mother arrives, we are tipsy and laughing nonstop. I haven't been this free in a long time, but I think we might be in trouble.

"Phume why didn't you tell me you were coming?" she asks, coming to give me a hug.

"I planned last minute," I say.

Ntombi breaks a chuckle and hides her face behind her hands. Alcohol! If she's not careful we'll get caught.

"Are you staying for the weekend? I might need to send you girls for shopping because we've ran out of most things and I know you're very picky with what you eat," she says.

This is exactly why I don't like visiting people, it always feels like I'm coming with a burden.

"I don't need special grocery Ma, I'm nothing," I tell her.

She adjusts her beret and looks at me with her brows snapped. "You're nothing?"

"She's about to get married to Mpatho," – Ntombi.

I turn and look at her, WTF.

"Hhayi, manyala mani lawo? Tell me that's not true," her mother pulls the chair and sits.

I release a sigh and tell her the story. Everyone knows him as my brother, my brother who was in the army that I'd threaten people about. Now, all of a sudden, he's my possible husband. Ntombi's mother is just as shocked, but she doesn't think me being arranged to marry someone was a bad idea.

"It's what everyone wants for their child, to know that there's someone who will look after them when we are dead," she says.

“Hhah! Don’t tell me you’ve seen a husband for me as well,” – Ntombi.

Her mother clicks her tongue, “You can’t even wash a sleeping blanket properly, why would I punish someone’s son like that?”

We both laugh. My mother clearly didn’t care about the disadvantages of marrying me, I can’t do shit.

“It smells like alcohol in here,” she says, sniffing around.

Fuck! Ntombi slips up and laughs.

“Did you drink?” She looks at both of us.

I shake my head. Ntombi is still laughing.

“Just a little bit,” she says, showing little with her hand.

“Who said it’s okay to drink in my house? Do you know what your father will do if he finds out about this?” – her mother.

“He’s in Johannesburg,” Ntombi says.

“I can call him and he’d be here tomorrow morning.”

“Come on Ma, I’m just stressed about umemulo. I feel like it’s an overrated thing, why can’t I get a normal party with my friends to celebrate?”

Now I want to laugh because I know the real reason why she’s scared.

“Overrated thing? Do you know how long it has taken for your father and I to be able to do this for you? We expect gratitude from you, not attitude,” her mother says, pushing back the chair aggressively.

“It’s in two months, you should be having invites designed already,” she says.

There’s no way out for Ntombi, if she doesn’t come clean umhlwehlwe will do it for her.

“I’m going to my room, make something to eat, don’t starve Phumelele. Wena Phumelele don’t be bullied by those people, if you don’t want to marry Mpatho don’t,” she says.

I just laugh and nod. I know it comes from a good place, I just wish it was that easy. She leaves us in our senseless laughter, Ntombi is supposed to start cooking after 6pm because her father is a member of the Nazareth church, but she switches the stove on 20 minutes before time. She’s lucky her mother is in the bedroom, she’s a Christian but she always honors Sabbath on behalf of her husband. He converted from Christianity after Ntombi’s mother had already married him. They co-exist in their marriage despite different religions, that’s the kind of love I want.

While she’s cooking I put my dishwashing skills into good use. The old Phume would’ve sat and watched her do everything by herself, I’m grateful to Mpatho for his lessons. He calls while I’m in the middle of my dishwashing chore, there’s so much noise in his background.

“Hey, I’m sorry I haven’t called since morning, I’ve been held up.”

“Are you in a strip club?” I ask.

“Strip club? No.” He sounds very guilty.

“You are, why are you denying it?”

“I can video-call,” he says.

I roll my eyes, “I don’t care, I was just saying.”

He’s quiet.

“I’m busy, if you didn’t call for anything important can we drop so that I can continue with what I’m doing.”

“Let me know when you’re done,” he says.

“I won’t be done, bye!” I drop the call.

Bustard. Beauty was right, I could hear a half-naked girl in his background laughing.

I wouldn't be surprised if the business trip ended today and he's there one more day to bless and be blessed by strippers.

"Trouble in paradise?" Ntombi asks.

I sigh, "Men are trash, all of them."

"Why do you think he's in a strip club?"

"Because he's into strippers and I heard one talking."

She frowns and then laughs until she starts coughing. "Now I understand the saying; better the devil you know than the one you don't."

Yeah, but is Sphakamiso any better in this situation?

We are done, I was helpful in the kitchen, even her mother is surprised.

"What's wrong with you Ntombi?" she says, looking at me coming with a stack of plates.

"This is a guest," she says.

"It's fine Ma, I'm preparing for the wife role anyway," I say.

"If it means you must change who you are, then it's not for you," she says.

We sit around the table and eat. Ntombi is such a great cook, I can learn a thing or two from her.

"So, what happens if you and Mpatho don't get married?" her mother asks.

"He will marry someone else and I will be homeless," I say.

"What if he doesn't marry?" she asks.

I shrug, "I don't know."

"Maybe everything will go to your grandfather name, remember Mpatho's mother was not married, he's also balanced with one leg there and he doesn't have a child. If your grandfather dies then Beauty takes everything," Ntombi says.

We both look at her surprised, that's a deep analysis.

"She can't take everything," I say.

"She can, she's the wife there," she says.

Clearly Beauty doesn't know this, otherwise she wouldn't be convincing me to give Mpatho a chance. Contradictory, also telling me all the bad things about him.

"Does she support your relationship?" Ntombi's mother asks.

"Yeah, she does," I'm not sure of this.

"She's kind," Ntombi says, laughing.

She's still very much tipsy.

Ntombi fell asleep without having a bath, her mother has been shouting the last 30 minutes. I'm sharing a bed with her, I'm bored because alcohol kicked out of my system a long time ago. Sphakamiso has been texting me nonstop. I have to call him, we need to meet up and talk before I return to the Mshazis.

We agree on meeting tomorrow afternoon, he will borrow the car from Malibongwe.

Luckily Ntombi's mother wakes up early in the morning for church, they have a prayer meeting in Stanger, they're coming back late today. I will be gone by the time she comes back. Beauty called and said she will pick me up before 6pm.

Sphakamiso will be coming this side, it's more safer because not many people know him this side. I wear my cotton pants and turtle-neck T-shirt and boots. I know he will bring a jacket for me, or take his off if it's get colder than this. I leave my bag packed, Ntombi is planning her own meet-up with her boyfriend. Not the one who took the virginity that's about to be celebrated and slaughtered a cow for, a new boyfriend.

The Tazz arrives, I get inside, he drives us into a spot far from Ntombi's home. He looks better than the last time I saw him. His wounds have healed, he shaved his head, he looks cleaner and more handsome.

I'm not as angry as I've been, I even hugged him, but I didn't allow him to kiss me.

"Why didn't you tell me you were visiting Ntombi?"

"Do I report to you?"

He chuckles and looks away briefly. "Is that how you speak to me now, Phume?"

"Being soft-spoken, respectful and loving didn't get me anywhere. So this is the new me, the me you created," I say.

Silence.

Him and everything that my family did to me has turned me into a complete bitch. I can't be blamed for my attitude when being nice hasn't been rewarded.

"No day has passed by where I didn't regret what I did," he says.

I look at him, we hold eye contact for a good minute. He looks sad, very sad.

“I wish I had confessed earlier, things wouldn’t have happened this way. Some other time, not now when I need you the most,” he says.

“What’s happening?” I still care about him, genuinely.

“Things are not good at home, for both Aphelele and I. I’ve been considering giving him up but I don’t want him to hate me when he’s old, thinking I didn’t love him,” he says.

I’m shocked. My heart hasn’t open for Aphelele, I don’t know if it ever will. But that can be too much, first his mother abandoned him, now his father is considering it too.

“Sphakamiso things can’t be that bad,” I say.

He releases a deep breath, “They are.”

“What is the main problem? Money?”

He tilts his head back, deeply thinking.

“He’s not accepted, mostly by my sister. Money is part of the problem, not the whole problem,” he finally says.

I don’t want to rush him, he’s at his lowest, I’ve never seen him like this.

“I’m not a Mcineka,” he says.

My heart just drops. I was here not so long ago, my world was turned upside down because of the sperm that created me.

“Who said that?” I ask.

“Nombuso,” he says, swallowing hard.

Why am I not surprised?

“Maybe she’s lying,” I say.

“If she was, my mother would’ve sat with me down and corrected it. But she hasn’t, instead she’s extra nice and full of pretense. I grew up thinking I had a bad character, I’d do a

small mistake and everyone will make a big deal out of it, now I understand why,” he says, breaking a senseless chuckle.

“I know how that feels, you lose yourself with your identity. I’m so sorry, please don’t handle it with anger.” I can tell by the way he talks that he’s bottled a lot of things up and that’s not good for anyone.

“So were you thinking of giving Aphelele up for adoption?” I ask.

“Aunt Teekay, the woman who brought him to me, she’s very loving. I always lie and say everything is okay. She came to see him on Wednesday, bought him toys and a bike. They divided everything, yesterday Aphelele broke Yoli’s toy that ‘he gave to him’ and he was told to pay back Yoli with his. So today he had to play a wire car that Mkhuleko made for him,” he says.

I’m sweating on Aphelele’s behalf. I knew Nombuso was the devil’s PA, but this!

“You let her bully Aphelele?” I thought I didn’t care even if that child dies, but no fuck Nombuso and her little tortoise. Given a chance I’d take that Yoli to town, leave her in the market and run off.

“It was either I let that happen or listen to her throwing harsh remarks at him the whole day,” he says.

I’m speechless, now I understand why he’s this sad.

“How sure are you that the woman you give him to will treat him well?” I ask.

“Sometimes outsiders can treat you better than family. If I ask her she will agree, if she feels like she can’t do it anymore she will tell me, she’s a very honest woman. My only worry is Aphelele, what picture is this going to create in his mind? That neither of his parents wanted him? I wish he was old enough to decide on his own. Does he want me to struggle with him on

my lap? Or a better life with someone who's able to give it to him?"

This is very tricky. I get both perspectives, some may prefer to eat phuthu and water with their biological parent and suffer with them, and some may choose a chance to be given a comfortable life by other people.

"Have you talked to Malibongwe about it?" I ask.

He clicks his tongue and shakes his head.

Okay, I thought they were close.

"Is he aware?" I ask, again.

"Do you think he's always around. Malibongwe doesn't know anything until he's told. I'm not going to run after another man with my problems," he says.

"But he's your brother, Phaka. That's the first person you should seek advice from, maybe he doesn't pay a lot of attention but he cares," I say.

"It's not that he doesn't see anything wrong, he doesn't want to address it and I'm cool with that, I'm going to do things my own way," he says.

"What's your own way?" I'm curious because his face darkened when he said that.

"You will hear about it," he says.

"Don't hurt anyone, rather take Aphelele to that aunt you were talking about and go look for a job. Maybe try another town, Durban might not be your spot," I say.

"It's my spot, anyone's spot, just that someone is trying to ruin my reputation by making sure I have a bad history with the police," he says.

At this point I'm starting to think maybe it's Nombuso. I mean, she knows about him owning a gun, I just don't know how she'd have that personal relationship with the police.

"But I will find out who's behind lo mshikashika, and when I do things won't be nice, umfana uyofisa uk'buyela esiswini sikanina," he says. It sounds more like a promise than a threat.

I don't even know what to say, at this point I feel like his anger is justified.

I hug him, he wraps his arms around me and exhales heavily.

I don't know if we can ever rekindle what we had, but I know for sure that I still care about this person, I probably always will.

Beauty calls and says she's on her way. I have to say goodbye. We hug longer, he has his forehead linked onto mine. I lift my eyes to him and lock a stare with him.

"It's going to be okay," I say.

"Thanks, but I don't know if it will, especially now that you're not next to me," he says.

"I'm always here to listen," I say.

"You drop my calls if Mpatho is around."

"You know my story, Sphakamiso."

A moment of silence passes...

"If I had means to take you out of your situation, would you have forgiven me for my mistakes?" he asks.

I don't know how to answer his question. Would I have forgiven him?

He releases a deep sigh and holds me tighter.

"I have to go," I say.

It's hard to part ways but we have to.

My heart is broken, I'm happy to get in the car with a tired Beauty. She's less talkative, I can dissolve in my thoughts without her disturbing me. I pick my bag from Ntombi, she's canceled her meet-up with her boyfriend because her mother is on her way back. I'm ready to get home and take a shower and have a snack and get in bed before mkhulu and Mpatho arrive.

"I'm so tired, but I have to cook a welcome feast," Beauty says.

I'm glad I'm not anyone's wife yet, I don't have to stress about other people's stomachs.

"You should've told Aunt Nomusa to come in," I say.

"It's Sunday and I don't trust her," she says.

Speaking of trust, I remember what Ntombi said.

"Would you like to see Mpatho and I get married and live happily ever after?" I ask.

She glances at me, her eyebrows snapped. "Happily ever after? Which movie have you been watching? I thought you loved your boyfriend."

"But you said I should marry him," I say.

I see her rolling her eyes. "I said feed into the idea."

"What does that mean?" I ask.

"It means just that, you're honestly so...young."

Immature may be the word she was looking for.

I swear nobody has confused me like this woman. I don't even know why I've been listening to her. She's told me ten many different things. Love him, don't love him. Marry him, don't marry him. He's not that bad, he's got issues and he's stingy. My head is buzzing.

We park outside and take our bags and make our way inside. The door is locked, she opens, we walk in.

I notice a bottle of Glenmorangie on the counter. This wasn't here when we left, Beauty doesn't seem to pay any attention to it.

I walk into the lounge and see him on the couch. The TV is blank, the curtains are closed, he's just sitting there wearing a charcoal herringbone overcoat and jeans. How do I explain myself? I was expecting him home at 10pm.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 12

PHUMELELE

Beauty cooked dinner, mkhulu hasn't arrived yet, he's sticking to the time that was set. The fact that Mpatho hasn't asked us anything makes everything awkward. I wish he can confront me and get the tension out of the way. I notice that he's not eating much.

Beauty is a bit quiet, I thought she'd try and break the ice. I can't put all the blame on her but she pressured me into leaving the house. I'm beginning to feel like she does and says everything on purpose. I'm in trouble because of her, her husband is still in a flight here, she's not bothered.

I leave the table unannounced, I didn't finish my food. I get in my room and call Ntombi.

"He's here," I say.

"Who? Jesus?" she asks.

How slow!

“Mpatho,” I say.

“Oh, he came back before time. Just tell him you were with me because Beauty left you alone and went to her side-man,” she says.

This one will have you cracking up during sticky situations.

I’m not going to throw Beauty under the bus regardless of the mixed feelings I have about her.

Sphakamiso is calling, he thinks I’m still alone. I drop Ntombi and answer, I have to tell him that we need to be careful now. It feels like I demoted him from main to side, it’s like we haven’t broken up, just going through a phase.

“Sphakamiso,” I answer.

“Hey, are you home?”

“Yes, please wait for me to call you, I don’t want to be in trouble.” At this point I know that I’m playing a dangerous game because Mpatho thinks we are trying to get to know each other better.

“Is he back?” he asks, I can hear a sigh.

“Yeah, he’s home,” I say.

Someone clears a throat behind me, I almost drop my phone on the floor. I pull my hand down and end the call. It’s him, he heard me, he knows what’s up.

“Are you using your charger?” he asks.

I swallow hard, he’s only asking for a charger?

“No,” I shake my head and hurry to take it.

“Thanks,” he says and walks out.

He knows how to give someone cold chills. What’s up with this pretense? I know he’s angry because I lied to him this morning

saying I was home with Beauty. The same Beauty he doesn't want me to be friends with.

After pacing up and down trying to figure out how I'm going to deal with this, I sum up courage and walk out to look for him. He's not in the lounge, not in his bedroom, if he's not in the kitchen I will check the balcony and give up. I walk in the kitchen, Beauty is standing against the counter, her wrist is in Mpatho's grip, held very tightly.

I stop, I'm not sure what's going on here.

He twists her wrist, she flinches in pain.

"What are you up to?" he asks, through gritted teeth.

She's fighting his hand off but he's way stronger than her. When I see a tear dropping down her cheek I scream his name, why the fuck is he twisting his step-grandmother's wrist in the kitchen?

He drops her hand and looks at me. I'm shivering, is this what's waiting for me too? He tucks his hands into the pockets of his coat and walks out.

"Are you okay?" I rush to Beauty.

She's rubbing her wrist, looking enraged.

"I'm okay," she says.

"What happened?" I'm confused because to me he hasn't showed any anger.

She doesn't answer me, she turns to the fridge and grabs plain yogurt from the fridge. She sits with a spoon and starts eating like nothing just happened. She likes plain yogurt, I'm sure soon she will be eating Nivea and Camphor because that thing has no taste.

“I will sit with you until mkhulu comes home,” I say, pulling a chair and sitting. I’m not Batista but I don’t think Mpatho will do anything to her when there’s a witness around.

“That’s who he is,” she says.

My heartbeat escalates. “What do you mean?”

“Didn’t you see what he was doing to me? If you didn’t walk in he could’ve killed me,” she says.

“Why is he angry with you? Is it because you and I were not home?” I ask.

She adds more yogurt into her cup, I really don’t know how she enjoys that thing.

“He thinks I told you to go wherever you’ve been,” she says.

“You did. But why is he not addressing it with me instead?” I mean, who is he dealing with between us. If we get married he’s going to punish other people for my mistakes?

“Because he’s still drawing a perfect picture in your mind,” she says.

“What if this happens again and I’m not around?” I’m worried about her safety.

I think she’s right about Mpatho giving me a perfect picture, there’s more to him, maybe there’s even a side that I wouldn’t want to associate myself with. I hate violence with everything in me.

“Don’t worry, he knows he can’t do anything to me,” she says.

I’m confused. Wasn’t she saying he was going to kill her if I didn’t walk in a minute ago? Is it amnesia, she’s always contradicting herself. I’m starting to doubt her sanity, there’s something wrong with her, and wrong with me too because I’ve been taking advices from her.

“I’m going to bed, Mvimbo will find me waiting for him there,” she says.

“Are you not scared?” I ask.

“Nah, I’m okay, I’ve dealt with much worse, he’s nothing.” She gets up and throws the cup in the sink and puts the yogurt back inside the fridge.

“Good night,” she leaves me on the chair.

I sit in the kitchen absent-mindedly. How long before I get my wrist twisted as well? I need to drop this whole undercover thing I was trying, I’m bad at it and I will get into trouble when I get caught. I text Sphakamiso, he mustn’t tell Malibongwe anything, I’m dropping it. I need to do something to keep busy, I will wash the dishes, I’m getting good at it. I fill the sink with warm water and add Sunlight liquid and start washing each, very slowly. I don’t want to go to bed yet, a lot is on my mind.

I’m in my head, I don’t hear anyone coming in, I just feel strong hands on my waist. I almost jump with terror, he’s standing behind me.

“You scared me,” I say, trying to control my wobbling voice.

“I’m sorry,” he says, standing still and not letting go of my waist.

I keep rubbing the sponge on a plate, my chest is pounding.

“You should go to bed,” he says.

He’s not asking or suggesting, he’s telling me.

He lifts his hand and gently pulls my hand and takes the sponge from me.

“Rinse your hands,” he says.

I swallow back hard and open the tap to rinse the soap off my hands. I leave some dishes inside the sink, he pulls my hand and takes me to my room.

I sit on the bed, he goes to the bathroom and comes back with a bath towel. He takes my hands, both of them, and wipes them. He's quiet doing all of this, I'm shivering.

He puts it down and lowers himself next to me.

"So, let's talk about the strip club," he says.

This is one hell of a way to start a conversation. I have forgotten about the strip club thing, a lot happened after that, and as I said, I didn't care if he was at a strip club.

"Beauty said that to you, didn't she?" he asks.

I look at him, gathering some courage. "Why do you think Beauty told me that?"

"Because I know you wouldn't make something like that up. Is that why you didn't sleep at home, because I was in a strip club?"

"No, I was bored so I visited Ntombi," I say.

"We talked last night and this morning, you said you were here. I doubt if you were with Ntombi you would've found it necessary to lie to me. But anyway, I was out for drinks with a few business associates, there were no strippers and I'm 32 years old, I don't get entertained by half-naked people."

"I'm sorry," I say.

"For?" He raises his eyebrow.

"For saying you were at a strip club."

He looks at me, hard and long.

I don't back down, I hold his stare.

"Are you still with him?" he finally asks.

He overheard the phone call, me telling Sphakamiso that he shouldn't call because he's back.

"No, but we still talk," I say.

"And that makes it okay? Phume, you said to me we should try, that you want to get to know me better, but you're only getting to know me through Beauty. I'm the only thing standing between Beauty and all the Mshazi property. Mkhulu can die any day, he's old. This is deeper than you, agreements were made way before you and I matured. I'm willing to make sacrifices, even allowing you to strip me off my dignity and constantly remind me that I'm not your chosen one, I will always be your second-best, if I even make it to the list of your heart. All because I want you and I to get what we deserve."

"I don't feel like you're being honest with me," I say.

"About what Phume?" He's no longer angry.

For a moment I forget what he's capable of- the wrist-wrestler.

"After you've gotten what you were promised and mkhulu is dead, will I continue to see this Mpatho you're portraying?" I ask.

"Yes," he says.

I don't believe him, I feel like he's doing all this for the inheritance too and because he doesn't to be married to a stranger mkhulu might pick for him.

Beauty said you have to bear a son. Is that another rule?"

He smiles, "If you fall in love with me, won't you want to have my kids?"

"I'd want to have kids when I want to have them. Not when it suits mkhulu," I say.

"I understand, are you on any contraceptives?" What a personal question.

I've never had a man ask me this before.

"Yeah," I say.

"So nothing will happen, we can just..." He pauses and puts his hand on my knee, there's a soft look in his eyes. "You've never been inside my bedroom."

"No, I haven't," I say.

"Why not?" He's touching my face.

I'm blushing, he's very close to me.

"Have you ever been with anyone else beside him?" He always refers to Sphakamiso as him, I don't know why. "I mean, sexually?" he clarifies before I answer.

I shake my head, this is a bit embarrassing.

"So it was just him?" he asks, his arm is around my waist.

I nod.

He pulls me and makes me sit on him with my legs on either side of his waist.

"I haven't been able to forget how soft you feel," he says.

I feel a poke on the side of my thigh, he pulls me to sit direct with his penis.

"Relax, it won't break," he says, chuckling.

I look at him, trying not to show that my nerves are scattering. He grabs my neck down and kisses me.

He doesn't want to let go, he's breathy and rushy. Before I know it he's put me down on the bed on my back. He grabs my knee up and lies between my thighs and continues kissing me.

He finally stops, breathing hard. "Please help me, I've held in for too long."

“Huh?” I’m confused.

He takes his top off...not just it, his pants too.

He’s butt-naked, I wish I can close my eyes but I don’t want any surprises.

Okay, I think men genitals are naturally not good-looking. His looks bent, I hope he doesn’t think he will shove it inside me and stir my intestines. I’m scared, he knows that I’m not sexually-wise.

“I’m not going to do anything you don’t want,” he’s rubbing himself against my thigh.

My panty is getting soaked but I’m still just nervous. “But if you want me to prove myself to you, then you need to give me a fair chance too.”

“There’s no competition here.” Not with my body!

“If that’s so, then can you just touch me.” He pulls my hand, at first I’m hesitant.

My hand is against the hardness of his joystick. He puts his hand over mine, “Don’t be scared.”

Okay, I need to breathe and do this.

He shuts his eyes and removes his hand, I’m doing it right.

“Please kiss me,” he says.

Multi-tasking! He waits for me to initiate the kiss, as I kiss him I stop the handjob.

He grabs my hand back to it.

“It’s aching,” he says.

I freeze, am I hurting him?

He opens his eyes, breathing heavily.

“If I ask you to suck me, would you do it?”

Yikes!

“No, I won’t,” I say.

“Please mommy, buk’ ikhinqi lingakanani, it hurts.” He’s showing me his joystick that’s grown even more harder. He’s doing well at milking my sympathy. “I thought your hand would be enough but I’m craving for your real muffin, ngiyak’cela.”

“Mpatho no, I don’t like sex,” I say, rolling to lie on his side.

“If you don’t I will never ask again,” he says.

“I don’t believe you,” I say.

“You can punish me however you want if I ever ask again.” This sounds like an empty promise. How can I punish someone who’s bigger than me?

He comes for a kiss, a deep one. His hand slides between my legs, he snatches my panty aside and rubs me.

I’m nervous but I let my body go with the flow.

“Don’t shut me out of what you’re feeling,” he says.

I nod and let him pull my panty out of my legs. He lifts my legs and positions himself between my thighs.

“Condom?” I ask.

“I will pull out and you are contraceptives, aren’t you?” He says that with his tip between my vaginal lips. He presses it on my clit and locks his eyes with me. When he sees that I’m enjoying it he slides down to my opening and tries to penetrate me with one long push.

I scream, that was painful.

“Sorry, I will be gentle,” he rests his body on my chest and tries again. He pushes each inch gently until he’s fully in. I can’t believe I can take such a huge piece inside of me and not burst.

He pauses and looks at me, "I'm proud of you."

He's proud of me for what? I'm not going to get an explanation though, he's moving in and out, slapping against my butt-cheeks loudly and moaning with his eyes closed. I don't feel any pain, there's an itch he's rubbing that I didn't even know of.

He drops his head, "Mommy! Aweeh."

He pulls out and wraps his hand around his thickly-coated joystick and spills out at the side of the bed. That was very quick, I was just getting to experience what everyone is crazy about. The way he's pulling his face is really scary, he groans one last time.

I turn to sleep on my side, he grabs me back.

Huh? I thought he was done.

I look at him, he's still just as hard.

"Woza, we are not done," he says, pulling my leg up.

I thought when one cums it's over.

He thrusts in again, my clit is hard.

He presses his thumb on it, my body shivers.

He pulls out again. No, he's not cumming, he wants to tap his stick on my clit. I cry out loud and feel something warm spilling out. I can't describe the feeling that follows after that.

"Don't you like it?" he asks.

"I love it, please." I'm grabbing his waist.

He thrusts inside me again, my legs are still shaking.

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I slept like a baby, I didn't even realize that he slept here with me until now. He's awake, I open my eyes to him and almost die of embarrassment when I realize that I'm naked and I have my leg over him. I shove my feet on people's faces, that's why I don't like sharing a bed.

He holds it when I try to remove my leg from him.

Gosh, I'm naked, my cookie is spread all over him.

"Good morning," he says.

"Morning," I drop my eyes.

He kisses my forehead and slides his hand into my open cookie.

"Just feeling if you're alright," he says, cracking a smile.

This a long check-up, his fingers are all over my clit like it's piano buttons.

"I thought you'd freak out waking up and seeing me here," he says and kisses my forehead again. "But it seems like we both had a good time, no regrets."

"Surprisingly, no," I say.

He smiles wider. "I don't even feel like going to work and leave my muffin unattended. I want you to experience what a real dick feels like."

I'm unable to look at him in the eye. He pulls my leg up to his waist and shifts closer. This is about to become a glorious morning.

"Mpatho!" that's mkhulu.

Couldn't he choose a better time?

He ignores and pushes in.

Mkhulu calls again, "Mpatho."

“Fuck,” he hisses and pauses inside me.

“Mkhulu?”

“We have to go now, they took all the cars.”

He freezes, so do I.

What does he mean they took all the cars? How?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 13

PHUMELELE

They’ve been gone since morning and now the sun is going up. It’s all over social media, the police are at the scene but there’s still no trace. Mkhulu exaggerated, only 5 cars were taken. They took from the new models that were delivered last Friday. I’ve been wanting to call Sphakamiso and ask if he knows anything about this, which I highly doubt anyway. But I’m scared because I don’t know where Mpatho’s eyes and ears are, this is serious crime and I don’t want anyone to know I once had an idea. The cars were taken from the dealership, I had a complete different plan that Sphakamiso talked me out of. I’m grateful that he screwed my head back in place, I’m no criminal.

Beauty comes out of the bedroom with a shining face and a towel wrapped around her head. She wouldn’t skip her skin routines even if South Africa was being bombed.

“Any news?” she asks.

I shrug, “No update yet.”

“Ah, it’s not like we will be poor, they must come back now, they didn’t even eat breakfast. I mean, the real breakfast,” she says, sticking her tongue out and laughing.

I keep quiet, I’m not relaxed because of this whole thing, only if I can hear from Sphakamiso.

“You finally invited him to your bedroom. How was he?”

Is she serious? This woman is unbelievable.

“What do you mean?” I feign confusion.

“Can he hit it well?” she asks, very bold.

I know she won’t stop unless I answer.

“Yeah,” I say.

“Bonnie said the same.”

Okay, positive reviews only.

But who is Bonnie?

I don’t ask, I pretend not to care.

“He likes them with big breasts. What size are you?”

Okay, I’m done with this woman.

“I don’t care about his preferences, I don’t want to hear about them. I got my own, some he doesn’t meet, please stop telling me things like that,” I snap.

“Hhayi-bo princess, you’re beautiful, don’t get insecure over nothing,” she says.

“I don’t want to hear about it, I’m sure you also wouldn’t want to be compared to gogo.”

She cracks up, “I was around while she was still alive.”

“I know, but mkhulu loved her, that’s why he only married you when she died.”

“She hadn’t slept with her for a year before her death,” she’s bragging.

A proud homewrecker!

“But I’ll tell you, being a side-chick is way better than being a wife. I didn’t have to deal with an icy princess and the confused heir back then,” she’s referring to me as the icy princess.

“You should’ve turned down the proposal,” I say.

“If it was that easy letting go of this, you wouldn’t have come back here and opened your legs for someone you’ve always seen as a brother.” She’s saying nothing but the truth. Both her and I are here because of what this family has. Nobody pointed a gun at me, heck they didn’t even follow me when I packed my bags and left.

“You’re right, we are both gold-diggers,” I say.

She laughs, I don’t.

There’s a car driving in, I stand up and go to the door. She’s right behind me. They climb out of mkhulu’s car looking worn-out and make their way to us.

Poor mkhulu, this might raise his BP and kill him.

Mpatho grabs my hand and goes to his bedroom with me. I have entered his room, just not as his possible wife. I sit on his bed, he takes his clothes off and starts kissing me, without saying a word. He’s coming on too hard, breathing like he’s running a marathon and sucking my lip to numbness.

I push him and look at his face. “Are you okay?”

“They killed Mpangele,” he says.

It doesn’t ring a bell.

“Our security guard.”

Oh shit, I didn't know someone died.

"Who would do something like that?" I ask knowing very well that I would've done it too if I had resources and a willing partner.

"I don't know," he says and lies down on the pillow.

"No leads?" I ask.

Deep down I don't want the criminals to get caught, something is not settling well inside me about this whole thing.

"Nothing. No finger prints, all the cameras were off, the only person who could've known something was killed," he says.

"So what's next?"

"Wait for the police."

At least those are useless, I have hope that they will let this go and focus on selling the remaining cars.

"Aunt Nomusa cooked, are you hungry?" I ask.

"Yes, I'm hungry." He's smiling.

I try to get off bed to go and get him food, but he grabs me back.

"I had something on the way back. Right now I'm hungry for you."

"But it's mid-day and we had sex last night." I mean, my vagina deserves a break.

"Just a quickie," he says.

"No," I stand my grounds.

"Please, look at my sad face."

I look at it and laugh. Unfortunately there's no sympathy from me this time.

“Okay, we can just sit and talk about us.” Yoh, he’s forgetting about the cars really quick. One moment he’s worked up, next he’s smiling and wanting to talk about umjolo, or arranged marriage.

“After last night, do you still not like sex?” he asks.

Fuck, I lie on his chest and bury my face on him.

He chuckles, his chest vibrating beneath me.

“I like it a bit,” I say.

He lifts my face up, I have to look at him.

“I want you to know that sex is not something you should be ashamed of enjoying and exploring. It’s part of life, you’re in your early 20s, in this stage of life you should open up to experiences.”

“I just thought I’d get married first,” I say.

“I thought so too. But I didn’t wait until I got married either, not many people can do that. How many times have you done it?” This is such an uncomfortable question.

“Two times and it was painful both times. The first time I was being deflowered, it was painful as expected. I stayed for too long not letting him do it again, it was months. And when we did it again, it was almost intact and painful like my first experience,” I tell him.

“You know it also hurts to break into a virgin, that’s why people would want to do it again soon after the first time so that the opening stays clear,” he says.

“It hurts?” I’m confused by this. Sphakamiso could’ve given me his mother in exchange of my virginity.

He laughs. “It does hurt, especially when you’re done, but we like it anyway, being someone’s first makes you think you’re special.”

“Who is that special person to you?” I ask.

It’s his turn to look uncomfortable about the sex topic.

“I can’t tell you,” he says.

“Why?” I’m now more curious to know.

He just told me sex is nothing to be ashamed of.

“Not everyone get their first with people they have feelings for, especially gents.”

“Can’t you say no and wait for the right person?”

“Not when you don’t have a choice or think turning down free sex is a character flaw.”

I nod, I get him. I take it he didn’t lose his virginity to someone he liked, either because he was pressured or scared to say no. I’m not going to push if he’s not comfortable sharing the name with me even though I’m dying with curiosity.

“Was last night special?” I ask.

“Yeah, it was.” He’s smiling.

“And I want us to do it again, tonight,” he says.

I don’t think there’s something called too much sex in his books, or any sexual active person’s book for that matter. People get on it, as long as they’re horny.

“I want you to teach me your body, I will teach you mine as well. Being open with each other sexually opens a certain level of emotional connection,” he says.

I nod, I’m willing to learn, I’m a grown girl now.

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We finally decide to come out of his bedroom. We've been cuddling for the last hour, talking and laughing at silly jokes. I don't know, I think I'm no longer faking it, I'm getting to know him, naturally so. Beauty is in the kitchen, sitting on a high chair with a glass of wine. Housewife vibes!

I don't know where things stand between her and Mpatho after what happened last night.

"Your grandfather is sick," she says.

We stand, shocked.

"What's wrong with him?" – Mpatho.

"He was having his breathing episode, but I gave him his meds, he's okay now, sleeping," she says.

He kisses my cheek, "I'm coming back."

He rushes off to check on his grandfather.

"Is it bad?" I ask Beauty.

"No, he will be okay, he just needs to stay calm," she says.

He needs to stay calm and she's here drinking. But, let me mind my own fuckin' business. I was here to make something to eat. I open my browser because Mpatho is no longer here to direct me.

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BEAUTY

Mpatho and Phume have gone back to fucking. She's made his strong black coffee and two slices of buttered bread. He's still shaken, the Mshazis have been running businesses for

decades and something like this has never happened, ever. And the fact that his favourite security guard was shot dead, a man who's been a loyal employee to this family for 10 years and he doesn't even know who killed him is about to drive him to an early grave.

Beauty sits next to him and inhales a long breath.

"Are you feeling okay now?" she asks.

"I feel a bit better," he says.

He gives him the cup of tea on a saucer and holds the plate of bread for him.

"This is scary, the person who did that is obviously an expert and he's going to come back again now that he's got an access and knows everything about the dealership," she says.

"We will upgrade the security system and employ two more security guards," Mshazi says.

She's silent for a minute, then she shakes her head.

"Yazi something like this once happened, I read about it. People came and stole cars from this top-rated dealership, they took about 9 and left some. They also killed security guards and broke the CCTV system."

Mshazi sips the tea and looks at her curiously. His wrinkled eyes evident of stress.

"Were they ever caught?" he asks.

"Nope, they came back for the second time. But the second time they killed the owner's wife, kids, dogs and cats. Everything. When they were done killing them they took all the cars and burnt down the building and the man's home. Everything he worked hard for burnt into ashes, their bodies were found in a dump with flies all over them. The sad part is, they were never caught."

Mshazi starts coughing uncontrollably. The cup in his hand trembles, spilling the hot tea all over his pants.

Beauty puts the plate away and rushes to rub his back.

“Mshazi are you okay?”

He shakes his head, still coughing.

She rushes to get him water and helps him drink.

He finally calms down...

“I think it’s the same people, Operation Wipe Out. Someone said they are connected to the B0k0 Haram, in fact they are trained by one notorious leader,” she says.

He coughs again, and begin to breathe heavily.

“Mshazi what’s wrong? Should I call an ambulance?” She paces around and stops. “But if you go to the hospital things will become worse, they might come here and kill us knowing that you’re not home.”

He shakes his head, “No, no, no hospital.”

She stands behind him and rubs his back.

“Mpatho will want you to go to the hospital, let’s just tell him you’re okay. He’s a child, he doesn’t know what it takes to protect a family,” she says.

He nods and lies back on the pillow. Beauty sits next to him and holds his hand.

“It’s going to be okay, you’ve faced and conquered many wars. It’s just that you’re old now, worse those people are said to carry big guns from Russia. Someone on Twitter said she heard something like a bomb last night, maybe it was them, they will bomb Mpatho and Phume as well. This is so dangerous, worse...” Hhayi-bo, is he still breathing? She checks his pulse, it’s still there but weak.

“Mpatho! Phume!” She takes her wig off and throws it on the floor.

1, 2, 3, Action!

Hysterical wife.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 14

PHUMELELE

We have a huge dilemma here. Mkhulu is gravely sick, man can't even talk properly, his breaths are short. Beauty says he said his chest was aching, she tried to calm him down but he kept stressing about the cars. Now, he wants to lie here in bed helpless, he refuses to go to the hospital. Mpatho isn't exactly the sweetheart I've seen over the last two weeks, but I understand his attitude this once, mkhulu is signing his death warrant by refusing to seek medical help.

“Don't take him to the hospital against his will,” Beauty has been saying. She's the wife, Mpatho can't go against both their words. So we are just sitting here waiting for a miracle to happen.

“Don't you know any doctor who can come here?” I ask Mpatho. He knows a lot of people, surely someone can come and help.

“Let me try someone but it's late now, I don't know if he will come,” he says and steps out of the room with the phone.

Beauty passes with a mug, I highly doubt it's tea in there, but at this point she's justified to get drunk.

“Where is Mpatho?” she stops and looks at me.

“Trying to get hold of a certain doctor that can come and help us,” I say.

“What???” She frowns.

“Angithi mkhulu doesn’t want to go to the hospital. He can’t die here,” I say.

“This is the right place for him to die at,” she says.

I’m taken back by that response. I was saying it figuratively, not that I think mkhulu is about to die for real. Why does it look like she’s thrown the towel? If she ever held it.

“How is he now?” I ask, trying to study her face.

She sips the thing in the mug, “Asleep for now. Tell Mpatha there’s no need for a doctor, let’s wake up in the morning and see how he is.”

Okay, but wait a minute...

“Did you call him Mpatha?” I ask.

She pulls her brows, “Did I?”

She turns and walks away. She surely did, there’s a huge difference made by those vowels at the end, calling him Mpatha instead of Mpatho was an intended insult. I’m not sure if Mpatho is aware of the depth of the animosity.

He comes back, his doctor is going to come.

“Beauty said I must tell you to postpone him to morning because mkhulu is now asleep,” I tell him.

“What if it gets worse during the night?” He’s asking the messenger.

I shrug, I don’t know what goes on inside Beauty’s head.

“She called you Mpatha,” I say.

He sighs and sits. I'm trying to make him aware that Beauty doesn't rate him at all.

"I care less about the name-calling, I'm just worried about mkhulu. He's the only family I have, he's had health complications before but nothing like this. I know he's old, most of his agemates have long died, but man he can't leave me."

If this happened a few weeks ago before I was informed that I no longer have anyone in this family and the same mkhulu told me to pack my bags if I'm not marrying his grandson, maybe I would be crying my eyes out as well.

"He will be fine," I say, wishing I could be more sympathetic.

He calls the doctor again and cancels. All we have to do now is pray that mkhulu wakes up in a better state and perhaps puts Mpatho in charge of his health related issues. Beauty is the type that switches the machines off before the doctors even come back with your blood test results.

I don't know if Mpatho will go to bed, I leave him on the couch drinking his second cup of coffee. I need my beauty sleep, I will see them in the morning. I get in bed and finally make my decision. I'm calling Sphakamiso and asking him if he heard or knows anything about what happened.

"Sthandwa sami," he answers.

I take a deep breath first. "Hey, how are you doing?"

"I'm okay, I was just worried because you haven't made contact. I didn't know what to think, especially after hearing the news," he says.

"I'm calling about that," I say.

"Did you do it?" he asks.

I'm shocked he thinks I could pull this off on my own.

“No, I didn’t. Did you?” I ask.

“I didn’t, you know me better than that,” he says.

“I was worried because the investigation has been launched. I was very stupid to think I can do something like this. You should see how sick mkhulu is, he’s been having a lot of episodes where he runs out of breath and faint,” I say.

“Good for him!” he says

He sounds so heartless.

“He must die and fetch his grandson as well,” he adds.

I feel guilty knowing that our hate for Mpatho is no longer mutual. I promised him I wasn’t going to take things too far but I’ve already gotten in bed with Mpatho and I’m now his shoulder-to-cry-on during this time. It feels like I’m betraying, regardless of what he did to me, sleeping with prostitutes and having a child behind my back, nothing warrants me to do what I’m doing. I should’ve cut things off, completely. But for some reason I just can’t, I’m holding onto him, to the connection and memories we share.

“I have to sleep,” I say.

“Ulale kahle, I love you.”

I keep quiet, he stays on the line and doesn’t drop.

I exhale loudly and ask, “How is Aphelele?”

“He’s okay, thanks for asking,” he says.

“I’m glad he’s okay, have a goodnight.”

“You too,” he says.

I drop the call and put it under my pillow. In this situation I’m no longer a victim of anything, I need to make up my mind. One final decision and stick to it. Sphakamiso or Mpatho? This can’t keep going on.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Today is one of those days where I want to drag every customer out with their cheap purses and attitude. It's busier than most mid-month days, I don't know where these people got the money.

I'm helping a young lady look for size 10 black pumps. What kind of a girl wears size 10? I don't care how strong her father's genes were but this is ridiculous.

"Sorry sisi, I can only find size 8," I say giving up. I've been going through the shoe rack for almost 5 minutes, I checked the storeroom and confirmed with Precious at the counter.

"What am I going to wear then?" She glares at me.

I glare back. I'm not a shoemaker, I just help around the store.

"Did you check properly at the back?"

"Yes," I nod.

"Please try again."

Woman!

"There's no shoe magic happening at the back, as I've said there's no female size 10 in this shop," I say.

She still doesn't look satisfied, I don't know what she wants me to do now. I've never heard of foot reduction surgery, I could've recommended one. She mumbles something under her breath before walking away. If one more customer sends me for non-existing shoe size I will tell Singh that I'm sick and go home.

“I’m looking for a jersey,” someone says behind me.

No rest for Mthethwa’s daughter!

“What kind of a jersey?” I turn to look at the person and guess who it is? The Tazz man who followed me in to take my correct number the other day and never called me.

“Something that can warm a lonely, single man,” he says. He’s not wearing the hardware worker’s uniform today, he’s in sweater pants and long-sleeved black T-shirt.

“Come,” I say, ignoring the fine unnecessary details of his response.

I lead him to a men’s wear section and stop in front of the tops..

“You can choose here,” I tell him.

I can’t even call this catwalking, he’s taking one step at a minute with his hands behind his back, looking at each piece with no evident interest. He has a really cute face, his skin is smoother than mine, all his facial features are well-defined. He does his walk around the section until he’s back in front of me.

“I don’t like them, the brands are fake,” he says.

Trust me, I hate working here and I enjoy every bad review because sometimes they end up giving the clothes to us for free. But this one comes with a bit of arrogance that I don’t like. My father wears from this shop, I buy his clothes here because I get the employee’s discount. Everyone back home knows my father as the king of Nike, sometimes I buy him Nike from cap to sneakers. Well, not the Nike that the Nike company knows about.

“They’re not fake,” I say, folding my arms over the Adidas name on my T-shirt.

“Okay, if you say so. I will take the one you like,” he says.

If I thought the size 10 lady was a difficult customer, clearly it was because I hadn't met the best from the annoying box.

I turn and pick the first sweater I see. "Medium or Large?"

"Medium." He's smiling, I don't know why.

"Are you okay with the colour?"

"It's white and I hate washing, but I will take it because now I have you in my life." He's a comedian, I just haven't heard about him because I don't attend comedy shows.

I tell him to follow me to the counter.

Precious scans the sweater and packs it. In her head she's an IT specialist, sometimes she switches and acts like our manager.

"Cash or card?" she asks, staring at him instead of the till.

I forget that she's a dick-hopper, she's probably seeing new meat.

"Cash," he says.

I've forgotten his name, I just remember that he drives a Tazz.

He takes out his wallet and pays. I give him his item once he's collected the change and go help another customer. I can't wait for my lunch break, I just want to eat shwarma and have a breather.

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My feet are killing me, I've been standing half of the day and telling grown-ups how to dress up and where their sizes are. I've taken my handbag, I'm ready to step out and stop the first taxi I see. The last thing I need is a dissatisfied customer who will come here and delay things.

“You tore it,” that’s Singh, the store owner’s wife.

He’s standing in front of the counter with the sweater I sold to him earlier and complaining. This man has been nothing but drama from the very first time I saw him chasing my Fortuner away. What’s wrong with the sweater now?

“Madam, I didn’t tear this thing. I wore it carefully and the only thing I did was to lift my arm, then I heard ‘klweee’. Maybe you should’ve written on the tag; Don’t Lift Your Arm When Wearing It,” he says.

I wish I can escape this but Singh has already seen me.

“Miyanda come here,” he says.

Can I just die?

I go and stand next to them. It’s me, him and his wife, against the dramatic man.

“It’s this one, she sold it to me,” he says.

“Was it torn, Miyanda?” Singh asks, giving me a look to take his side.

“No,” I say.

“I’m not saying it was torn when I bought it. I’m just saying it’s bad quality, I paid R250 for this but now I’m cold.” He’s serious about this, I thought he was joking.

“Fine, we can replace it with another one, just don’t tell anyone about this.” The Singhs surrender.

I see a smirk on his face. “No, don’t replace it. I can just buy cotton and needles, then ask Miyanda to sew the torn part because she works here and she’s my friend. Then you can pay her for the job, I will keep my mouth shut.”

What the hell? I’ve got nothing to do with this.

“Akusona istolo sami lesi,” I snap at him.

“Ngiyazi, ngicela ungithungele nje kuphela.”

“Angikwazi,” I say.

“Ngizokufundisa.” Then why wouldn’t he do it for himself?

Singh nudges me. Oops, Zulu.

“What are you talking about?” he asks.

“She’s saying I can buy the needles, she will sew for me.”

TF! I never said that, do I look like his sewing grandmother?

“Thank you Miyanda, you’ll get something extra on Friday,”
Singh says.

Now it sounds like a deal I can take, but I hate that the Tazz man put words into my mouth. I’m excused, they tell me I can come in late tomorrow. He takes his sweater and follows me. The Tazz is parked outside, I walk past. I’m both mad and happy.

“Miyanda,” he yells.

I look back at him, he lifts the sweater.

I hate him.

I go back and take it from his hand. “When do you need it?”

“Today,” he says.

My eyes widen. “How and when am I going to sew it?”

“I will come with you to your place and wait for it.”

Okay, now he’s taking it too far.

“You like drama, I know you don’t need this sweater,” I say, my tone softer.

He gives me a lopsided smile, lowering his head and looking at me.

“I’m tired, I’ve had a long day,” I’m kind of begging.

“I will take you home, get inside the car.”

Today I’m not even going to give him a run-around, I need a lift.

I get inside, there’s no air-con, it’s 50 degrees hot.

“I will open the windows, it will get better when we start moving,” he says.

I’m tired, hungry and all, but I burst into laughter.

He laughs too. “God’s air-conditioners will help,” he says.

I laugh harder, why doesn’t he take this car to the scrap yard and use taxis. After this ride though, I still need to get home.

“Finally, I have your attention,” he says, sitting back and relaxing instead of driving.

“Are we going to move?” I ask.

“You’re really beautiful,” he says.

I’m humble, so I thank him. But I really want us to move, it’s not like we are chilling in a tinted Fortuner. He’s blocking the way here, people passing by stare at us.

“You didn’t think I was coming back, did you?” He’s looking at me, smiling.

“I didn’t think about you,” I say.

“Well, I thought about you a lot. You know my grandfather came to my dreams and told me it’s time for me to find a woman to build a home with. I told him I haven’t found anyone except the Mthethwa girl I met and he...”

I finish for him; “And he said I’m the one.”

He laughs, “I swear you were there in my dreams, that’s exactly what he said.”

I roll my eyes.

“You’re not creative, just dramatic. What was your name again?”

His mouth drops, like he’s in total shock that I forgot.

“Seriously? Am I that easy to forget?” He can’t be offended, I forget people in the Bible as well.

I say Peter is David sometimes.

“No,” I say.

I mean, I remembered the Tazz and that he took my number and never called. And I’ve just remembered his name.

“You’re Bonga,” I say.

He frowns, this is my first time seeing him with his forehead furrowed and eyes filled with confusion and not sarcasm.

“I’m Malibongwe, the only person who called me Bonga was my father.”

I take it his father is late. I also have a late parent, my mother. She left when I was 12 years old, I’m a Daddy’s prince.

“Well, then I’m your father-wannabe because I will call you Bonga or the Tazz man,” I say.

“Fine, I will call you the Adidas girl,” he says.

I hide my chest, why am I still in this car?

“Weren’t you working today?” I ask.

“No, I’m no longer working at the hardware. I’m trying to push my business to the top,” he says. There’s a police van turning and taking the up road. They hoot for us, I’m thinking they will pull over and arrest us.

He makes the 7 sign for the police. I understand Mandela coming out of jail, democracy and freedom. But getting the police hoot is something that constitutional rights can’t give you.

What's his relationship with them? To me he doesn't look like the type that abides with the law, so what is it?

"We are going to your place, right?" he asks.

"My place?" I frown.

"My sweater, I'm cold," he says, smirking.

Sigh!

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 15

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I sew his torn sweater long time ago but he's still here. It's a few minutes after 7, he's sitting on the plastic chair outside the door of my rented backroom where I located him when we arrived. I don't know if he's fallen asleep, I've seen the quieter side of him ever since we got here. I didn't let him inside because I don't know him that well. But now I feel bad because it's cold outside, he's been here since four, surely he's hungry as well. I cooked baked beans and rice, I want to ask if he'd like some, I'm everything but not stingy.

"Hello there," I say standing at the door.

He doesn't lift his head. Is he asleep?

I go and shake his shoulder. Gosh, he was asleep.

"Please go home," I say.

He looks confused. Then he looks around and realizes where he is.

"What time is it?" he asks.

"7:13pm, you should go home, I'm sure your family is worried."

“No, they’re not.” He stands up and stretches his arms. This time the sweater doesn’t tear in the arms, I should open a sewing school.

“I know they are, every family worries when one of them doesn’t come home on time.”

“Where are you from?” he asks.

This is such a random question and it doesn’t address the issue at hand.

“Matshamhlophe,” I say.

“You live with your family, right?” I ask.

He chuckles, “Yeah, we live in the same yard.”

Okay, that’s hell confusing but I will leave it at that.

“I cooked, if you eat baked beans I’d be happy to give you some,” I say.

“Thank you, I’m okay,” he says.

I doubt he’s okay, his rumbling stomach tells me something different, but I’m not going to force him.

“Can I take you to work in the morning?”

I frown, where is this coming from?

“No, why?” I ask.

He shrugs, “I just want to.”

“Your services come at a price. What will you want this time? My ID number.”

He chuckles, “No, maybe a piece of your heart.”

“Are you a witchdoctor? What are you going to do with heart pieces?” I know very well what he meant, he just needs to try harder. Harassing me at work and coming to sit in front of my

door under the disguise of waiting for the sweater won't make me fall for him.

"You really like joking," he says.

"I think it's the other way around. Seriously though, you have to go home, I don't want to have your mother or wife coming here with their skirts on their waist." I've been in situations like that before, I've had to fight women for the men I wasn't even dating. Maybe I'm too friendly, even now I'm begging him to leave, not telling him 'ay'gubhe'.

"Thank you for accommodating me," he says.

Guilt almost trips my heartbeat. I can't even say he's welcome because I kept him outside the door the whole time.

"See you tomorrow," he says.

I don't say anything, I know, judging by his past behavior, that will come whether I say yes or no. I stand at the door until he drives off. That car will turn me against the neighbors and put me in trouble with the landlord. That's one loud engine!

I need to call my father and say goodnight. I don't live in the same yard with him, I'm miles away from home, but I know he worries if I don't call or text him the whole day.

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MALIBONGWE

It's after dinner when he arrives home. There's a fight, he can hear the yelling from his rondavel. He tries to switch the light on but it looks like they ran out of electricity. Before he can change

his clothes and drink some water, there's a loud knock at the door.

It's his sister, she makes her way in before he responds.

"We've been sitting in the dark since 6pm," she says, coming in using her phone as a torch.

"Do you have money?" she asks.

He looks for his wallet and takes out R100 and gives her.

"You can add for bread as well so that I don't bother you in the morning," she says.

He gives her R20, she takes it and walks out.

He changes his clothes and follows after her to get his dinner. He would've preferred eating at Miyanda's place and come home to go to bed and leave in the morning. But that would've been unfair to her. No woman leaves home to work and feed men she barely even knows.

Today it's not Sphakamiso and Nombuso.

"What do you ever do in this house without complaining?" – Nombuso.

"I'm not going, end of story!"

It's Mkhuleko. He gives them headache and he never backs down. He's one person Nombuso thinks twice before starting a fight with and he's the youngest of them all.

"Malibongwe can you talk to him? You can't always turn a blind eye when THEY disrespect me. I'm telling him to go and buy electricity, he's refusing for no reason," Nombuso says, glaring at him.

"Don't tell me, ask me," Mkhuleko.

“Who do you think you are? I’m not going to ask you anything, go and buy electricity.”

“I’m not going, you will use the candle for your room like everyone else,” Mkhuleko says, stubbornly.

“I want to watch Uzalo,” Nombuso.

“Watch it,” – Mkhuleko.

Nombuso looks at him, “Malibongwe say something, this is not how a child should be behaving. No wonder he failed matric.”

“And you failed your marriage.”

The silence! You can hear a pin drop.

MaVilakazi speaks up, “That’s not how you should talk to your sister Mkhuleko. She’s older than you, Malibongwe has given us the money for electricity and you can’t do one thing to help your family?”

Mkhuleko taps his fingers on the table, stomping his foot rhythmically underneath. He’s not going to do it, they must know this and make peace with it immediately.

“Sphakamiso go and buy electricity,” Nombuso says, turning her eyes to Sphakamiso.

“I will go in the morning, I can’t risk bumping into the police and getting accused of things,” he says.

“You didn’t think of that when you were cooking porridge for Aphelele and finishing the electricity.” She’s alone this time in a fight, MaVilakazi has been threading carefully around Sphakamiso this week. No ganging up, if necessary she takes his side, which is something new. Sphakamiso doesn’t engage with her further, he takes Aphelele and walks out.

Nombuso doesn't stop, now the only thing that's going to shut her up is sleep. Malibongwe finishes his food and takes his plate to the kitchen and walks out as well. He never get involved, he gives what he's asked to give and minds his own business.

There's someone outside his door, the height is that of Sphakamiso, he's waiting for him. They aren't close but he does what he can to help where he can. He knew that Phume was one thing that made him the happiest man alive, so he always came through and helped them fix things when they were still together. He contributes almost all his salary towards the household needs, not that he gets a choice not to. Nobody knows that he quitted his job yet, he needs to be stable and safe where he is before telling them. So every morning he's going to wake up and leave for 'work'.

"You're a pussy," Sphakamiso says.

They can fight with each other and say whatever they want. But not with him, he avoids them for a reason.

"Leave my door," he says, calmly.

"What is it going to cost you to stand up to Nombuso? I know I'm not a Mcineka but wena! Uyigolo mfana," – Sphakamiso.

He takes another deep breath. He's never insulted or been insulted by anyone before. Only that man did before he died and he wasn't justified to do so either. If he complied with the rules he wasn't going to die, there's only a certain level of begging one can do in that kind of situation. But if he was clever he wasn't going to die for another man's property. For what? The R8k that he was getting paid as a security guard.

"Don't insult me Sphakamiso," he says.

"You insult yourself. What kind of a brother are you? I'm about to give up my son because of the ill-treatment your sister gives

him. Nobody can count on you because you're never around, even when you're here you're just a pussy," Sphakamiso says.

Malibongwe grabs him by his throat and pushes him inside. He could show him pussy but he's going to hurt him if he does, the kind of concoctions he drank after the job doesn't allow him to touch anyone unless he's planning to kill them.

He throws his wallet on his face, "This is the kind of a brother I am. That wallet is empty, I had R3000 on Friday and the only thing I got from it is this lousy sweater than I bought from a Pakistan store. You think I have the energy to come here and listen to all of you yelping about how hard your lives are. I don't, Sphakamiso!"

"I didn't take your money, all I'm saying is stand up for what's right," – Sphakamiso.

"If I had my own way I wouldn't come here at all. You're all entitled and selfish. The only members of this family who have peace are the dead ones. Do you think I want to be here, to listen to grown ups arguing about food everyday? I don't Sphakamiso, I have better things to do."

"It's than about food and electricity. Nombuso is making everyone's lives a living hell, and I'm going to tell you this once, it's not going to end here, one day you're going to bury one of us." He stands up and straightens his T-shirt.

"Do it," Malibongwe says going to the door and opening it. "I need to sleep, tomorrow I'm working."

Sphakamiso walks out without uttering another word, he's angry.

Malibongwe closes the door and sighs. He almost lost his cool with his brother, his blood. When Mcineka died he didn't leave him in charge, he's also fighting for peace and freedom like them. For Sphakamiso to think he's not doing anything when

he's done so much and received nothing in return except more complaints, makes his blood boil. He will never give up but he will definitely move out when things come together, business-wise.

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MPATHO

He didn't sleep a wink, he wakes up from his bedroom with his eyelids heavy and goes to the bathroom to wash his face. He makes his way to his grandfather's bedroom and knocks at the door.

"Who is it?" Beauty asks, sounding sleepy and annoyed.

"It's me, I'm here to see mkhulu," he says.

She takes her time to come to the door. After quite a moment she opens wearing her black silky gown, Mpatho walks in without taking more than two glances at her.

"How is he?" he asks.

"He's okay, I told you so," Beauty says behind him.

He stands next to the bed, indeed Mshazi is awake. But he doesn't look okay at all.

"Mshazi what's wrong?" He's worried.

Mshazi clears his throat and asks, "When is the wedding?"

He's a bit surprised that his grandfather is thinking about weddings instead of his health.

"Mkhulu we are just getting to know each other, you know she's difficult," he says.

Mshazi shakes his head, Beauty is staring at her phone pretending to be busy.

“I’m not feeling good at all,” he says.

“I will take you to the doctor, allow us to do that,” Mpatho begs.

“I’m old, I’m about to die anyway. There’s a foul play from the police department, I know because I’ve been in the game for a very long time. I need you to protect what’s left, but I need to trust that you won’t follow your mother, you will stay here and keep the Mshazi name alive. And the only way to do that is to get married, introduce your wife to our ancestors and give her the Nzuzza surname,” he says.

Mpatho nods, he’s been aware of this since he was a teen. But it’s not easy, Phume walked out in front of everyone after they told her she had to marry him.

“You grew up together, what is there to know about each other for this long? I need to trust you Mpatho, you’re my son’s only child. It would be unfortunate for me to leave everything to someone else.”

Beauty dances with her leg, she’s not looking at them though, her eyes are on the screen of the phone.

“Someone who’s already recognized by our ancestors,” Mshazi says.

Mpatho clenches his jaws and looks at Beauty. She’s always known this, that’s why she’s still here with a man old enough to be her ancestor. She knows she has an advantage to gain a lot from this marriage.

Beauty looks up, “Enough of this, you’re stressing yourself Mshazi. Can we arrange for you to go to the hospital?”

“No hospital,” Mshazi shakes his head.

She looks at Mpatho, “Can I talk to him privately?”

“About what?” – Mpatho.

“Going to see the doctor. Or you want him to die?” she says.

“I’m watching you Beauty,” Mpatho says before walking out.

She just sighs and holds Mshazi’s hand.

“Now he thinks I’m a threat to his inheritance. Please go to the doctor, go with Mpatho, I know he doesn’t trust me at this point. I will stay here with Phume and wait for you to come back home.”

“What if they come here and harass you?” He’s worried about their safety.

“They won’t come on broad daylight, just go, for my sake please.”

He finally agrees, Beauty calls Aunt Nomusa to come and get him ready. He’s physically weak, she needs to contact the doctor before they get there. Mpatho comes and takes his grandfather, this is the first time in history that he’s looked so broken and defeated.

They’re watching him drive out of the gate.

“How did you convince him to finally go and see the doctor?” Phume asks, standing behind her.

“I told him he can’t die before you and Mpatho get married. I don’t want the responsibility of looking after this family, I have a life outside all of this,” she says.

“Mmmmm,” – Phume.

Beauty turns and looks at her, smiling.

“You must agree sooner and do what I told you to do. Win his trust, because without his trust you will be watched like a dog and probably killed, like Mcineka,” she says.

Phume frowns, "Mcineka?"

"Your boyfriend's father, Mpatho killed him. And he's behind your boyfriend's police attacks, I know because I have some inside info," she says.

"No, that's not true. How would he know all the things Sphakamiso get beaten for?"

"When did he lose his job? After Mpatho came back home and heard that you had a boyfriend. But I'm saying just agree to marry him for the sake of peace." She turns and walks away smiling.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 16

PHUMELELE

Mkhulu was admitted, I knew he was too weak. I don't understand why he's dying sick over a few cars, he's a millionaire, it's not like he's poor now. But we will see how this is going to play out. I don't care if he does, at this point I have no sympathy for anyone. I hate Mpatho, everything Beauty said makes sense. Things started going wrong after his comeback. However, Sphakamiso had already cheated on me by then. The first beating he got was well-deserved, but now, as much as I hate to accept it, he's a father. Aphelele doesn't deserve to witness his father being beaten by the police. I'm not saying he's a saint, I'm not always with him, but Sphakamiso would never rob or kill anyone. He owns a gun because almost everyone does. I feel guilt and angry that he lost his job and has permanent scars simply because I fell in love with him. Mpatho misused his power, whoever stole their cars must come back for more.

He walks in, looking sad and tired. Beauty just left, she's going to the hospital to be by her husband's side.

I would've gotten up and hugged him, but not now, maybe never again.

"Hey," he says.

I don't say anything, I don't trust myself yet.

He takes a huge breath and sits. "Beauty wants mkhulu dead but I have someone watching everything."

My curiosity is piqued but I don't ask him anything. I don't care, Beauty can kill him too for all I care.

"Wena uright?" he asks.

I sit up straight, looking at him. I knew there was something off about this man. He's capable of darker things, but that's how every Mshazi person is, selfish and cruel to the core.

"No, I'm not okay Mpatho," I say.

I'm not going to beat around the bush.

"You sent the police to beat Sphakamiso?"

"Huh?" He frowns and leans forward.

Maybe he learnt his tricks in the army, I care less, I just want the truth.

"And you killed his father," I say.

I see his chest moving, he folds his right fist and tightens his jaw. I'm sure he's probably figured out who told me.

"I didn't know I was your legacy wife. Why did you mess his life up like that? He has a child, do you know how difficult his life has been? His child witnessing the police beating him up, he's scarred for life."

“I didn’t send the police to anyone and I didn’t ask anyone to send them on my behalf. As I said Phume, I will support whatever decision you make. I’ve had girlfriends before, why would I...” He’s acting, I know this perfect Mpatho who says only what’s sweet for the ear.

“Tell me, how coincidental was it that he lost his job after you came back home?” I ask.

He drops his head and exhales heavily. “Beauty stayed behind to poison you,” he says.

I shake my head, “Poison me? I probably know Beauty more than you do, I know she doesn’t want us to get married, I’ve figured that out. Now leave her out of this, I’m talking to you about your selfish actions and cruelty.”

“I didn’t do it,” he says.

“Mpatho, you can’t fool me, I know you did. And she was probably right about the strip club, you pretend a lot, you’re still a Mshazi,” I say.

“Phumelele, I’m telling you I didn’t send the police to him.”

“Fuck you man, you know very well that you did.”

“I didn’t.”

This guy is making me really angry, I was hoping he’d respect me enough and say the truth.

I stand up, I’m not going to talk to him until he drops the act.

“I didn’t do it Phume, your mother did,” he says.

I stop and look back at him. My mother?

He stands and comes to me, trying to hold my hands.

“She heard that the guy was working to save money to marry you. And that couldn’t be allowed, so she made him lose his job,” he says.

“You know she’s dead and can’t speak for herself. You’re very cruel, do you know that?”

“Phume, I’ve never...can we sit?” He pulls me back to the couch.

“I’m going to tell you the truth,” he says.

I sit and glare at him. I’m not sure I will believe anything he’s going to say.

“Beauty probably said that to turn you against me. I didn’t send the police to anyone. But she didn’t lie about me having a hand in Mcineka’s death,” he says.

“So you’re a murderer?” To say I’m disappointed would be an understatement.

“Yeah,” he says with a shrug.

“Why did you do it?” I ask.

“Phume everything that happened was because of your mother. I’m sorry to say this, but she wasn’t the affectionate mother you knew her to be. At least not to me, she did things to me and made me do things to earn my place here, even though I was a child that existed before she came here. It was between her and MaVilakazi, I had to prove to her that private schools didn’t change me, that I would defend the family when necessary. If you think Beauty is a nightmare, then your mother was a natural disaster.”

I can’t say he’s lying because I’ve learnt that my mother wasn’t what I thought she was.

“But why do you want to be with me if my mother put you through so much? I’m sure at some point you started hating me too,” I ask.

“Ummm, I just...I know you’re not your mother.” He can’t come up with a straight answer. I know he’s not being truthful, there’s no love here.

“Were you ever suspected for murder?” I ask because I know if the Mcinekas find out hell will break loose, there will bloodshed in this area.

“No, but Beauty knows and she might use it in future to blackmail me, that’s why I’m watching her every move,” he says.

“In future? She will use it very soon. The other day I walked into her taking pictures of mkhulu’s confidential documents, she said she will soon own big shares from the Mshazi Enterprises,” I say.

He breaks a short chuckle, “Because she opened her legs for mkhulu. Is that what she thinks it takes to become a shareholder?”

“What if mkhulu makes her one?” I ask.

He inhales sharply, “Yeah, that’s possible, especially with the way things are right now. If he dies I might have to fight lawyers to retain my seat.”

“So what are you going to do?” I ask.

“Angazi Phume but I won’t watch her take what’s rightfully mine,” he says.

“She’s probably two steps ahead already. What we need to do is to get married at Home Affairs without her knowing, then I will come back home and be the Phumelele she knows how to play around with. Just so you get your inheritance, once everything is sorted you will let me go.”

The hope that was in his eyes transforms into sadness. “I know it’s hard to trust me after you heard what you heard, but I never planned to marry you to divorce you.”

“You don’t love me, Mpatho. There’s no need for us to pretend that this is more than a program. I will help you out and you will do the same for me,” I say.

He’s not happy, he’s not grateful, he’s just looking at me. Once again, I wish it was possible to reverse your sex from someone. He saw my mother as a natural disaster, obviously me as a little hurricane or tsunami. There’s no love, it was never there.

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BEAUTY

She drives out of the hospital furiously. Knowing Mpatho she knows that he asked that nurse to be everywhere she is. He’s probably fucking her and blessing her with HER money. She was going to give him his share generously, but now she’s taking everything. She knows they’re not going to get married before the old man kicks the bucket. Phume is not going to marry him, she was still on the fence, now she has every reason not to jump into Mpatho’s side. That girl wears her emotions, she’s probably going crazy where she is and packing her bags. She will be giving her more scoop later, something that will futherly destroy all the connections she’s made with Mpatho.

But for now she needs to meet up with her sister, her partner in crime. At first Noxolo didn’t see the bigger picture, she hated that she married a man old enough to be their grandfather, but now they’re all about to become rich.

They're meeting at Steers, Noxolo is late because of taxis. She makes their orders while waiting for her.

"The Deviant!" that's her screaming.

Beauty laughs, her sister is such a dramatic person, now everyone's eyes are on them.

They hug, Noxolo sits opposite her singing compliments.

"You're glowing mntase. Are you a new widow already?"

She exhales heavily, "Not yet, the stupid Mpatho happened. But very soon, I've already had my mourning clothes designed and the hat I'm going to wear at a funeral."

"Are you going to faint? Just so I prepare to hold you," Noxolo asks.

They both erupt into laughter.

"Mntase, I will be wailing. I just hope this week will end with him lying in the mortuary. I'm tired of living this fake life, I just want to be free," she says.

"So the girl refuses to marry Mpatho?" Noxolo asks.

"I told you I was going to take care of that. She's confused as hell, I keep feeding her information bit by bit, she already hate him," she says.

"What if he makes her an offer, maybe money?"

"She won't, that's one crazy girl. I love the emotional damage it's going to do to him, he was already visiting her room and getting attached. He won't even know which pain to deal with first."

Their food comes, they start eating between their humorous chats. It's only a matter of time before she moves her family

into the mansion. A matter of when the old man is dying and handing the ownership of every property to her.

“I will make Jabulani the Chief Business Officer,” she says.

“Wait, is that something that can happen just like that?” Noxolo, surprised.

“Yes, once I have the power everything will change. I’m not happy with their overpaid staff, I will fire and hire,” she says.

“Can I get an office job too?” – Noxolo.

“You’re my sister, you don’t even have to work, we’ve struggled our whole lives,” she says.

“Then fuck it, I’m handing my resignation at work tomorrow. Are you sure the man is dying?”

Beauty smiles, “Like a bacteria mntase. If not my way, then his new enemy’s way.”

“New enemy?” Noxolo frowns.

“They sent Mpatho, because he is a mpatha, to kill a man a couple of years ago. You heard about the stolen cars, right?” she asks.

Noxolo’s eyes pop out.

“Don’t tell me that was you,” she says.

“Nope, I created an enemy who’s going to distract Mpatho. He will be taking care of old battles while we swim in the money. As for Phume, I don’t know, maybe I’d pull her with me,” Beauty says, taking a sip of her drink. She doesn’t have anything against Phume, unless if she creates a problem with her.

“Let’s eat and go, I still need to return to the hospital like a caring wife,” she says.

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She's going to drive the G-Wagon, so she parks her car inside the garage and walks in to find Phume depressed on the couch.

"Hey you," she says, walking to her

Phume looks up, she has her bitchy face on.

"I'm just here to grab some clothes. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine." Poor little thing!

She looks around and asks, "Where is Mpatho?"

"I don't know, probably out to see his strippers."

Okay, this is interesting. She's in a fake hurry but she can spare a few minutes to be her shoulder to cry on.

"Did you guys fight?" She puts a worried mask on.

"No, I don't fight," Phume says.

"Hhayi-bo babegirl, you and him have to get married."

"Have to? I'm not marrying a killer, I'd rather go and starve on the streets. I'm sorry to disappoint you, I know you want us to get married and look after the family's legacy."

This day keeps getting better. Pity she can't celebrate out loud.

"All men have their flaws," she says.

"Well, I don't mind staying unmarried. I told him we are done, this time I don't want anyone to convince me otherwise," Phume says.

"Okay, I will let you cool down. Don't worry, you're allowed to stay unless you no longer want to be around him." She stands up, ready to get in her bedroom and dance victoriously. This girl is hard-headed, it's going to take a lot to change her mind. This

is going to be an opportunity for her to use this girl against Mpatho while she's still angry.

"I'm coming back later. I think going out for a few drinks will do you good," she says.

Phume looks at her, "Drinks?"

She rolls her eyes, "It doesn't mean alcohol, you can drink your 100% fruit juice, I just want to take you out. I'm sure his presence alone depresses you."

"Oh yeah, I'm up for it," – Phume.

"Okay guuuurl, let's do this."

Her God works wonders. By the time Mpatho stops being Mpatha she will be ten steps ahead. Phumelele is going to help her do the necessary emotional damage to him. Fun times lie ahead!

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 17

PHUMELELE

I'm not in the right mood for going out. Even though Mpatho and I were not together, it does feel like we broke up, my heart is bleeding. But I dress up, one way or another Beauty has to believe that I'm on her side and I hate Mpatho, which I kind of do. She must be driving back from the hospital now, I gather my purse and step out of my bedroom. I left my phone charging in the lounge, I walk into Mpatho using my charger, he connected his phone and put mine aside. I have no idea what happened to his own charger.

I don't say anything, I take my phone and sit. I text Beauty asking her how far she is. She's only ten minutes away, I slide my phone inside my purse and sit quietly.

It's awkward, we went from being distant half-siblings to almost lovers and now we are enemies with a common target.

He clears his throat and ask, "We no longer talk now?"

"About?" I ask, raising my eyes to him.

"We live together, we have to communicate about everything, especially..." I know where he's going with this, that's not how things are going to be.

"We will talk when there's something to talk about. Don't be confused Mpatho, there's no friendship between us," I say.

"He hurt you, why are you fighting for him?" His question throws me off, I'm annoyed that he even thinks that would stand in an argument. So what if Sphakamiso hurt me? Nothing makes him deserve what this family has done to him.

"I will always stand for the truth. None of the bad things you've done to him and his family were for my benefit, it was because you're selfish and cruel," I say.

"I'm not perfect, nobody is," he says.

He mustn't include me in his flaws. I don't bribe, I don't kill and I don't lie.

"I am perfect, I don't hurt people for my selfish reasons," I say.

"You're not perfect, Phume. The only person you ever think of is yourself. If it's not about you then it's useless. I was put in a difficult position, why can't you put yourself in my shoes for once? You've never had to do anything in your life to get what you want. You had a mother, I had nobody. All you have to do is make me your second choice husband. Do you know what I've had to do to be here? To prove that I'm worthy of the

Mshazi name? Do you think I did it all smiling?” He’s on his feet, roaring at me. I’m sure even people on the street can hear him.

“Do you know anything about life? Beside complaining and criticizing, what else are you good at Phumelele?” He’s coming at me with all his guns blazing.

I’m still sitting on the couch, I didn’t expect this blow-up. He’s still at my mercy, doesn’t he remember?

“I’ve told you I know nothing about the police, the person you should be taking out all this frustration on is lying in her grave peacefully.” No, no, not my mother.

“Excuse me?” I stand up too.

“If you want somebody to blame go to your mother’s grave and ask her about everything,” he says.

“Oh, now we are involving mothers? Do you even know where yours is?” I ask.

I have struck the right nerve, his chest is moving up and down. I didn’t hear anyone coming in, Aunt Nomusa is somewhere at the back of the house.

“Guys, I can hear the noise all the way from the driveway,” she says.

We turn to look at her, what an awkward moment! It’s awkward because it’s not staged, we are in the middle of a nasty fight. His veins are popping out, I’m shaking at the side.

“What’s going on?” she asks.

Nobody answers. I take my purse and turn back to her.

“I’m ready,” I say.

She looks at Mpatho, he doesn’t say anything.

“He’s critical but stable, sizobona ngokusa,” she tells him, updating about mkhulu’s condition. Clearly there’s no hope and she’s not even trying to make it better.

“I will go and see him,” Mpatho says.

She flips her hair and points her finger up. “Nope hunny, he doesn’t need you to stress him out, he’s resting there.”

“You’re his gold-digging wife, I’m his grandson, know the difference.” He turns and walks away. He’s still fuming, so am I. Mkhulu has been gone for a few hours and I can already see where this family is headed. It might be the end of the powerful Mshazis.

She grabs my arm and whispers, “What was the fight about?”

Really, I’m not even calm yet.

“He’s stupid,” I say.

She cracks up, laughing. She drags me to her room, it’s the biggest in the house, it’s refurnished every year. She’s throws her purse on the bed and rushes to the bathroom. I’m hearing a car driving out, that must be Mpatho defying Beauty’s instructions.

She comes out of the bathroom cursing. “He’s messing up with my plans,” she mumbles.

I don’t ask what her plans are, I’m still in the hot wave of anger.

“I’m fuckin’ peeing everytime,” she says to herself, adjusting her skirt in front of the mirror.

“Do I look fat?” She turns and looks at me.

“Ummm, no you don’t.” I’m not a weight coach, why is she asking me.

She turns to the mirror again, “I think I’ve gained a lot. I just feel...”

Oh gosh, here comes nonsensical weight issues!

“I feel weird, man. Something is off, I need to see my doctor.”

Now something is off, my eyes are wide and out.

“Pregnancy scare?” I ask.

“Don’t say that, I’d literally kill myself and Senzo,” she says.

I can’t say I’m shocked, but I have that wow moment. It’s too late when she turns and looks at me regretfully.

“He’s just a friend,” she says.

I shrug, “None of my spaza shop.”

“Good, you and I will vibe. Let me change these shoes then we are out.”

Honestly, I’m no longer interested, I wish I can curl up in my bed and watch a sad Bollywood movie, especially those ones where a poor wife marries into a wealthy family and gets abused.

We are in the car, now heading to Waterside Seafood and Grill because she’s craving prawns. I’m getting more suspicious of her, she acts like someone who has baked a little something in the oven. Something to do with the Senzo person, he’s possibly the secret boyfriend and father.

Mpatho calls me, I don’t know why. I decide not to answer, he sends a text immediately. He wants to know where we are going. It’s a very angry message, with one question mark and three exclamations. We changed the restaurant, initially we were just going to town and grabbing a meal and few drinks. But my only worry now is how did he know we are driving out of

town. I remember Beauty saying the cars had trackers but I thought hers wasn't, she's smart.

We get to the restaurant, Beauty is excited and ordering a glass of wine. She's forgotten about the possibility of her being pregnant. I, on the other side, have a phone vibrating nonstop in my hand.

"Are you okay?" She's clicking her fingers on my face.

I put my phone on the table, screen down.

"I'm good," I say.

"Who's calling? Not Mpatho, right?"

"It's him, I don't know what he wants."

"Don't forgive him, he went too low. You're still mourning for your mother and he's already insulting you by it. Hell, his mother is dead while she's still alive." She's on my side, supposedly. Personally, I think we both went too low, I'm not the type of person that fights by using people's pain.

"So are you ready to move on?" she asks.

"Move on?" I'm confused.

Her wine is here, she takes a long sip before clarifying.

"You're young and I think something that's going to make Mpatho get the message is seeing you dating your ex-boyfriend or with a new one," she says.

I almost choke on the icy water I'm drinking.

"Trust me, you need to do that, and while he's trying to chase you and dealing with heartbreak, I will be securing my bag," she says.

Her bag, not our bag, okay.

“I don’t know, I will think about it,” I say.

“No Phume, this is a mission, not a game you can take on according to the schedule of your emotions,” she says.

I didn’t expect things to take this turn, I’m willing to play the game but I’m not going to be a push-over.

“I will decide Beauty,” I say with a straight face.

“Fine, just don’t take too long, he needs to feel the heat.”

Whatever Mpatho did to this human it was very deep, she hates his guts.

She grabs her purse and stands up, “I need the bathroom.”

Is this a normal pregnancy or twins? How many times is going to pee?

I have a chance to check my phone. Mpatho is still calling.

I answer, “Ufunani?”

“What are you doing at Waterside Seafood and Grill?”

“How do you know where I am?” I ask.

“You’re there, aren’t you?” He’s not willing to answer my question.

“Are you okay there?” he asks.

“I’m with Beauty, I’m okay, please stop calling me like a crazy man.”

“Please take care there, here it doesn’t look good,” he says with a heavy tone.

My heart just drops.

“What are the doctors saying?” I ask.

“That we should prepare for the worst. I called to hear why you’re there,” he says.

I feel hopeless, we need to wake up tomorrow morning and go to Home Affairs and get married.

Beauty comes back, our food have arrived.

“Thank God, I’m starving.” She sits and looks at me.

“And now?” she asks.

“Nothing, are you okay?”

She inhales sharply, “I’m good, I just need to take a pregnancy test and see what’s up.”

“What if you’re pregnant?” I ask.

“It works either way, Mvimbo will have a child,” she says.

My eyes pop out. Another child, as old as he is?

“It is his?” I ask.

She sips and exhales heavily.

“The father is always the one that makes more figures,” she says.

I’m confused...doesn’t DNA...okay.

“Got you!” I raise my water to her, we toast.

To a new curve, this is not going to play out the way Mpatho and I wanted.

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I’ve always fantasized about the day I get married. I wanted a big wedding, a husband I dearly love and want to spend the rest of my life with and that had always been Sphakamiso. I didn’t think I’d be sitting on cold chairs at Home Affairs signing

my surname away. My mother had this all planned out, even though she was married I've always been registered by her maiden name. She promised she was going to change it before I did my ID. But it never happened, I forgot about it because it wasn't that much of a big deal.

Now here I am, getting married by simply signing a piece of paper. Yipeeee, I'm somebody's wife.

"Congratulations Mr and Mrs Nzuzza," the lady says.

I feel his arm wrapping around me, I turn my head and look at him.

He's not saying anything but his stare can be interpreted in many different ways. I look away before reading too much into it. He doesn't remove his arm from me, we stand up, he gives me a hug. I wouldn't have hugged him back if it wasn't for the attention around us.

I'm feeling a lot of mixed emotions going to the car. I haven't told Sphakamiso anything, at this point I feel like all these new developments would be a torture to him. Regardless of what he did, the whole Aphelele thing, I feel bad about everything I've done, continue doing, and still going to do.

"We can go and grab breakfast together, just to celebrate a bit," he says behind me.

"I'm good, I'm going home," I tell him.

I stand against the car and look at him. He's going to the hospital from here, I told Beauty I was going to the shops for a few things and took my car and came here to get married.

"Be careful Phume, don't just go with her to places without telling me," he says.

"I am careful, she trusts me for now. I think we might have another situation that will complicate things. I suspect that she's pregnant," I say.

“Fuck!” He puts his hands on his waist and paces around with his face up.

The baby will definitely be mkhulu’s, even if we want to argue our case it will have to go through courts and laboratory for DNAs. At this point I’m defeated, she’s going to be part of this legacy one way or another, whether we like it or not.

“Okay, okay, don’t worry about it,” he says, coming back to hug me.

“What do you mean I mustn’t worry?” I’m confused, Beauty might come for everything that he has and that would leave me in a place I’m running away from.

“I will take care of it,” he says.

I’m more confused.

“How?” I ask.

“I don’t need you to insult me about it in the future. I will do what I have to do, I know that baby is not my grandfather’s,” he says.

“How do you know? You don’t sleep with them in their bedroom,” I ask.

“Phume, I didn’t get here without making sacrifices, betraying, and shedding blood when needed. Mkhulu has always wanted a child with her and I knew the danger of that, so I made sure it doesn’t happen and it was never possible.” He pauses and takes a deep breath, “And now, whatever is growing inside her will have to be terminated. I didn’t want your journey to be like your mother’s, but it looks like you have to make sacrifices and get a bit dirty.”

My heart starts beating fast. What is he saying?

“Mpatho please don’t tell me you want us to kill an innocent soul.” I don’t agree with those type of things. We are fighting with Beauty, not babies.

“Confirm first, then I will deal with it.”

No, this is not what I signed up for.

He comforts me with a hug, I’ve already made him my husband, I’m his wife as far as the court is concerned. I will have to go through certain channels to reverse the situation and that will take long. It hasn’t been 30 minutes and I’m already asking myself; why did I get married?

“About yesterday, I’m sorry things escalated like that,” he says.

I’m sorry too but I’m not in a good space to issue apologies. I’m still trying to wrap my head around what he just said.

“With mkhulu gone and you hating me, not just for the act but for real, it makes me feel alone,” he says.

“You are alone, I told you we are not friends,” I tell him.

“I know, I just miss the times that we shared together. Even though you didn’t care that much, I miss having someone supporting me and believing in me for a moment.”

“I never supported nor believed in you,” I say.

There’s a twinge of pain in his eyes, I’m not here for his abandonment issues.

“Can I go now? I still need to do a little shopping so that she doesn’t suspect anything.”

“Are you going to need money?” Husband duties activated!

“Send an ewallet,” I say.

He nods, I turn and open the car. Sooner or later I will have to tell Sphakamiso that I’m now married.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 18

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I didn't expect to find him outside my workplace. He fetched me in the morning and brought me to work as promised, but he didn't say anything about coming back again. I've saved R24 today on transport, I'm happy. The Tazz is starting to feel like a Lamborghini, I sit at the front like a queen. He's smiling, showing off his dimples, I'm getting more comfortable around him.

"You didn't say you'd come and fetch me. What did I do to deserve this free transport?"

"You looked beautiful this morning, so I thought taxi drivers would take you from me."

I laugh, he's got a good sense of humor. When did I start belonging to him?

"I get over 100 customers a day. What makes you think they won't take me?"

He raises his eyebrow, "Are you taken?"

"Yes," I say with a straight face.

That smile again, he's not taking me seriously at all.

"I'm not scared of young boys," he says.

That was supposed to sound threatening, but he just can't look like a fighting type, he has a gentle face.

"Are we going straight to kweVez'unyawo?" he asks.

KwaVez'unyawo? I'm confused, I'm renting in the township.

"Where is that?" I ask.

“It’s where you live, those tiny backrooms that shows your feet while you’re sitting inside, kwaVez’unyawo,” he says and laughs.

I’m a bit offended but I laugh it off. It’s a small room but he’s exaggerating, feet don’t show outside the door when I’m inside. His, maybe, because he’s tall.

“I need a room too, but not a tiny one,” he says randomly after a laugh.

“Oh, you’re tired of being a farm-julia now, you want to move to the township?”

“Yes, I want to be closer to you,” he says.

See, I’m a straightforward person, if a guy likes me I’m not going to read between the lines, I need him to confess and plead his case. He’s going through the corners with me, God knows he’s in for a long game, I will gladly take these free lifts while enjoying being single.

We start at the garage, he’s filling up.

“Do you like any snacks?” he asks.

I know how men are, but I’m not the one to turn down food and drinks, I’d go and eat a guy’s KFC knowing very well that I don’t like him.

“Peanuts, Doritos, small Coke and wine gums,” I say and look at him, curious to see his reaction.

It doesn’t look like he’s the stingy type, he leaves the attendant filling up and goes inside to get my snacks. Fuck, why didn’t I mention R29 Vodacom airtime? I need to call Nyambose, my dad. But I will make a plan, he’s already cut down my snack fee for tomorrow, I will keep the Doritos and use that money for airtime.

He comes back, we head to my place. I expected him to drop me off and leave, but he's looking for a parking space. I guess yesterday will repeat itself. I get inside the house and take out the chair for him. I left without cleaning, it's a mess here. He sounds a bit judgmental, I could be wrong, I don't want him to diss me for lack of hygiene tomorrow.

He sits outside like yesterday, I clean up and then invite him inside. This is a very bold step, I don't know why I suddenly trust him, just because he gave me two lifts. He comes in with his chair and sits next to the bed.

"Why are your feet not outside?" I ask him.

He frowns, I keep my stare, he gets it and laughs.

"I didn't mean it literally," he says.

Still, my landlord wouldn't be happy to hear this, she charges us R450 every month for her 'Lucky Star tin sizes' rooms. I do everything inside here, except the bathroom, it's built outside and shared among all five tenants. Yesterday he didn't leave immediately, I had to tell him to go home, I doubt today he will leave anytime soon either.

I turn the stove on, ready to cook. In case you're wondering why I'm turning the stove on before I even chop the onions, well this ancestor-stove has low electricity drive now. It takes about five minutes for it to realize that it's plugged into the electricity and needs to be hot for me to use.

"Let's go out for dinner," he says.

That's a very unexpected suggestion. I turn and look at him, he's serious.

Snacks, I don't mind. But this is another step, going out for dinner!

"What's the catch?" I ask.

The seriousness is all gone, he's smiling. I think he likes it when he gets under my feathers and ruffles me up a bit.

"Nothing, I'm hungry too," he says.

"But I'm cooking, unless if you don't like my food, you rejected it yesterday as well," I say, pretending to be emotional about it. That's what everyone does when someone rejects food, deep down we all love people who reject food.

"I haven't eaten out in a year, I'd like to make my return with you. I promise you, I'm a nice guy," he says.

He looks and speaks like a nice guy, but he has those off moments where I don't understand him. He's always smiling when talking, but when he's quiet he looks completely different. He can switch from being a cheerful guy to depressed, switching back and forth within minutes. I can't tell whether he's happy or not, in his own personal life.

"Okay, but I have to take a bath first," I say.

"Okay," he says, still seated.

I look at him, does he expect me to bath in front of him?

"What?" He raises his eyebrow.

"You have to sit outside and wait, I can't bath in front of you."

He smiles, he just wanted me to spell it out so that he gets amused.

"Please bath like a man," he says, walking out with his chair.

I haven't called my father, I don't know if he'd be still awake when I come back from this dinner. In my whole life I've never put any dinner above my father, this is the first time.

My dad doesn't like to see me wearing pants, he's from that old generation. I only get my freedom here, I put on my jeans and

the Nike jacket I stole from one of my male cousins, I can't remember which one. It's going to be cold when we come back. I didn't take that long, it was only 15 minutes or so. I tell him he can come inside as I take the water out.

I come back, he's sitting on the chair with his head dropped to his chest. He's in that depressed mode again, but he immediately looks up after I've walked in.

"That's a nice jacket," he says.

This is the first cloth compliment I'm getting from him.

No, wait...he doesn't mean it.

"It is nice," I say, boastfully.

"I can buy you a better one," he says and cracks a smile.

This one can insult you and smile at the same time, just to confuse you.

"I stole it from my cousin. Still a big deal?" I ask.

"Oh, why didn't you tell me? I'm a jealous man. Are you ready?"

Whoooah!

He places his hand over his forehead, "Oh no, you look ready, I didn't mean it that way."

"In which way did you mean it Bonga?" I ask with my hands on the waist.

"Like, are we leaving? Do you have your lipgloss, cutex and eyeliner in the bag?" This one really thinks he's clever.

I shake my head and confirm if I have everything in my bag.

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I didn't expect him to take me to an Italian restaurant, not that I'm undermining him. But he's proved me wrong, this is a dining experience, a real one. I still don't know him too well, I have a lot of questions about him.

"So, how is your mother?" I ask, this is how normal conversations start.

"She's okay," he says.

"And your siblings? How many do you have?"

"Three," he says.

He turns his head and looks at the staff on the counter. We just got here, our food is not ready yet.

"They're slow," he says.

I don't think he's complaining because he's really bothered, he's putting a stop to the conversation I'm trying to have. Maybe he's looking for a hook-up or something casual, that's why he doesn't want to share much about himself and his family.

"I have to buy airtime and call my father," I say, going off topic as well.

"Is he well?" he asks.

"Yeah," I say and shut it down by picking up my drink.

We don't share anything about families, now do we?

"Brothers and sisters?" he asks.

I take a sip to occupy my mouth and then shake my head. Now this is turning cold.

We wait for our food in silence. It comes, I'm sure even the waiter can feel the dead energy.

He eats right away, he must've been really hungry.

I pray for mine first before eating. He's done within a few minutes and drinking his water.

"Do you drink alcohol?" I ask, forgetting that I was trying to be cold towards him.

"I do, just not regularly," he says.

"Me too, but my dad doesn't know. He doesn't know that I wear pants either." Of course Miyanda you won't shut up, even when you're getting bad energy.

"So you're not an obedient person?" he asks.

"I am, but what he doesn't know won't kill him," I say.

He laughs, "You're so fun to be around."

Shocking!

"It doesn't look like you're having fun though," I say.

"I'm sorry, I have a lot of things on my mind. I'm happy you're having dinner with me, it means a lot, I will get you a present after this," he says with a smile.

"I don't like presents, I prefer money."

His phone rings, our energy was just picking up.

His smile disappears, he takes a deep breath and answers.

"I'm coming...what's wrong with him...is he armed...okay I'm coming."

Fuck the caller, whoever that was. If there's an armed person why aren't they calling the police?

He looks at me, "There's an emergency at home."

"At home?" I panic, I thought he was talking to a drunk friend or something.

"Yeah, my brother and my mother are fighting."

Roughhh!

“Who is armed?” I’m grabbing my bag and standing up to get the attention of our waiter.

He needs to settle the bill, then we pack this food and go.

“He’s armed, I just hope I get there before he does something bad,” he says.

I can see the fear in his eyes. Damn, some kids these days, imagine being armed and fighting with your own mother.

“It’s fine, just pay, I will take a taxi,” I say.

“Is it safe?” He’s still worried about me while his mother is in danger.

“It’s fine, you need to go home,” I say.

The bill comes, he pays while I pack the food.

Okay, we are good to go.

There are still taxis on the road, I will get one.

He opens the car door and stops, he looks back.

“I can’t, just come with me, I will drop you if I see a taxi on the road. If not, I will go home with you and bring you back,” he says.

“To your armed brother?”

“He’s fighting with my mother, not with everyone.”

“How do you know? You’re here,” I ask.

“It’s been long time coming, it’s a family issue,” he says.

Now I’m curious, how bad can it be that a son has to take out a spear or gun to his mother?

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I remain in the car, he rushes out and disappears inside the yard. I asked that he parks outside, I don't want to catch a stray bullet. It's dead quiet in the yard, I'm just hoping nobody is dead yet.

Did I say quiet? Somebody just started wailing, another one is shouting. What kind of a family is this?

I hate big families for this, me and dad only argue about boys.

I have Malibongwe's number, I need to call him and see if he's okay.

It rings unanswered, just when I'm about to call again I hear the sound of a gun.

It repeats again.

My stomach turns cold, what would my dad say finding out that I died inside of a Tazz?

I need to lie on the seats and pray; "God please don't take me, I love you but I don't want to meet you yet."

The gunshot again! No, that's my ass. Why did I come here?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 19

>>>>EARLIER

He received a call from Phume asking that they meet urgently. He hadn't seen her in a few days, he looked forward to it. Even though things had been tense at home, he left Aphelele playing

with Yoli. He's been meaning to apologize to Malibongwe for how he spoke to him but Malibongwe is hardly ever home. Seeing Phume was the only thing that was going to make him feel better.

As usual, he waited behind the containers, mentally preparing to ask for her forgiveness again. He'd been begging for her love back, but what he did wasn't something any girl could easily accept, however he still had hope. She also gave him that hope; they talked over the phone, any chance they get. Over the weeks she'd become his safe place, she'd been one person who listened and understood his pain.

When she arrived at the containers she was driving her old car, all along she'd been walking and not using any Mshazi car, that was very suspicious. He reluctantly hugged her, not knowing if she'd hug him back. But she did, even held longer and sniffed on his shoulder. He looked at her face, glad that she was hugging him but also worried.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"Yeah," she nodded.

Her eyes said something different, it looked like she'd been crying.

"Let's get inside the car," she suggested.

That has always been a no-go zone for him. He always asked Malibongwe's car whenever they had to travel somewhere, he's never taken lifts from her or chilled inside her car. He asked her out six years ago knowing very well that their financial backgrounds were different, way too different. But he never felt pressured, when he was still employed he did his part as a boyfriend, she was grateful for everything. Their love was beautiful, they both wanted to carry it from their twenties to their thirties.

“I’m happy to see you,” he said, holding her hands. They were standing behind the containers, her car was parked at the side of the road.

“I’m happy to see you too,” she said.

Something was amiss in her voice and spirit.

He cleared his throat suspiciously, “I didn’t expect your call.”

“I have to tell you something, I didn’t want to do it over the phone.”

It sounded serious, he continued holding her hands firmly.

“You’re scaring me. Is everything okay at home?”

Phume started shedding tears, “I know you will be angry but I had no choice, I had to do it.”

“What did you do?” he asked, trying to calm down his nerves.

She started blabbering, he was running out of composure.

“Phume just fuckin’ tell me, did you cheat on me with Mpatho?”

She would’ve responded quite differently had it been another day, maybe reminded him of his own cheating ways while at it. But at that time she was emotional and looking apologetic.

“I’m married,” she said.

At first he thought his ears had deceived him.

“Married?” He was confused.

“We signed, it’s official,” she said.

He still can’t describe all the emotions he went through when she said that. Yes, he wasn’t perfect throughout their relationship, but they were going to work things out. It was a bad idea from the start that she’d go and pretend to be on board with the arranged marriage idea for the sake of

inheritance, but he didn't have much of a say because he's down and out.

I was at least don't be going back looking beetle“Mkhulu's condition is not promising, Beauty on the other is planning to take everything away from Mpatho. There was no time, we did what we had to do,” she said.

He was numb, the only thing he could do was breathe. Everything just shattered. Hopes and dreams, happiness and purpose, nothing made sense anymore.

“We are not in a relationship though, we will divorce when we are sure that he's got the victory,” she said.

He took a few breaths and fought for his voice to come back.

“Your grandfather is not even dead yet. You're not even sure he's going to die, you're not God. Yet you've married him, you've left me Phume. After everything we've been through? All the things I've put up with because I love you. Babe, I respected you, I only made one mistake. One, Phume! Am I not worthy of forgiveness? Of love? Second chance?” He forgot that they were in a public space, he allowed his emotions to weaken him. It pained more than anything he's ever felt.

“Uyang'shiya? Are you breaking up with me?” he asked, his voice trembling.

“I don't want to drag you along, you have your own battles that you're dealing with. You don't need inconsistent love and attention, that would weigh you down emotionally. Right now I can't give you my all, I don't know when I will be free from these chains, it would be selfish of me to ask you to wait.”

“I can wait,” he said desperately.

Phume closed her eyes and took a long, deep breath.

“If you're married but not doing things that married people do, doing it all for an act,” he added.

“You can’t, you know that. I don’t want to complicate your life, I love you way too much for that. I’m not going to be selfish and hold you back,” she said.

“You love me?” He’d yearned to hear her say that over weeks. But at that time the words sounded empty.

Phume sighed, “You fucked me up, I don’t know if my heart will ever be at peace with what you did. But I love you, I will always do. I’m going to look out for you,” she said the last one like a promise.

Nothing made any difference, he doesn’t need her to look out for him, he needs her back. He couldn’t go home with tears in his eyes, he had to find a spot near the bush and cry his heart out and pull himself together. Aphelele expected his father to come home with a lollipop and a smile.

But it didn’t happen, instead of calming down emotions just piled up.

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MALIBONGWE

Mkhuleko caught a bullet. He’s wounded on the leg, the other bullet went through the wall. Sphakamiso only stopped when he realized it was Mkhuleko, not MaVilakazi on the floor.

Malibongwe has managed to take the gun from him. Everyone is crying, the kids witnessed it all, they were on the couch watching T when Sphakamiso walked in with his violence. .

“You’re going to jail,” Malibongwe says. He’s got blood on his hands, wrapping a cloth around the gun wound. Mkhuleko needs the hospital, they will want to know what happened.

“I don’t care even if the police kill me, vele there’s nothing to live for. This woman, this bitch, won’t tell me who I really am. Everyone enjoys seeing me being put down on daily basis. From her husband, to her daughter, and all of you, have treated me like an outsider. Fine, I’m an outsider, just tell me where to go damnitttt!”

Malibongwe has to hold him again, he’s charging towards their mother. This is above him, Sphakamiso wants either the truth or blood. He needs to take Mkhuleko to the hospital but he can’t leave Sphakamiso unattended because he’s dangerous to everyone here, even himself.

“Ma, talk,” Malibongwe says, he’s holding Sphakamiso against the wall.

Initially he didn’t want to get involved in this matter, he thought it would be ‘naturally’ resolved. He respects his mother, maybe unnecessarily too much, that’s why he stayed out of it. It didn’t favor Sphakamiso because on his side nobody is willing to listen to him in this family.

“Please just tell him what he wants to know. If he’s not Mcineka’s son, then who is his father?”- Malibongwe.

“It’s complicated...” MaVilakazi is still trying to protect her image.

“Ma! Mkhuleko is bleeding, he needs the hospital,” – Malibongwe.

MaVilakazi sheds more tears. “It was your father who didn’t treat me right. I made a mistake when I was gone to work for you, my children.”

“It’s okay Ma, nobody is perfect. Just tell him,” Nombuso says, she’s squashed in the corner with Yoli hiding her face on her chest. She will never forgive Sphakamiso for this, he’s dead to

her as a brother. The trauma he's put them through is too much.

"Mhlongo from Ireland, Mandeni. He's late, his wife doesn't know anything about Sphakamiso, Mcineka welcomed him as his child," MaVilakazi finally confesses.

Sphakamiso wants to fight again, he's crying. He thought the man would be alive at least, now it's just a hopeless situation, he's stuck here as a hidden and hated child.

"Bafo calm down, I know you're hurting but this is not worth it," Malibongwe says.

"Not worth it? Awufetshwanga Malibongwe, you don't know anything." He tries to push his way, Malibongwe holds him back against the wall.

Mkhuleko starts groaning in pain, the cloth wrapped around the gun wound is now wet. He's in so much pain and these people are having a family meeting instead of helping him.

Luckily there's someone coming in, the neighbor. He's armed with a machete.

"I heard the gunshot," he says, looking around. It's clear that there was no robbery, just the Mcinekas being the Mcinekas. More neighbours are going to come, people love scandals around here. Malibongwe has helping hands though, he's finally able to restrain Sphakamiso and rush out to drive the car inside the yard.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I've run out of prayers, I'm sweating under the seats. The noise has died down though. I need to sit and take a small breath.

Just when I sit up and fan my face with my hand, someone is outside the car door. Not the crazy brother with a gun, please!

I almost scream his ears off when he opens the door.

"It's me," he says.

It's Malibongwe, I breathe out in relief.

"What happened? Those gunshots...is everyone okay?" I ask.

Lord, he smells of blood.

"Bonga!" I'm freaking out.

"I have to take Mkhuleko to the hospital, he got shot on the leg."

"Oh okay," I'm confused and even more scared.

I don't think he's in the right state of mind, he drives with me inside the yard and then goes back inside the house. Who am I going to say I am to his family? They will come with the injured person. This situation has gotten out of hands, I'm starting to regret going to dinner with him, he's got way too many problems. I don't like problems.

There's still noise inside the house, just not as loud, now there's an intervention of the neighbors. I want to change seats and go to the back, but the injured person will probably sit there for comfort. I'm scared because I still have no clue what's going on. The injured guy, is he the one who was firing the gun or he caught a bullet? The mother, how is she?

I see them coming out. I knew it would be the whole family. Malibongwe is carrying the injured person, I remain in my seat quietly. How do I become magically invisible?

The lady carrying a blanket comes straight to my door and opens.

“Yehheni, who is this?” She steps back and calls Malibongwe.

I’m silently cursing at myself for being caught up in all this.

“Nombuso you will sit here with Mkhuleko,” Malibongwe says.

“Is his gun with you?” she asks.

“Yes, Khuzwayo will make sure he doesn’t take any weapon,” – Malibongwe says.

She looks at me again, the woman whom I think is his sister, and then she goes to the back. They close the doors, we drive out. Obviously I’m going to the hospital with them, they can’t drop me off, it’s an emergency. I really don’t know if I will get any sleep today, I’ll be having a shitty day at work tomorrow.

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It’s 11pm, I’m on the cold waiting chairs at the hospital with an angry woman next to me. Malibongwe has been up and down, doing every necessary step needed before someone is admitted. I heard him talking about unknown attackers, I’m not sure how that story went, if it convinced the nurses.

He appears again, he’s been constantly checking up on us, I think to see if his angry sister hasn’t flipped on me. I think it’s all because of trauma and fear, she’s the type that responds to threatening situations with anger.

“I’m almost done, are you okay?”

She looks up, “Yeah, I’m fine.”

I think Malibongwe was asking me, I give him a lazy smile and look away. He has his depressed face on, I hate seeing him like this because I know how jovial and funny he can be. I’m sure

he feels helpless, I understand why he's always delaying going home.

He leaves again, when he comes back he's done, his brother has been admitted.

I wish I can hug him but we are not close like that.

"I will start by dropping Miyanda," he says.

It's like his sister had forgotten about me. Yes, she took my seat at the front because it's her brother's car, I'm at the back now.

"What is she?" she asks.

Now it's not 'who is she', that was answered, but not to her satisfaction I guess.

"MaMthethwa," Malibongwe says.

"I hope it stays and ends here," she says.

I'm confused by her statement. She's saying everything loud for me to hear.

"The Mthethwa clan is ill-mannered everywhere," she says.

Normally I'd have responded to that, but she had a traumatic night, I understand she can't be nice.

Malibongwe keeps quiet, she stops when she realizes that nobody is entertaining her.

I only have a few hours left before waking up and going to work. His sister is finally asleep when we get to my place. He parks the car and climbs out with me. He wants to say something, an apology.

"I don't know where to start," he says.

"It's okay, I'm perfectly fine," I say.

“You shouldn’t have seen all that, I’m disappointed in myself.”
He takes my hand and firmly holds it.

It’s cold and dark out here, he’s still smelling of his brother’s blood.

“Are you going to be safe?” I ask.

“Yeah, things happen and pass, don’t worry about. If it’s okay, I’d like to give you this for tomorrow, I don’t think I will make it in time to take you to work.” He’s giving me a note, I can’t see how much is it because it’s dark.

“You didn’t have to,” I say folding it and shoving it inside my bra.

“I’m really sorry Miyanda, I promise you will never be in such a position again.” He pulls me into his arms and hugs me. I didn’t expect it, I’m hesitant, but he’s not letting me go.

I give in and hug him too.

“How are you feeling?” I ask.

He’s quiet for a minute, then he takes a deep breath.

“I want to go away,” he says.

I’m taken back by that answer, I didn’t expect him to be that.

“Is that possible?” I ask.

“I don’t know, but I know I’m cut for the kind of environment I’m trapped in,” he says.

“Why not change the environment, instead of running away? I mean, that’s your family at the end of the day.” I don’t have a chaotic family, but if they ever got into fights I’d be trying to help because to me family is everything.

“I don’t know how to,” he says.

This is not how I thought he was.

“Have you ever tried?” I ask.

“I do, but nobody listens. I have a family that focuses on negativity more than positivity. You can do ten nice things to someone but they will drag you for one bad thing you did. I’m just emotionally drained, I try to be neutral but it never works,” he says.

I can hear it in his voice, I wish I can help him, but it’s family matters that I have no business with.

“Your family is just bad...” I was going to finish the sentence but I couldn’t.

“Oh, Dr Phil.” God knows when she opened the door and climbed out.

Malibongwe turns, surprised as me. Wasn’t she sleeping?

“Is the session done?” she asks.

I don’t think she’s going to listen even if I explain to her.

“I’m still saying goodbye to her,” – Malibongwe.

“This is a long goodbye with our family name inserted in it. I want to go home, if you ever bring her with you again there will be trouble,” she says.

Now, this is funny. Trust me, she doesn’t want a beef with me.

“Trouble?” Malibongwe is shocked.

“She just called my family bad, I will show you what’s bad. Who does she think she is with her big eyes, ngathi imbuzi iphekwe nezimpondo? Rubbish.”

What the fuck! She’s serious, this is going to explode and cause too much damage.

“Bonga please take your sister and leave, you’re the only reason why I’m still calm,” – this is the first and last warning. If

this woman ran like her mouth she'd be in a good shape, I pray we never cross paths again, for Jesus' sake.

"Seriously, you didn't even hear what she was saying." He's angry but I don't feel the depth of the confrontation. Maybe they talk anyhow with each other, unfortunately this is a no-bullshit zone.

She turns and walks away after clicking her tongue.

"I'm sorry, can I call you when I get home?" - Malibongwe.

I'm not in the mood, I wish she was the one who got shot.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 20

SPHAKAMISO

He didn't sleep a wink, Aphelele kept having nightmares. He shouldn't have let his emotions get the better of him like that. Yoli won't even look at him, she hasn't come to Aphelele since morning. Aphelele is still in bed, he wet the bed throughout the night, which is something he hardly ever does now. He trained him to wake up and pee in the bucket three times a night. It's good that he's a smart child, he learns very quick, which makes his life easier.

"Bafo," he says, touching Aphelele's cheek.

Aphelele lifts his eyes, there's fear written all over them.

"I love you, okay," he says, guilt scrapping every part of his conscience.

Aphelele should be the first person he considers before doing anything.

"Baba shoots a gun," his son is still shaking.

He picks him up and puts him on his chest, gently rubbing his back.

“Bab’omkhulu took the gun and went to throw it away,” he says.

“He threw it in the forest?” – Aphelele

He nods, “Yes, far away in the forest.”

Children forgive easily, he puts him on his lap.

“Baba will never shoot again, okay? But there’s something I want to ask you and hear your opinion.” Aphelele is too young to make an opinion of anything but he will feel less guilty if he discusses it with him first.

“You know your grandmother who lives in Durban? The one who bought you the bike?”

The bike is still Aphelele’s favourite thing after food. Yes, he knows that grandmother.

“Would you like to go and stay with her? Baba will look for a job so that he can buy you more toys and lollipops,” Sphakamiso says.

Silence...

He can see the confusion in Aphelele’s eyes. It’s a painful thing to see.

“You will go with your bike,” he says.

Aphelele smiles, “Thuthuthu?”

“Yes, thuthuthu, you will go with it.”

He’s a child, obviously he doesn’t know what’s going on. It will be hard for him to sleep without his father or MaVilakazi, because even though things are the way they are, those are two people Aphelele is close to the most. But this is for the best, at this point he doesn’t even know where he’s going.

Before yesterday he thought he'd go and find his biological father, but that hope died when his mother told him the man was married and he died without even informing his wife. If he tries to find his family right now it will cause a lot of problems, he might face rejection there as well. He's on his own, that's what he needs to accept. Malibongwe is just a statue when it comes to resolving family related issues. After everything that happened yesterday he still woke up today and left by the crack of dawn under the disguise of going to the hospital. Everyone knows why he leaves by dawn and comes back in the late hours of the evening. He can't stand his own family, he never bothers to get to the bottom of things. Or just lend his ears and listen. It would be great to have him, as the eldest brother, sit down and listen. Just to show that he sees the validity of everyone's feelings.

Eventually Aphelele went outside to play with Yoli. He has to go and make him something to eat, it's even more hard now because everyone hates him. Nombuso needed a reason and he gave her one last night. In the morning she came and told him he's dead to her as a brother. Not that he really cares, it's always been like that, she's always treated him like a dead brother. MaVilakazi went to the hospital using taxis because Malibongwe was nowhere to be seen. She tried to talk before leaving but things have gone too far, there's nothing he can talk to her about. They had plenty time to sort things out, she didn't give a damn, she only wants to talk now after he acted a certain way that furtherly perpetuate the character people have painted him to be. Even though most believes so, he knows that he's not rude, neither is he violent nor stubborn. People always analyze his reactions without checking what caused them. All thanks to Mcineka who made sure he paints his character as bad all over the village.

Aunt Teekay's phone rings on the other side, he's already sweating.

"It's going to rain cats and dogs," she says, picking up.

He forces a brief laugh, "Unjani Ma?"

"I'm good, now even more good because I'm finding out I still exist in your world. How is my gorgeous boy?" she asks.

Traumatized.

"He's fine," he says and exhales heavily.

"And you?" she asks.

"I'm not complaining about anything, I'm still breathing." He takes a brief pause and gathers courage to say it. "Ma, I've failed," he says.

"You failed to do what?" – Aunt Teekay confused.

"I failed to be a good father, I think this is when one admits that, yes, I may love my child with all my heart but I cannot give him the best that this world has to offer. I cannot provide him with financial and emotional security." These words leave his mouth stinging like bees. His hands are trembling, his life used to be okay, but out of nowhere everything just crumbled.

"There are a lot of things happening here that affect him as a child. I don't want him to grow up angry like me, I don't want him to think there's something wrong with the way he is, that he's less than any other child. I've fought, I've tried, but the situation gets worse everyday."

"I knew it, you've been hiding something from me. Even the condition I found Aphelele in the other day, I could tell that it wasn't great as you made it to be. You know I love him and I'd do anything to help. I just needed you to tell me the truth. And please, don't say the word 'failing' because you're far from being a failure. Your peers do unimaginable things for money,

you accepted your situation and continued being a role model to Aphelele. You're a good father," she says.

He shuts his eyes and locks back the tears. Maybe he would've believed it if it was MaVilakazi or Malibongwe telling him this. It would've sounded more factual.

"What have you decided on?" – Aunt Teekay.

"You once talked about taking him to start school that side. I know you can't rush it and take him in without talking to Bab' Khulekani first. But if you can help me, I have nowhere else to take him, I don't trust my family with him, kuningi nje," he says.

The other side is quiet. She's probably shocked, maybe he should've done this face to face.

"Ma, I will understand if you can't."

Then loud sniffs...

"You're making me emotional. I don't have a child child Sphakamiso, not everyone can put the trust you're putting me on me right now." She's crying.

"Well, sometimes strangers become family more than those you share blood with," he says.

"Ok stop, I'm ruining my Ponds puff," she says.

He could've laughed at that, she's always this hilarious.

"Is your mother okay with this? I don't want her to think I'm trying to replace her as a grandmother?"

"I haven't told them yet, but trust it won't affect them," he says.

"Are things that bad?" – Aunt Teekay.

"Yeah, they are bad," he says, releasing a long breath.

He's relieved, even though it's still hard to believe that he's really letting go of his son.

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MPATHO

It's another hopeless day, he's on his way to the hospital to see his grandfather. He's too drained for the mall traffic, so he decides to buy fruits from the local shop. Little does he know that Sphakamiso is chilling under the shelter with a lit cigarette. Sphakamiso is not a person he'd choose to bump into anywhere. Phume went to see him yesterday, maybe they're back together. It sucks that he will always come second-best to this guy. It's actually fucked up because Phume is not even giving him a chance. Sometimes he regrets his decisions, he thought he was looking out for her by refusing to marry her at 21, he didn't know he was inviting a permanent resident in her heart.

He doesn't greet, he climbs out of the car and goes straight to the shop. Locals have this thing of pretending to worship certain people just to get a few coins. He's getting praises as he makes his way in. One is even telling him that he dreamed of Mshazi coming out of the hospital alive and strong. It's a lie, he knows them. Two coats of beer are enough to gain him more praises.

When he comes out of the shop, the Mcineka boy is standing next to his car. Really, he's not in the mood for a fight or public argument. He tries his utmost best to keep his dignity intact by not engaging everyone and having unnecessary arguments. People respect him, there are kids who look up to him, he's not about to humiliate himself and Phume on the street.

“Mcineka,” he says, opening the door and putting the bag of fruits inside.

Sphakamiso doesn't respond, hopefully he's not armed.

Mpatho looks at him, his face has no readable emotions. But as he puts one foot inside the car, Sphakamiso speaks.

“Congratulations on your Home Affairs wedding.”

Now he needs to keep his emotions in check.

“Thank you,” he says.

Sphakamiso takes two steps forward and stops.

“Yazi sbari, you're the last person I could've thought of. Not because it doesn't make sense, but because I had so much respect for you as a person. I don't remember a single day where I offended you or your family in any way. Even though I'm not perfect, I made your sister happy, I respected her as well. I'm not denying the mistakes, they were there, but I've always been willing to learn and unlearn.”

He's not violent, Mpatho stands and listens.

“To me you will always be usbari, I will never see you as a competitor or anything. You've married her, not because you love her or she loves, you just have the power and advantage to do so. And I will tell you what sbari, I don't respect that,” he says.

“Okay, you can not respect it in peace,” Mpatho says with a shrug.

“Peace? You think I have peace after you've trapped the most important person in my life into a legacy marriage?” He furrows his forehead, glaring at Mpatho.

“What is the point of this? I'm rushing to the hospital,” – Mpatho.

“I was just congratulating you. I hope it works out. And good luck making her happy sbari.” It sounds like he’s boasting here, maybe Phume told him that she’s not happy.

He gets inside the car and closes the door. A deep breath, he needs to forget about everything and head to the hospital.

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Mshazi is awake, he actually looks better than any day today. When Mpatho sits next to his bed he cracks a smile. It’s not returned, Mpatho is just cold.

He sits in silence for quite a moment, then exhales heavily.

“Must I peel the banana for you?” he asks.

Mshazi nods.

He can’t feed himself now, Mpatho has to feed him. He last saw his Beauty yesterday, she promised to come in the morning and never came.

“Where is Beauty?” he finally asks in a cracky voice.

“Home,” Mpatho says.

“When is she coming to see me?”

Mpatho shrugs, “I cannot know.”

There’s something on his mind, or in his heart, that he needs to let off.

“Mkhulu why do I have to fight for everything?” he asks.

Mshazi keeps quiet, he’s just staring at him because he has no idea where all this is coming from.

“My father chose his wife and stepdaughter over me, many many times. For me to receive love, love that always comes

second place, I have to fight and prove myself over and over again. Today I'm in this situation, fighting for my spot as usual, because even after everything I've done for this family I still get doubted and double-checked because my mother left with whatever she left with. I have to prove that I'm not like her, that I will stick around even though I'm blood." He shakes his head, Mshazi is still just staring at him, hardly blinking.

"Nobody has ever had my back. You all watched Phume's mother abusing me, everyone masked it as 'training'. Phume never got any training, nobody cared what kind of a wife she will make. As long as she knows how to spend money and sit at home to decorate the house and knows how to dress up for dinners."

"But I, on the other hand, had to kill a whole man to prove that I can protect my wife and kids in future. I was allowed to mingle but not fall in love, because from the early age I was told who my heart was reserved for. I know how to love, how to run multiple businesses, how to take care of my manly duties, and respect women. But did I get the same courtesy? Nope, Phume is in love with someone else, I'm fighting for the second-best spot again. And she knows shit, that's the kind of a wife you all kept for me. She can't love me, she can't be cordial with, she can't even respect me, literally there's nothing she has to offer. Not even something I need the most in my life. Love, she can't give me that." His breath is shaky, he rolls his fist and takes a brief pause.

"So I've been asking myself, am I that important to this family? If I am, then why am I constantly being put through tests? Why the fuck am I even doing this? I'm one person who's held this family down after my father's death, but every blood drop I've invested in this family doesn't mean shit. You know very well mkhulu that if it wasn't for me you would've kissed everything goodbye because of Beauty. I have cameras in your office, she's there everyday going through..."

Mshazi coughs, he's been ranting and not paying much attention to him. Even forgetting that they're in hospital, not in their dining room having a family meeting.

"Mshazi! Mkhulu! Mshazi!"

Why is this man not moving? His eyes are open but there's no movement.

No, he can't die.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 21

PHUMELELE

There's a scream coming from the kitchen. I get off the bed and rush there, thinking something is wrong with Aunt Nomusa. Well, she's here too, but it's Beauty crying. I can't think of a single thing that can make The Greek Defiant cry like this. Aunt Nomusa is rubbing her back, holding a glass of water for her.

"What's going on?" I ask.

I get no attention. Aunt Nomusa is trying to calm her down.

"Did she lose her bank cards?" I ask. That's the only thing I can think of, Beauty would definitely cry like this if she lost her purse with bank cards inside.

"It's Mshazi," Aunt Nomusa says.

"Is he coming home?" I ask.

"No, he's left us," she says.

"Pho why is she crying?" I'm confused.

Aunt Nomusa is staring at me like I'm the one acting out of character.

“Her husband died, Phumelele,” she says.

Shit, mkhulu died.

“When?” I ask.

“We just got a call from Mpatho that he’s died, he was with him when he took his last breath,” she says.

Mpatho must be going through the most right now. Beauty, I’m not sure if those are crocodile or hippo tears, but they’re fake.

I don’t know who told Aunt Brandi, Aunt Nomusa follows me to my bedroom and gives me the phone. It’s her wanting to talk to me, I’m not close to this woman.

“Hi,” I say.

“Phume, how are you holding up?”

Like she cares!

“I’m okay,” I say.

“I will come tomorrow morning,” she says.

“To do what?” I ask.

“To support you,” she says.

I don’t know what to call this, a joke or stupidity. What makes her think I need support now and I didn’t need it when my mother died, her own sister? She didn’t come, didn’t attempt any contact, I don’t need her support.

“Take care, your father sends his regards.”

I cringe and drop the call. My father? I don’t consider myself as someone who’s ever had a father, the man that I thought was the one turned out to have been just raising a daughter-in-law for himself.

Aunt Nomusa takes the phone and walks out without bothering me with questions and instructions on what to do and not do,

like when my mother died. I don't have much to do, I'm not going to be involved with the funeral arrangements, he had his people.

I check my feeds, someone has already made an announcement on social media. I have console pouring into my DMs. The day people find out Mpatho and I are married it will be scandalous. Speaking of him, I haven't heard from him, even when he informed the family he didn't include me.

It's three hours later, I hear him talking to someone. I know we are not on good terms, but we can pretend during this dark time, for his sake, I know he needs support. I step out of my room, damn so many people are here. I wonder if Beauty has sat on the mattress, I honestly don't see her doing that, she'd rather mourn on Instagram than on the mattress.

Mpatho is with some men, they look familiar, wearing expensive-looking suits and conversing in big English words. I don't want to disturb, so I just greet and walk past. I make my way to the kitchen to grab a snack. Beauty's family is here occupying the kitchen. One is drinking champagne on the chair, her sister is making burgers, I can hear the kids playing outside. I shouldn't have come out of my room.

I greet everyone and grab left-overs from the fridge.

"Let me warm it for you," Aunt Nomusa says, coming behind me.

I step aside and let her do it.

"Do you know how to warm your own food ntombi?" – that's the champagne-drinking lady. She's been here before, I think she's a cousin or something.

I'm annoyed by this type of question. But I answer; "Yes."

She chuckles, sips her drink and says nothing.

Aunt Nomusa gives me my food, I take it and leave before I get more judgmental questions. Why are they even here? I mean, the funeral might be next week, are they going to be here the whole time?

Mpatho is still with these men in the lounge, I walk past them with my food and go to my room.

I cuddle myself up in my room, binging on Netflix, hoping all those people will go away. But the noise is getting louder, meaning more relatives are arriving. They're probably asking about me, as far as most of them are concerned I'm a granddaughter of the deceased. I can't put on a fake sad face and I'm not willing to explain, being here is the best decision. But, Aunt Nomusa will always fish me out of every hole.

"Phume, you can't quarantine yourself in here and not engage with the people who've come to console you," she says.

"Hhayi aunty, I have a flu. When are you going home? You can't be cleaning after Beauty's family."

"Mpatho will get a driver to take me home, I want to be around and useful. Have you checked on him?"

"You know how our relationship is," I say.

"But this is not just a random sad day, his grandfather has died. Surely it hits him harder than anyone, unlike any of you he doesn't have a mother's side of the family that's going to come and comfort him, now he has no family from the father's side too."

"Aunty! I also don't have anyone," I tell her. Let's not pretend like Aunt Brandi is the aunt that matters, she's never given a single fuck about me and my mother.

"Fine, be there for each other, you were once siblings," she says.

Sigh!

I close the laptop and gather my plate and phone.

“I will take this to the kitchen for you,” he says.

“Thank you.” She’s always a sweetheart, one person I genuinely care about and love in this house.

I’ve known her for almost a decade now, she’s an aunt to me more than Brandi is.

Mpatho is no longer in the lounge, it seems like the men have left, only Beauty’s family members keeping pouring in with their big bags. I can’t see the mattress laid anywhere.

I will find him in his bedroom, if not outside the balcony.

The bedroom door is slightly open, I knock twice before he lets me in.

I didn’t expect to see Beauty by his side. I freeze at the door for a moment. She’s rubbing his shoulder, there’s a tray of food and juice next to the bed. Am I having a bad dream here?

“Hey,” she says.

Mpatho doesn’t even lift his face to acknowledge that I’m here.

“I came to check on him,” I say.

“He’s taking it hard but if there’s one person who’s going to rise above this, it’s him, the family soldier,” she says.

My mouth drops open. Who does she think she is? TD Jakes?

She looks down at him, “You have to eat.”

She even brought him food. Isn’t her husband dead?

“Shouldn’t you be sitting on the mattress?” I ask.

I don’t know, I’m feeling some type of way seeing her doing all this for Mpatho. She hates him, why is she pretending to care and taking my role. Yes, my role.

“Is’dala leso, I will sit down the day before the funeral,” she says.

Whatever she says now goes, technically she’s the grandmother here, the elder of the family.

“Let me go and check Lindy,” she says, pats Mpatho on the shoulder and walks out after flashing a smile at me. I don’t know if the smile was meant to tell something. Whether what she’s just done was part of the act or not, I don’t like it.

I stand with my arms folded, looking at him.

He finally looks up, damn he looks hurt. I’m not affected by this death at all, but I can relate to what he’s feeling right now.

“I wanted to talk to you earlier but you were with those men,” I say.

He doesn’t say anything, I can’t tell whether I’m welcome here or not.

“Beauty seemingly beat me to it. She even brought you food, how kind of her!”

He pulls the plate and starts eating, as if to spite me. Beauty could’ve poisoned that food he’s chowing like a hunter. I’m so pissed.

“How are you feeling?” I ask.

He ignores me and eats.

“When is the funeral? Aunt Brandi called and said she will be here in the morning.” I’m trying to be easy and understanding but he’s giving me a cold shoulder.

He seems to be annoyed by me, I don’t know what I did. We haven’t spoken since we got married, it’s the most weirdest thing in the world.

“I wasn’t aware that we are not on speaking terms, Aunt Nomusa asked me to come and check on you.”

“I knew it,” he says, putting down the fork.

What did he know? He seems angry about it.

“You’re coming here pretending to care, you walked past me and didn’t say anything, you didn’t even ask if I was hungry or not. You just passed, now you’re here on assigned duty.”

“Seriously?” I see his point, I didn’t articulate myself properly, even though Aunt Nomusa did tell me to come, I also had a will to do so.

“Please get out,” he says, his jaw twitching.

Really now, he’s being harsh.

“Okay, I’m sorry if you think I’m not supportive enough.”

He looks at me, he doesn’t look very convinced. I hardly apologize to anyone.

“I mean it,” I say.

He exhales deeply and shifts, “Come and sit.”

Finally, I really don’t want us to be on bad terms, regardless of where our marriage stands.

“Why are you eating her food?” I’m triggered seeing the plate on his lap.

It’s like I just reminded him to continue; he picks his fork again.

“I’m hungry, you went to eat in your room alone,” he says.

“So this is my punishment. What if she poisoned you?” I don’t trust Beauty at all.

“I have my eyes everywhere,” he says.

I can’t say I know him, there seems to be a lot to him than what he’s giving. He’s shady and unpredictable.

“So what happens from here?” I ask.

Mkhulu has died, as we all expected. Him and I are legally married, does it mean he’s now the successor?

“We take care of the last obstacle,” he says.

My heart starts beating fast. He knows I’m against that.

“How?” I ask.

“It has to happen during this commotion, I need you to be in the kitchen regularly.”

“It’s her family in there, I can’t stand them. And what am I going to do in the kitchen? I’m not experienced in that department.”

“You will wash dishes, make tea, or prepare snacks. It’s not rocket science, you need get out of the bubble. And one more thing,” he says.

I take a deep breath and look at him.

“Don’t discuss me with your boyfriend,” he says.

Okay, this is unexpected.

“Sphakamiso? I never discussed you with him,” I say. Now I see why he was angry, I don’t know what he heard, someone probably saw me with Sphakamiso yesterday and told him.

“He wants you back,” he says.

I can’t look at him in the eyes and pretend this doesn’t affect me. I heard about the shooting that happened at the Mcinekas yesterday, apparently Mkhuleko is in the hospital, I can’t even reach out to him because I know how badly I hurt him.

“You look hurt,” Mpatho says.

I lift my eyes to him, I can’t shake off the regret I’m feeling.

“You really loved him, didn’t you?”

“He’s the only guy I’ve ever been with. All this is happening when he’s dealing with a lot of family issues. Beside everything that happened, he’s a good guy. One of the reasons why I would’ve never guessed that he cheated on me, or booked a prostitute, whatever it was, is that he was never anything but a best boyfriend to me. He only slept with me last year, on our fifth anniversary, there was never pressure...”

“Because he was getting it somewhere else,” he interrupts me.

I give him a look. Really now? I’m trying to highlight the good parts of my relationship.

“Does it mean you are getting it somewhere?” I’m staring at him.

For the first time today I see his smile. I’m not trying to be funny here, is he fucking someone else?

“Would it matter to you?” he’s asking me a stupid question.

“We are married for Christ’ sake!” Is he kidding me?

“You could use that against me in the divorce court. And besides, this is not really a love marriage,” he says.

I don’t know if I wanted to hear that, but I guess it’s fitting.

“So you’re sleeping with someone?”

“I was raised to be loyal, even to people who don’t deserve it.”

“Am I one of those people?” I ask.

He chuckles and looks away. Obviously I’m on the list.

I cup his chin and kiss his lips. I don’t know what motivated me to do it, but yeah I’m kissing him. At first he’s shocked, who wouldn’t be? Then he relaxes and kisses me back. He grabs my waist and pulls me closer, our breaths dissolve into each other, I’m biting on every taste of him.

I break the kiss and link my forehead onto his, we are both panting and staring deeply into each other's eyes. I have feelings, they're sexual, and the way he's looking at me makes me want to give him more of myself.

But all of this could be just triggered by jealousy; Beauty might be planning something. I don't understand why, all of a sudden, she wants to be his wife and not his gold-digging stepmother. Yes, it's a marriage that's not based on love. But Beauty baby, as long as it says I'm married to this man in court, you're not getting him.

I turn my head, a shadow moves from the door, it was never closed.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 22

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I didn't think he'd be here to fetch me from work because his brother is still in the hospital. But he's here and I cannot thank God enough because I had one shitty day, I wasn't looking forward to the taxi rank chaos. I've been thinking about him a lot today, I don't know why he's occupying so much space in my head because he hasn't said anything to define these free lifts and late visits to my room.

He doesn't get out of the car today, I know he's here for me so I make my way to the car and enter. He's wearing Orlando Pirates T-shirt and trackpants, looking like a true Nkomazi guy. I settle on my seat and then greet him, trying to read his face.

He smiles, this is one thing he does the best, I've come to learn. This guy will smile through grief, heartbreaks, I bet even in the middle of fire you'd find him smiling.

“I thought you’d ignore me and go the other way,” he says.

“Am I dramatic?” I ask the obvious.

He’s laughing.

“No, you’re the most peaceful, calmest person I know,” he says.

I roll my eyes, he’s not that good with jokes, he must leave Trevor Noah to it.

“How is your brother?” I ask.

“He was discharged, he will be okay,” he says.

“And the other one?” I can’t remember his name, the one who caused havoc and chased everyone with a gun.

“He’s okay too,” he says.

I wonder if he got any punishment, he shot his own brother inside the yard. If they do things like they do back home, he’d have to apologize to the living and late family members with a goat for firing and almost killing one of his blood. Malibongwe doesn’t look like a firm old brother, but I’m nobody’s old sister, I can’t judge.

“I need some things from Shoprite,” he says.

Yeer, he’s got money during this time of the month.

“Is the business doing okay?” I ask.

“Ummm yeah, it’s doing good,” he says.

“What kind of a business are you in?” I’ve never asked him this, I don’t know why he looks lost. Is it not his business? I’m glaring at him, waiting for an answer.

“It’s a car-wash,” he says.

I’m not trying to be saucy, but say what now!

“You own a car wash and your car is never washed?” It has to make sense, ngeke.

“You also work in the so-called fashion shop and...” Weh, he must never!

“I always look good, don’t even try,” I say.

He’s laughing out loud. It may not be expensive clothes but I know how to put pieces together, he mustn’t discredit me like that.

“All I’m saying it, Gucci can sue the hell out of you,” he says.

I adjust my Gucci hat. The design looks correct unless you wear spectacles and look too close.

“So let’s pray the car-wash grows so that I can buy you real Gucci,” he says.

I don’t know why, but I don’t believe this car-wash story. Where is the car-wash? Why is his car doesn’t look like it’s owned by a car-wash owner?

We are at Shoprite for whatever he’s here to buy.

I have some money, I will buy bread and a dozen of eggs. People know him, he’s greeting everyone and stopping for little chats. He takes the big trolley, I guess he’s here for a full grocery, not just a few items. We start in the cosmetic aisle, he’s buying lotions, deodorants and shaving creams. I guess it’s for him and his siblings, they’re all unemployed.

“Are you done?” I ask.

It’s only my bread and eggs and his cosmetics in a big-ass trolley.

“I thought you’d do some shopping too,” he says.

“Hhayi-bo, I only get paid on the 3rd.” And I go home first then come back and do groceries.

“But I didn’t say you will pay. Come on, let’s go.” He’s leading me to the another aisle. Even if the devil himself came down and offered me free shopping, I’d agree and apologize to God later. I take the 5kg of rice, he takes it out of the trolley and puts 10kg. My ancestors must be pranking me! I’m filling up the trolley, he’s not saying anything. I hold my breath when we get to the till, the cashier scans everything. The total amount is over R800, did I overdo it? Why did I take the coffee, I hardly drink hot beverages.

He takes out his card and swipe. I breathe out, relieved.

I’m lucky nobody is outside when we arrive and offload the grocery from the car. My neighbors are nosy, they will want to know if I’m dating him and have forgotten about Thabani. Well, Thabani is my ex-boyfriend from home. He used to visit me here and tell me what bad wife I was going to make. Thabani didn’t have money but he didn’t approve of me moving here and working. Umfazi akasebenzi, that’s what he believed in. I had to hide my pants and peel off my nail polish whenever he was coming because he didn’t approve of those things, he said it’s for izifebe. I loved him, he was my second boyfriend after high school, I tried to do everything the way he wanted. But never was I enough for him; he found mistakes in everything I did. So I stopped trying to be perfect for him, he stopped talking to me, I wasn’t the farm girl he could control anymore and it pissed him off. One day I called him and asked that we meet in town, I wore my jeans and applied red lipstick and went to meet him. I had all his clothes that he’d left in my room in a small bag, we ended it at KFC. He was waiting for me with two pieces of chicken, I thought I’d eat to heal from a heartbreak, but when he got up with his bag he took his chicken too.

Everyone wants to know why he stopped coming, I’m not in anybody’s business, so I never explain myself to anyone either.

He sits on his chair; it's his now because he's always here sitting on it. I pack the grocery inside my small cupboard and the rice inside the bucket.

"Do you eat eggs?" I ask.

"Yes," he says.

"Are you going to eat my food today?" I'm asking because he's refused it multiple times.

But today he promises to eat, I fry eggs and make salsa to go with bread. I serve him first, he eats right away. Well, I'm glad he's eating, even though I know his sister would launch nuclear missiles if she heard that her brother spent money on me.

I sit on the bed with my own plate. I can feel my nose stretching and poking into his business.

"Have your brother and mother resolved their issues?" I ask.

He sips the Oros first, I can see this is not his favourite topic.

"I don't know," he says.

I'm confused. He dips a slice of bread in the salsa and eats.

Is he that hungry? I need the scoop.

"I left early in the morning, I haven't gone home," he says.

I can't hide the shock. After last night's war he left in the morning and didn't check up on anyone?

"What if something happened in your absence?" I ask.

He shrugs, "It would've happened even in my presence."

"No Bonga, you have to stay in touch, not with the drama but with everyone's emotions. I know if I had siblings I'd check up on them, just like I do with my dad." This sounds a bit

judgmental but true to Christ, I'm only trying to advise him, for some weird reason I care.

"You don't know my family," he only says that.

I think I got a glimpse of them. They're a family from hell, but where is he going to swap them? Who's going to take Nombuso away from him and make her his sister? Nobody.

"I don't know them, yes. But I saw the youngest one, he was cursing all the way to the hospital. The other one was shooting people, Nombuso called me names for no reason. So far you're the only calm person in the family, I may be wrong, but your character could be an asset in your family if you allow yourself to be involved," I say.

"Why can't I be an asset to you?"

"I'm serious Bonga," I say.

He exhales heavily, "I don't know, I'm really exhausted."

I can see that he's exhausted, but family is family.

His phone rings, I get up and take the plates to a washing basin. I'm not going to cook today, I will eat bread and carry it to work for lunch.

I don't know who's stressing him over the phone now, he drops the phone with a long face.

"Is everything okay?" I ask.

"Phume is trending on social media kissing her brother," he says.

"Who is Phume?" I'm taking out my phone, I need to see the kiss for myself.

"Sphakamiso's girlfriend, I mean ex," he says.

This worries him, I check Twitter, that's where all the news are. I don't know both of them, it's not even a video but snaps of

them kissing. It's making news because they're brother and sister, grandkids of the late business mogul who's yet to be buried.

"This is going to trigger him," he says. He's worried about his brother.

"Is he not over her?" I ask.

"She was taken from him because of this arranged marriage thing. We knew them as brother and sister but it turned out they're not blood related, hence the arranged marriage to keep both of them in the legacy. I just can't believe that Phume would choose money over my brother."

"Is she the mother of his child?" I ask.

"No, the child happened with someone else, it wasn't intentional," he says.

I'm trying to understand this triangle, but I won't get clarity from him because he's on his brother's side and angry at this Phume. I haven't met him yet but I'm also scared of what a triggered-Sphakamiso might do.

"Maybe you should go home," I say.

"You're always kicking me out," he says.

I look at him, thinking he's being his playful self.

"I'm not kicking you out, I'm suggesting that you go home and monitor the situation."

He gets off the chair, "Okay, I will go."

Now he's giving me an attitude, I'm only looking out for him, tomorrow he will be drowning in grief if his brother hurts another person.

He leaves without saying goodbye, I close the door and throw myself in the bed.

Why is this person stressing me out? We are not even anything to each other.

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MALIBONGWE

He makes his way inside the silent room full of people. You can cut the silence with a bread knife. It's tense, they're family but they hate each other. Mkhuleko is sitting on the other side glued to his phone. It was too soon for him to be discharged but public hospitals are always full and needing beds for new patients. There was no internal damage with him, only a wound. Nombuso is knitting, she doesn't look like she's having a good day. And their mother is a depressed widow, this Sphakamiso thing has taken her back to grief and hopelessness. Yoli was playing outside alone, Sphakamiso and Aphelele are missing.

"Where is Sphakamiso?" he asks.

Nobody answers.

"Aphelele?" he asks.

"He was fetched by those people who found him. He's not here and I doubt he's coming back," Nombuso says.

"What?" He's confused.

Sphakamiso walks in just on time. He needs to explain what Nombuso is saying.

"Where is Aphelele?" Malibongwe asks.

Sphakamiso sits, his eyes are blood-shot, he's been crying since Khulekani came to pick Aphelele. Yes, he asked them to,

and Aphelele was very happy to get in the quantum and leave. But he's been a mess of emotions, a part of him feels like he gave his son up. "He's in Durban."

"Doing what there?"

"He will stay there now."

"Why?" This is not something Malibongwe expected to come home too. They've always had fights in the family, some worse than what happened last night. Nombuso once packed her bags and went away for two days after Mkhuleko fought with her. It was bad, even Yoli was caught up in it. But they were able to reunite and start other fights.

"Why should he stay here?" Sphakamiso asks.

"Is this not his family?" he asks.

Sphakamiso slides down on the couch and sighs. "Minus one plate, he's not coming back, I hope everyone is happy now."

"This is crazy. How can you give away the child without even telling me? Who did you discuss it with?"

"That's my son, I make decisions," – Sphakamiso.

"Just like that bafo?" He's hurt, because regardless of how the siblinghood is between all four of them, he's been a good uncle to both Yoli and Aphelele. He was buying nappies and baby juices for them. It would've hurt still, but getting a heads-up would've been nice.

Nobody is saying anything, they're not calling Sphakamiso out. Well, he's sat many times too and silently watched wrong things happening. God knows how MaVilakazi allowed Aphelele to leave, just like that.

"So what did you say was the reason for you to give Aphelele away?" he asks.

Sphakamiso doesn't answer. His silence is a very loud answer. Nombuso doesn't care, MaVilakazi is scared of her son, and Mkhuleko...he will care one day. For now he's still waiting for Sphakamiso to acknowledge that he shot him. Yes, it was a mistake, but he can say sorry.

Malibongwe walks out, he makes his way to his rondavel and shuts the door. How can Miyanda expect him to make peace with and among these people? She accuses him of disregarding their feelings, when have they ever considered his? Sphakamiso gave Aphelele away, he wasn't even given a chance to say goodbye.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 23

PHUMELELE

I'm all over the internet kissing 'my brother'. I've deactivated all my social media accounts after blocking some accounts, sadly I cannot block people coming here and asking questions. I saw a shadow but I didn't see who it was. Mpatho has questioned everyone, nobody is owning up to it. Sooner than later damage control needs to be done. We, or rather he as the face of the Mshazis, needs to tell people what's up for the sake of the Mshazi brand.

Someone is at the door, I don't know how many times I should tell them I don't want to talk. This one doesn't even wait for me to respond, she pushes the door and walks in. It's Beauty, she's everywhere today, you can't even tell she just lost her husband.

"You're getting weak," she says walking in.

Me, getting weak? I'm one hell of a strong young lady.

“I’m not weak,” I say.

“Phume you kissed him, forget that the scandal is now helping us distract him. But you can’t be kissing him because he’s sad,” she says.

“Hhayi-bo didn’t you say I must make him fall in love with me?”

She exhales deeply, “I did, but...”

“But nothing Beauty, you shouldn’t have took pictures and posted them. Why were you even standing at the door and watching?” I’m just guessing, she was the only person who saw us sitting together.

“Okay, I’m sorry, I just don’t want you to lose focus. Anyway, what were you talking about?” So it was her, we need to be careful from now on.

“He was asking why I met up with Sphakamiso. He’s not happy we are talking, he’s jealous,” I say.

“When are you meeting with Sphakamiso again? You need to have sex with him, umgcwalisele.” This one thinks she’s smart, she thinks she’s going to hit two birds with one stone. Once she’s destroyed my relationship with Mpatho she’s going to make a move on him, right?

“I can’t be everywhere when I’m supposed to be mourning. Sphakamiso is dealing with some things, I’m sure he’s heartbroken right now because of the kiss,” I say.

She rubs my shoulder, “I’m sorry-ke, why don’t you make up to him while Mpatho is dealing with the media and confused clients?”

Honestly, she’s exhausting, doesn’t she take time out and rest?

“Okay, I will sneak out tonight, please cover for me if any suspicion comes up.”

“I’m your girl, don’t worry about it.”

She's up to something and I will only overpower her by acting dumb.

I haven't seen much of Mpatho the whole day. Aunt Brandi arrived with a 7 year old granddaughter, the mother is said to have moved to Pretoria and never came back. I can't help but wonder if Sphakamiso's prostitute didn't have another child before Aphelele. With the bad lucks that I have, I wouldn't be surprised if the universe decides to make my sister my first love's babymama. Aunt Brandi is playing I don't know which role, but she's here and calling the shots.

It's 6:14pm when I leave the house, nobody pays any attention, I disappear smoothly. I'm not going to Sphakamiso, I haven't talked to him since the day we officially broke up. I'm going to see Ntombi and chill for an hour then come back. Beauty needs to believe that I'm still her toy, one thing I'm sure of is that Mpatho will know my whereabouts, I'm using one of the family cars.

I didn't think I'd find Ntombi's father at home, she didn't mention it when we talked earlier. Her mother is wearing an ankle-hugging dress, she looks like a calm wife. It's awkward walking into them, they're all sitting in front of the TV as a family. My life once looked this complete and perfect; having a mom and dad on the table, in one roof.

"Sanibona," I greet.

"Phumelele, is this you? Usukhule kanje!" – that's Ntombi's father pulling my leg. I'm still the same height he left me, maybe I just gained weight and became colder.

He shakes my hand, I go and sit next to Ntombi. Awkward!

We need privacy, there's a lot to catch up on. I need to know why hey father is home and tell her about Beauty serving Mpatho in the bedroom.

"Baba, let's go and unpack your luggage," her mother says.

She's a sweetheart when she chooses to, they leave us to our young conversations.

Ntombi turns to me as soon as they disappear. "I think there's trouble in paradise," she says.

"Which paradise?" I'm confused.

"My paradise," she says.

"Ntombi you don't have a paradise."

She rolls her eyes, "Fine, my former paradise. I asked him to come and pay the damages for taking my virginity, but he refused saying he didn't make me pregnant."

"So what are you going to do?" I ask.

"I have no choice but to tell the folks. I think my dad will go and request the payment. Now my problem is that I didn't bleed, Kwanele is now doubting that I was a virgin knowing exactly that I was coming from a Reed-dance when it happened."

"Yoh, what if he denies?" I'm worried about her. Her mother will make a big deal out of this.

"I don't know bruh. Anyway, your kiss is still trending," she says.

My turn to blow out a sigh.

"I don't know what got over me, I walked into him being comforted by Beauty and kissed him after hashing things out," I say.

"Beauty? Is she making a move or what?"

"She's up to something, but she won't succeed."

“What if she likes him?”

“Liking Mpatho? Hhayi, hard luck for her, she must try in her next life.”

She bursts out laughing, “Are you sure you’re not catching feelings for ‘your brother’?”

“I’m not catching feelings but Beauty needs to stay away,” I say.

We always have a lot to talk about. Before I know it we’ve binged on two packets of biscuits and sat down for over an hour gossiping and laughing about our problems.

Driving back home I don’t know what to expect. Did she fall for the trick and snatched me to Mpatho? I hope so, I want to be sure of her motives. It’s quiet now, the kids must’ve went to sleep. They give me headache, maybe I’m just not into little human beings, they’re a lot for me with their noise and constant crying.

Aunt Brandi is in the kitchen, I don’t know what she’s boiling in the big pot.

“Phumelele,”

Gosh, can’t she ignore me the same way I ignore her?

“Hi Brandi,” I say.

“I’m an aunt to you. Are you hungry? Nomusa left you food but Olwethu was crying for it. “

“That’s interesting,” I’m pissed.

“Yes, you will eat fish,” she says, very bold.

“No, I’m full, thanks.” I take one step away.

She talks again, sigh.

“Mpatho has been looking for you,” she says.

“Is it?” I say walking away.

All the strangers are watching TV, they don't even notice me walking past. I'm glad this is a big house with many rooms, we can be inside the same house and not numb into each other, unless we need to use the kitchen of course. I have my own TV, nothing is going to make me sit with Beauty's sisters.

I use the bathroom and wash my face to apply the night cream. Before I do anything else I need to see Mpatho. I want to know what Beauty told him, I didn't see her in the lounge with her family. Is it even family only or the whole village?

I make my way to his room, the door is slightly open. I somehow dump my manners at the door and just push the door and walk in. And who do I walk into? Lindy sitting on Mpatho's bed with a skinny top exposing her cleavage and short skirt. My skin is about to crawl off me.

“Where is Mpatho?” I sound and look mad.

“In the bathroom,” she says nonchalantly.

I make my way to his bathroom, I don't care what he's busy with there. I want to know why he claims to loyal but still entertain Beauty and her family. She's sitting on his fuckin' bed for Christ' sake!

I walk into him pulling up pants, he was peeing.

He turns with a frown, then see that it's me and irons it off.

“What is Lindy doing in your bed?” I ask.

“She's drunk,” he says.

“So what?” I'm fuming.

“Phume...”

“No Mpatho, I dumped Sphakamiso for you, you can’t do this to me.”

“Calm down, I’m not doing anything wrong. Where were you?”

“I was at Ntombi’s house. What did Beauty tell you?”

“Nothing,” he says turning to the sink and washing his hands.

Why doesn’t he take this seriously?

“She wants you, either for herself or for Lindy,” I say behind her.

“Phume have you been drinking?” He’s dismissing my instincts. I’m a girl, I know what I’m talking about.

“If I ever find a woman in your room again you and I will never speak again.”

His eyes widen, I’m not joking here, if it happens again we are over.

“I can’t have an attitude, tomorrow I’m putting our plan in motion and I can’t afford anyone suspecting a foul play. We are a tight family, remember?”

“Okay, but I really think she wants to destroy us. She told me to go and sleep with Sphakamiso.”

“Are you kidding?” He looks disgusted.

The same way I was disgusted seeing Lindy on his bed.

“And what did you do?” he asks.

I take a step back, totally stunned.

“What kind of a question is that? I went to see Ntombi, I told you.”

He inhales sharply and nods.

“I will see you tomorrow,” he says.

Nope, not like that!

I stand on my toes and kiss him. He wraps his arms around my waist and kisses me, breathy.

He pulls back, "I'm angry, please don't turn me on."

"You're angry?" I ask.

"Yeah, I'm angry, but it's not you," he says, his face is still calm.

I know he's angry at Beauty for telling me to go and sleep with Sphakamiso. At this point I don't care what happens to Beauty, he can go extreme, she deserves it.

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BEAUTY

Nothing had worried her more than her money nor reporting. This moron had three days to make a transaction, she gave him a good deal and even passed him some important contacts for the job. For him to drag feet when it's time to transfer makes him untrustworthy. Poor people are like that, you give them R500k and they will suddenly think they deserve billions.

She's calling him for the fifth time today, the fool hasn't been picking up.

This time he does, bloody devil.

"Fool, who do you thinking you're dodging?"

"Hi Mrs Mshazi," he says in a very calm voice.

"Where is my money?" She's shaking with anger. She's got so many missions to achieve, not to be running after him wanting what's hers.

“I’m not your banker, am I?” Oh, he’s cheeky now!

“I’m not playing with you, you’re only 10 minutes away from me.”

“I don’t owe you anything Mrs Mshazi, if your husband didn’t order for my father to be killed he’d be still alive and working for his family.”

No, no, no! Say what now?

“I was helping you out, I want my money,” she says, grabbing her weave off and throwing it on the floor. Her temperature is rising, what the fuck!

“You’re not getting anything, please stop calling me.”

“Hey wena masaka, I gave you access to my empire because you’re poor. Now you think you can double-cross me, just wait and watch what’s going to happen.”

“You try one wrong thing, I’m having a conversation with your husband’s grandson.”

She’s sweating, there’s a lot she’d already planned for that money.

Someone comes behind her and picks her wig from the floor. Her heart almost stops beating when she sees it’s Mpatho.

“Who’s double-crossing you? Nobody does that to us, we are the Mshazis,” he asks.

Her mouth is dry, she almost dropped the phone on the floor.

He’s staring at her with a calm face.

“Nobody...it doesn’t matter,” she says.

He nods and puts the wig on her head and walks away.

What the fuck!

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 24

PHUMELELE

I woke up with a tight chest today, I heard a baby crying last night, I was woken up by it. But as soon as I opened my eyes it was quiet. It's possible that I was having a dream, just that something is so unsettling about it given that today Mpatho plans to terminate Beauty's pregnancy. I can't talk to anyone about this, Mpatho is not home, I don't know where he's gone.

Aunt Nomusa usually knocks at my door and asks me if I want to have my breakfast in the bedroom. It's strange of her not to come and check on me till this time. After dressing up I make my way to the kitchen. I don't know where the bunch of kids are today, there's no noise, I love this peace.

Oh, she's making traditional beer.

"Morning aunty," I say climbing on the kitchen stool.

She looks up, "You're finally awake. Your food is in the microwave."

"Thank you, where is everyone?" I ask.

"They're gone out for breakfast," she says.

"Even Beauty and Aunt Brandi?" I'm not aware of their friendship, I just know that Aunt Brandi likes everyone who didn't like my mother.

"It was their suggestion," Aunt Nomusa says.

This family is weird, what are people going to say seeing the widow gallivanting in restaurants while her husband is lying in mortuary. I take my food from the microwave and boil water for coffee.

“Did Mpatho eat before leaving?” I ask.

“Yes, they took care of him,” she says.

“They?” I raise my eyebrow.

“That cousin who’s always drinking, she made breakfast for him on Beauty’s instruction.”

“And he ate it?” I’m pissed.

“He was rushing to Durban, I was still busy with the fire outside.”

I don’t know why Mpatho is still entertaining Lindy, I thought I made myself clear yesterday. We don’t love each other but we are married, the least he could do is respect me. I make myself a cup of coffee and go to my room with my food. I don’t want to stress Aunt Nomusa out with my problems, she’s busy.

I won’t confront him over the phone, I will wait for him to come home. There’s a statement that was released by the Mshazi spokesperson, I didn’t even know there was one. It’s that man who was mkhulu’s shadow, he clarified my relationship with Mpatho. We were never brother and sister by blood, it’s a family situation that was handled by elders for the benefit of the business. I know this statement is receiving some backlash from the public as well. I will be off social media for a while.

I feel like I was told the truth, but not the whole of it. My mother seemingly called the shots in all of this. She was the mastermind behind this arrangement and it’s so strange how easily mkhulu and her husband agreed to it. They could’ve easily gotten rid of me and allowed Mpatho to marry whoever he wanted. Now I’m wondering why my mother had so much power in this family? What did she bring to the table?

There's noise again, the kids are back with their mothers. I'm unlucky because I'm returning the dishes to the kitchen when they arrive.

"Uwunyube kodwa Phumelele," Aunt Brandi says walking in.

"She loves to sleep," Aunt Nomusa says in my defense.

I don't know what makes Brandi thinks she knows me enough to speak on my character. I'm an introvert, I like my space, that shouldn't bother anyone.

Lindy is carrying shopping bags, one is dumped on the kitchen counter, it's alcohol. Other ones are carrying clothes. If Mpatho and I didn't honor mkhulu's wishes things would've gone south really quick. Beauty has already fetched everything that's in her bloodline, she's taking them out for breakfast and blessing them with clothes out of nowhere.

"Come, I got you something," Aunt Brandi says.

I stand still, she got me something?

I follow her, her granddaughter is behind her eating a big packet of chips. She opens her handbag once we are in the dining room and takes out a small sachet with brown powder. What is this?

She puts it in my palm and closes my hand. "That's going to help you."

"With what?" I'm scared to even hold this thing.

"There are man-snatchers here, you need to make sure Mpatho only has eyes for you."

Hhayi-bo Jesu!

"I'm not a witch," I say.

“Who said anything about witchcraft? I’m glad you got back to your senses and came back, this is your house now, you just have to marry that boy.”

“So that you can receive the lobola?” This conversation is as exciting as watching a snail race.

“I’m your aunt, your father is my husband,” she says.

I put the sachet on her lap, “I’m good, I don’t need this.”

“Phumelele wena!” She’s only pretending to care for her selfish reasons.

I’ve never needed her, I won’t start now.

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I took a nap, when I wake up it’s dark outside, there’s so much noise in the house. I visit the loo and then go check if Mpatho is back. Yes, I’m still going to confront him about eating Lindy’s breakfast and leaving without saying goodbye. He didn’t even bother calling me during the day to check up on me.

Someone is crying, there seems to be something going on in the dining room. Everyone is gathered there, Mpatho included. So he didn’t bother coming to me even when he came back home? There’s no balance in this life.

“This is strange. Aunty are you sure she didn’t eat anything she’s allergic to?” Lindy asks.

“I wouldn’t know, I’ve been busy with traditional beer the whole day,” Aunt Nomusa says.

There seems to be a problem, everyone looks worried.

Lindy’s phone rings, she steps aside and answers.

“Phume did you cook any food that Beauty may have been allergic to?” the other cousin whose name I don’t know asks.

“Phume can’t cook,” Mpatho says.

Aunt Brandi clears her throat, giving me a snide look.

“What’s going on here vele?” I ask.

Nobody answers me. I feel Mpatho’s hand brushing my hip briefly, I look at him hoping he’d say something, but nothing.

Lindy comes back, looking more worried.

“She was pregnant,” she says.

“Was?” multiple people ask.

They’re shocked about the pregnancy itself and that it’s no more.

“Yeah, it wasn’t a stomachache, she was miscarrying,” – Lindy.

Gasps!

My hands start sweating. Did Mpatho do it? I remember the dream, I didn’t get the chance to tell him about it, maybe it meant something. Maybe it was a warning, God saw that we are planning something evil against the baby.

“Mmm, surely it was because of stress,” Mpatho says.

“No, it wasn’t, Beauty was not stressed,” Lindy quickly dismisses.

We all look at her, curiously.

“Her husband died, what do you mean she was not stressed?” Mpatho asks.

I know he did something and now he’s playing mind games.

“Yeah she was stressed, obviously she loved her husband and...she loved him. You’re right, it was stress.” She doesn’t

know how to disagree without disclosing her cousin's gold-digging side.

"I will go to the hospital and check on her," Mpatho says.

"I will come with you, I want to know what the doctors say," Lindy says, grabbing her jacket from the chair.

"No, it's a family matter," Mpatho says.

"I'm family..." She looks disappointed.

He gives her a look, he's not negotiating with her. She sits down with a long face.

I tap his shoulder as he turns away. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

I can feel several pairs of eyes on me. At this point I don't care to keep the 'enemy' act, Beauty is not here and I no longer care if she finds out that I betrayed her. This man and I need to talk.

He's in my bedroom, I close the door after him and point him to the bed. His head is on Beauty, he no longer cares about my feelings and everything I said to him last night.

"We talked yesterday, I told you how I feel about you entertaining Lindy."

"What do you mean?" He's acting dumb.

"I told you Beauty is playing a game, this morning she told Lindy to make you breakfast and you entertained it." I'm fuming, I've boiled this up all day.

"You said I mustn't allow them in my bedroom, you never mentioned food."

"Mpatho, you're not 6 years old. Why must I mention everything one by one?"

He sighs and stands up. I move away, I don't want him to touch me.

"Please don't be this person," he says.

"Be what person?" I almost yell.

"Insecure and easily shaken. Beauty's cousins are not my spec."

"Yet you entertain them, mxm!"

"They're in the house helping with the arrangements. You were asleep and you can't cook, what was I supposed to do? Udlala ngami Phume."

"You knew I can't cook when you agreed to this arrangement," I say. To be honest, I'm hurt, I didn't expect him to use that to defend himself.

"I understand your emotional state, I wish I can help and not do anything that's going to trigger you. But I can't be an ass for no reason, I can't pay for what happened in your relationship." He grabs my hands and holds them to put me in place. He knows what he's saying makes me angry, because how is this about my relationship with Sphakamiso?

"I don't want to be out there protecting our legacy and searching for our cars and worrying about what my wife would think if she found out I'm having lunch with a female investigator," he says.

He called me his wife! I don't think he paid attention to his words, I can't describe my feelings but mostly it's shock.

"I'm not saying don't express yourself, we can talk about it. Let me know what your fears are and how the cheating incident changed you. But later, I have to go and be a supportive grandson while making sure the medical records are clear," he says.

“I had a bad dream; I dreamed of a baby crying last night,” I say.

“Don’t worry, I’m sure it’s because you knew what was going to happen today.” He cups my face and gently stares into my eyes. I can’t believe he just committed crime and I’m here in his arms, we are talking about it nicely.

“There’s something I’m taking care of as well,” he says.

“Okay, is that why you were gone the whole day and didn’t even check on me?”

“Yes, someone from this village helped Beauty steal the cars.”

Shut the front door!

“Beauty stole the cars?” My jaws are on the floor.

“Yes, with the help of someone who lives 10 minutes away from here and I’m going to find out who it was.”

Oh....that’s very strange.

“How did you find out?” I ask.

“I heard her talking to him or her over the phone demanding the money, she was double-crossed,” he says.

Somebody stole the cars for Beauty and broke whatever deal they had. I’d be supportive and doing anything I can to get the information from Beauty, but I can’t. Not when the possibilities of it being someone I care about are so high.

“I will need your help again, keep your ears open,” he says.

I nod.

He kisses my lips, “See you later.”

I walk him to the door, he’s going to the hospital to see Beauty. One mission has been accomplished, I played a role, I think he trusts me now more than he trusts anyone. I chose his side when I secretly married him, we were going to stick together

and do whatever it takes to get rid of competitors and threats. But not this time, if it's the Mcinekas as my instincts have been telling me from day one, I'd be compelled to protect them and betray Mpatho.

"Phumelele!"

She wants to break my door.

Can't I be left alone with my thoughts?

I open the door, she walks in wearing a kitchen apron.

"The only thing she was good at was opening her legs. What kind of a mother doesn't teach her daughter how to cook but arranges for her to be married?" She's insulting my mother and untying the apron and putting it on me.

What the hell is going on here?

"You will kiss that boy goodbye. Did you hear him complaining that you can't cook in front of people? Embarrassment everywhere!"

"Brandi why are you..." She's pulling me out of my bedroom.

"You need to learn how to cook, and this thing of sitting here alone all day is not going to work- uzodlula."

I have problems that are bigger than making a fuckin' stew!

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 25

PHUMELELE

I put a plate of beef riblets with cheese and macaroni, yam and greens.

“What is this?” he asks.

He just came out the shower, he’s wrapped in a white towel.

“It’s food, I cooked,” I say.

I’m not lying, unless if the macaroni took itself out of the packet and the greens rinsed themselves before Aunt Brandi did almost everything.

He looks down at the food, then up at me.

“Who else ate this?”

“You’re going to be the first one eating.”

His eyes widen, I lower myself down to his bed and sit.

He puts on a T-shirt and decides to only wear boxers below. His thighs are firm with muscles, it’s hard for me to look at his direction for more than a minute. I’ve had sex with this man, I can never look at him like I used to, we did things that I never thought I’d do with him and now my body remembers him.

“Can I eat with you?” He’s picking the plate.

“Mpatho you came home at 10pm, I had my dinner a long time ago,” I say.

He sits with a fork in his hand and pauses, staring at the food. By the way I tasted the food and dished for him, Aunt Brandi was coaching me throughout. I think I did well, the arrangement looks good on the plate.

He looks at me again, “Must I eat?”

“There’s nothing wrong with the food, I didn’t cook it, okay? But I helped with the process,” I confess because in his head he thinks I cooked the food and added 2 full packets of salt. The kind of faith he has in me is one for the books, SMH.

He takes a bite and looks at me, relieved by the taste.

“Thank you,” he says.

“You’re welcome. So, how did it go?”

“With Beauty? Nothing was found in the tests, so it was ruled as a natural miscarriage.”

I lower my voice and ask, “How did you do it? You were not even home in the morning.”

“This is delicious,” he says biting a riblet and licking his fingers. The compliment is just to ignore my question, I guess he doesn’t trust me to that extent yet.

“Mpatho,”

“Please let it go, it’s done.”

So my kind gesture of serving him dinner didn’t soften any spot.

“Did you find any lead about the robbery?” I ask.

“I will focus on that after the funeral. Please Phume, I don’t want to ruin you, I want you to know how things are done and what sacrifices I make along the way, but don’t be in it,” he says.

“What do you mean? I’m already in it, if it wasn’t for me Beauty’s baby wouldn’t have died.” It’s too late for him to worry about my innocence, my hands are already dirty.

“I will be the man I was raised up to be, I just need you by my side supporting me, whenever I need your help I will ask.” He takes another bite and nods, “This is good, I wish it was really you who cooked. But it still means a lot.”

“So you’re the type that wants a woman to cook and clean?”

“Aunt Nomusa is here for that, but I love being spoiled by my woman once in a while. Waking up and finding a shirt that was ironed by my woman, rather than a helper. There’s an intimate meaning to it.”

The answer is a simple yes, he wants a wife that cooks and irons his clothes before work.

“So if it wasn’t for the arrangement, I would’ve never been your type?” I ask.

He licks his fingers, manners! I grab a serviette and pass to him. He chuckles and wipes his fingers, then puts the empty plate on the pedestal.

“Answer me,” I demand.

“These days you’re crazy, what happened?” He pulls me to his arms. He wraps one around my shoulder and drinks a bottle of water with the other hand.

“I’m not your type, am I?”

“You are my type,” he says.

“Beauty said you like...”

He heaves a loud sigh. “So everytime we argue Beauty is behind it? Tell me who is entertaining her between you and I?”

“Okay sorry, I just...I don’t know how to say it.” I’m struggling to express myself in a way that’s not going to come across as stupid.

“You don’t love me but you don’t want anyone to fall in love with me?” He raises his eyebrow.

It’s not exactly that, but it’s that.

“Mpatho we are married for now, even though it’s still just between the two of us, but I want us to respect and be kind to each other,” I say.

“Kind?” He chuckles.

I don’t know why he’s highlighting only that from everything I said.

“I know girls Phume, I know exactly what you want. For your information ke, I don’t have a specific type, anyone that believes in me, loves me and supports me is my type,” he says.

I remember the conversation we had outside Home Affairs, I wasn’t kind, I hurt him. They always say words are sharper than any weapon, they leave deeper scars.

“I hope you also know that sometimes girls say things they don’t mean to hurt you,” I say.

“That’s tricky. I trained to defend my country, here at home I learned to protect my family and legacy. Come after my country, come after my legacy, I will know how to fight back. But when you come after my heart, I won’t know how protect myself from a heartbreak.”

I feel bad because in that particular moment I was doing what Beauty asked me to do. I was using his pain and vulnerability against him. I knew how desperately he needed me to say I believed in him. I said I didn’t to hurt him.

“I will be aware from now on,” I make a promise.

He lies on his back and pulls me with him, I lie on his chest with my hand clasped into his. It’s been chaotic, at times I even forget that mkhulu is dead and we are having a funeral in three days. It’s not easy but it’s better being on his side.

“What are your plans for this year?” he asks.

This is an unexpected question!

“Finding myself,” I say.

“Mmmmmm,” he rubs his thumb on my shoulder.

We fall into heavy silence for a minute. Honestly, I don’t know what my further plans really are. Divorcing him and then what? Buy a house and live on my own my whole life? I can start a business if he keeps his end of the deal, but my life would be

still empty. I have no back to turn to and no exciting future to step into.

“I want to have kids before 35,” he says.

He’s told me that he wants to have a family but I didn’t know he wants to have kids within 2 years from now.

“I want to love and be loved back. So in these few months that we are going to be married, if it ever happens that you fall in love with me, please make it real love.”

He exhales heavily and looks at me; a gentle look that drops my own eyes from him and fills my tummy with weird feelings.

“So my plan this year is to find real love, and I hope it’s with the girl I’ve known how to love since I was 16,” he says and caresses my fingers.

I don’t raise my eyes to him. I’ve never tried to open my heart for anyone else beside Sphakamiso. I loved him from my teenagehood to...I don’t know if I’ve unloved him. Sleeping here in Mpatho’s arms and not feeling any contempt is strange to me. Strange that I no longer want to smash his head against the wall and strip him out of every cent that this family has. I’m not lying here thinking of ways to kill him, and mostly I don’t feel like he was ever my brother. Yes, I once considered him one, but that relationship had no existing bond. I’ve slide away, I’m heading to a place I don’t understand. I’m allowing that to happen after everything I promised myself. If there’s anybody I’ve betrayed the most in this life it would be me.

“You’re quiet, what’s on your mind?” He’s still caressing my hand.

I take a deep breath and raise my eyes to his. His lids are sliding down, he keeps licking his bottom lip, I’m not sure if he now wants to sleep.

“Your bed is bigger than mine,” I say. I care less about the size of the bed difference, it’s his arms I want to be wrapped in throughout the night.

His lip curves into a side smile. He brings my hand up to his lips and pecks it.

“Please don’t lead me into temptations, you know we, or rather I, have to stay away from touching you for at least a week after the funeral. You see how bad it is already, how much more if you’re here the whole night? My dick will pop and burst,” he says.

I drop my eyes to his boxers, he’s grown two times bigger down there.

“So you’re kicking me out of your bedroom?” I’m not really sulking but I want him to feel bad before I leave.

He pulls me closer and lifts my chin up.

“I feel like you’re going to be hard to handle along the way.”

What is that supposed to mean? He kisses me while I’m still frowning at him.

“Now I’m not sure if I want you to grow up or stay young forever,” he says.

Again, he shuts me up with a kiss before I question the meaning of that.

I have to leave all this muscly comfort and go cuddle myself in my bedroom because someone chose to die.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I first heard the knock in my sleep and felt like it was a dream. But now I've opened my eyes, it's still there, there's a person at my door. The time is 3:25am, nobody should be at anyone's doors at this time. The only weapon I have in this room is a knife that I don't even know where I placed last night. I don't have any valuables that could attract robbers, except the 10kg rice that Malibongwe bought for me. Times are hard in South Africa, people die for wigs and cellphones, now I'm going to die for a bag of rice.

The knock comes again, my heart is about to pump out of my chest.

I need to come up with a plan otherwise I'm dead.

"Baby vuka," I say to nobody. If the robber hears that I'm with a man here maybe he will get scared and run. "Where's your gun baby?" I ask very loud.

Silence....

Maybe he's ran off.

I stay quiet, trying to calm down my thudding heartbeat.

The knock comes again. God why are you forsaking me?

"Baby wear the shoes I bought for you when you came out of jail after serving the murder sentence of that man you killed and chopped into pieces." I'm loud, moving my feet on the floor so that it sounds like someone is moving around.

The knock...fuck! I'm leaving this place with everything that's mine if the sun comes up with me alive. Never, I can't die kwaVez' unyawo.

I change my voice, making it sound deep and intimidating.

"Hosh ndoda unikezani? Ziwu-6 sthupha phezulu," I say, imitating Njabulo, my cousin who's always in and out of prison.

He pulled my ear to never talk about the jail stuff because it's dangerous. But I need to scare off this person.

"Miyanda," the voice says softly at the door.

My heart almost leaps out of my throat. The robber knows my name? Clearly I was a target, this is a premeditated murder.

"Miyanda is not here sebentini, who are you?" I maintain my dangerous prison-gangleader voice.

"Don't use that language, please open the door I'm cold." It's the Tazz-driving moron with dimples and out-of-service head. Did I have to go through all this trauma for him? What the fuck is he doing here at this time?

I open the door fuming.

He walks in, it's freezing cold outside and he's only wearing a white vest. Looking at the state he is in I don't even know where to start shouting at him.

Instead I ask; "Where are you coming from?"

"Home," he says.

No, he must try again.

But he doesn't, he's standing next to the bed with his hands crossed over his arms.

"Can I get in bed?" He looks exhausted.

"Yeah sure," my kindness speaks before my sane senses.

He's in bed now, wrapped in the blanket, where am I going to sleep? With him in one bed? I haven't known him for that long and our friendship or whatever it is, still remains undefined.

"What happened to you?" I ask sitting on the edge of bed.

"Nothing, can I take a little nap before I leave?" he asks.

"Yeah sure," I say.

“Please get in bed too, I’m going to give you space, I just want to nap.” His eyes are red-rimmed, it’s the first time he’s seen me and never flashed a smile. Something happened, he’s not physically hurt anywhere, however the emotional pain is evident in his eyes.

I lock the door and come back to bed. I have to share the bed with him, we will keep distance between us.

Whatever happened we’ll talk about it when we wake up.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 26

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I’m done getting ready for work; I’m dressed up, my lunch is packed. Malibongwe is still asleep, I don’t want to leave without telling him, I don’t know if he’d want to be here without me. He doesn’t know anyone around beside me.

He’s so cute though. I’m not usually attracted to cute guys because it gets you a lot of attention in public, people always end up thinking you’re the one paying bills. I gently shake his shoulder, his cute-sleep needs to come to an end.

He lazily opens his eyes and groans.

“It’s 6:41am, ” I say.

“Mmmm,” he rubs his eyes and looks around.

I still have about 15 minutes to spare, I sit on the bed while he stretches his muscles.

“Fuck,” he yawns and sits up.

“I didn’t know if you’d want to be here without me, I have to go to work.”

“Can I stay?” he asks.

I didn't expect him to ask that from me. We get along, but it's not that deep, this is my room, my private property.

"I won't touch anything, I just want to rest," he says.

Now I'm worried, why can't he go and rest at home?

"Bonga you're not in any trouble, right?" I need to be sure I'm not going to have police knocking at my door because of him.

"No, I'm not in trouble," he says.

"Then why were you at my door at 3am?"

He drops his eyes, I know he's lying about something.

"My car broke down and you were the closest person," he says.

"Broke down at 3am, where were you coming from?" I just want the truth.

"I had to sort things out, you know how the police are if they hear that someone owns a gun."

"Your crazy brother's gun?" I ask.

Maybe I should stop calling him the crazy brother and start remembering his name.

"Yeah, Sphakamiso, I had to control the damage and I lost track of time." Men lie with a straight face, I don't understand this talent of theirs, it's so natural.

"Wena ke, are you okay?" I ask.

"Yes," he nods.

He can't fool me, not with that puffed up face and grief-stricken eyes.

"But you're sad, what's wrong?" I've seen the sad parts of him, but today he can't even cover it with a smile.

He's broken, visibly so.

“You can talk to me, Singh will wait,” I say.

Look at me putting my job on the line for a man who hasn't declared anything for me!

“I don't want to burden you with my problems, I can handle it.” He's lying again, this time to himself more than me. If he could handle anything he wouldn't be here avoiding going home.

“I will sit until you talk,” I threaten. I'm ready to give up my job for someone's issues; clap once, clap twice.

He releases a deep breath, by now he knows what kind of a person I am.

“Someone killed my father,” he says and inhales a sharp breath.

I almost say daaaamn, but I remember I have to be a good listener for him to open up.

“My brother gave his son to strangers and didn't even wait for me to say goodbye. My sister is bleeding out on everyone after her failed marriage, she hates men. My brothers' relationship is hanging on a thin string after the shooting incident. Soon someone is going to die, it's now too much for everyone. I know you asked me to be their peace, but I failed,” he says.

I asked him to tell me what is it, now he's told me, I have to tell him something. But what do I say when he's telling me he's already given up? I don't come from a perfect family, not with Njabulo's fingerprints all over police stations, but I've never had to deal with this type of problem.

“So what are you going to do now, Bonga? You're going to wait for one of your siblings to die?” I ask.

“I just want to rest.” This is what he always wants. I think him wanting to rest and be away whenever there are problems is the problem among many problems.

“Did you at least try to talk to them?” I ask.

“I was ready to be their peace as you asked, I was going to stand in the middle and let anyone with a spear to throw at me. But getting there and not finding Aphelele home, enquiring about it and being told that I have no say changed everything,” he says.

I don't think he understood his assignment, he went there to focus on his own pain, which wasn't the plan. The plan was for him to listen, it wasn't going to be easy but he's going to have to step up because Nombuso has failed her role as the eldest.

“It sounds like your parents were grateful when they had you, I don't know if they were thanking God or idlozi, but they said 'malibongwe'. Don't make your birth the only proudest moment they've ever received from your existence.” I'm getting a bit emotional, I've never been anyone's advisor. I've never felt like someone needs my help like he does. I have to help him restore peace within his family from a distance. And I know I can do that because he seems to trust me, he listens when I talk.

“You can't run away without trying. Maybe your brothers need you to be in the same room as them and acknowledge your emotional absence in their lives. Maybe something happened to your sister in her marriage and she can't open up about it because, you know how the society is towards divorced women. I don't know, I'm just guessing and trying to figure out how you can approach this. I'm not saying neglect your own feelings, but at this tender stage just push them aside, at least you have me to talk to whenever you need someone.”

He shuts his eyes, his jaw tightens, I grab his hand and squeeze it.

He opens his eyes and looks at me.

“You have to be firm in your position, believe in yourself, they will believe in you.”

“Okay,” he says, taking a deep breath and nodding.

I check the time, I need to leave for work now.

“Are you going back to sleep?” I ask.

“I’m still tired but if you’re not okay with it I will drive home,” he says.

“Is your car not broken anymore?” I raise my eyebrows.

He scratches the side of his face, I shake my head in defeat.

“Can I sleep a bit? I will lock and bring the key to you at work,” he asks.

“Ah Bonga, I have private things here, what if you snoop around?” I’m referring to my panties, nothing too special because I don’t even own a dildo, I use my fingers.

“Trust me, the only place I want to snoop around at in this room is here, in the bed, with you.” He always say things like this, indirectly telling me something and I always ignore him because I like straightforward people. “As long as you don’t lift the mattress,” I say.

He lies back on the bed and chuckles. I know exactly what he meant, but I won’t acknowledge him until he stops going through the corners.

“There’s bread and butter, you will find juice in the cupboard,” I say.

“Okay, thank you.” He pulls the blanket up to his neck and stares at me as I pick my bag and earphones from the chair.

“You’re not saying goodbye?” he asks.

“Am I outside the door?” Uyaphapha too much, I’m still going to say goodbye.

“How are you going to say goodbye at the door?”

I look at him, “What do you want?”

“Come closer, I will tell you,” he says.

I sigh and go back to the bed and stand next to it.

He removes the blanket and gets up. I slip into laughter, there’s nothing funny, nerves are playing me. He’s standing in front of me and I’m failing to keep a straight face. I knew he was going to hug me and give me a peck on the cheek.

“Do I ever tell you how beautiful you are?”

I shake my head, “No.”

“I deserve to be arrested, that’s crime. I’ve never met any woman that’s beautiful as you. I can stare at you the whole day.” Sweet lies, I think that’s what they call it.

He wraps his arms around me and drops his chin on my shoulder.

“I didn’t mean to come here to dump my problems on you. That was never the plan, when I came here for the first time I was brought by matters of the heart,” he says.

“Matters of the heart?” I’m on his chest, leaning comfortably and forgetting about time. Singh’s rugs can wait, this is more important.

“You know what I mean,” he says, his face still on my shoulder.

He’s not shy, I don’t know why he won’t look at me in the face and tell me what are the matters of his heart. I gently pull from his chest and fold my arms, looking at him.

“I don’t know what you mean,” I say.

He takes his eyes away from mine and clears his throat. He's tapping down with one foot and looking so deceptively shy. I want to laugh at him, because the whole him is scared of ukushela straightforward.

"I feel like I've already turned you off," he says.

I keep staring at him, not giving him even a second to blink with my face away from him. He's turning me off now by thinking for me.

He clears his throat again, "It was a joke when I chased the Fortuner away. But it was no longer a joke when you gave me the wrong number, I really wanted to see you again, I knew I had to. And I've been wanting to see you again and again."

"Oh, is it?" I will make this hard for him.

He finally meets my stare. He pulls me back to his chest, wrapping his arm around my waist.

"I'd like for us to go to dinner again," he says.

"For ini?" I ask.

"Hawu Miyanda, I love you."

Wuuuuh, child! Somebody's son loves me.

"Isn't love a big word?" I ask.

"It's not big for me, I know what I feel," he says.

"Okay, thank you then, I love being loved." I tap my hand on his chest twice and slip out of his embrace.

He rests his hands on his knees and watches me as I head to the door.

I wave my hand, "Bye-bye!"

"Blue-tick?" He sits back on the bed and shakes his head with a smile stuck on his face.

I wasn't going to confess anything to him. Not today, he needs to break two sweats before I tell him I feel something for him. I walk out and pull the door behind me. Then I lean against it and release a huge breath. Thabani said I will never be loved by a proper man, he said I'd always be a 'meal' for my foreigner neighbors. Yes, from time to time he'd be mad that I live next to two Congolese guys and pull accusations out of his butthole. Now look at me, I wear jeans and paint my nails red and still get a 'proper man' falling in love with me.

Malibongwe didn't say he likes me, or that he'd like us to explore friendship and take it step-by-step, and he didn't say it's attraction. Nope, he went straight to the top, he said he loves me.

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MALIBONGWE

After he dropped the key at Miyanda's place he went to buy meat from the butchery. He thought he had it all figured out. He was going to have a conversation with Mkhuleko and Sphakamiso over braai, that's the most common duty that can unite them. After talking to them he was going to have a private conversation with Nombuso, she still needs to apologize to Miyanda for the way she talked to her because he's not planning to have a little fling with Miyanda. He wants peace and he wants to make Miyanda proud.

But he's standing over the braai-stand alone, Mkhuleko is sitting under the veranda watching, he still can't stand for too

long on his own. Sphakamiso didn't even bother coming out of his room; he's blasting music that's blocking everyone's ears.

Yoli comes and keeps him company.

"Malume who's going to eat the meat?" She's here with a million questions ke.

"Everyone," he says.

"Me too?" What she really wants is a piece.

He takes one and blows air on it for a minute than gives her. And just like that she's gone back to her mud castles behind the house. Aphelele would've been here too, that one was the family foodie. Hopefully he's being fed where he is and he's happy.

Sphakamiso comes out of his room with his phone in hand. The only reason he's here is because he's still trying to raise money for his departure, this time he will go to Joburg and search there.

"I just got a message from Phume," he says, reading it again on his phone.

Both Malibongwe and Mkhuleko look at him. He isolates himself in his room and comes out to talk about his ex-girlfriend?

"Are you two back together?" Malibongwe asks.

He looks triggered and irritated by that question. "No, she's married. She's just warning me that the dealership robbery is being investigated and there's a lead."

They look at him blankly.

He lifts his eyes to Malibongwe, “Someone helped the wife steal the cars and the investigation is leading to someone in this village, not far away from the Mshazis.”

Nothing. They’re just looking at him. Earlier he found out that Malibongwe quit his job, which is very strange because that was his only bread. More than ever, he’s been scarce at home, driving in and out at crazy hours of the night.

But nobody is coming forward with anything, so they’re all innocent.

“That’s all,” he says and turns to go back to his room.

Malibongwe stops him and asks, “Is the funeral still on Saturday?”

“That’s what I heard, I don’t know, I don’t care,” – Sphakamiso.

“Okay, I will buy a suit and go,” Malibongwe says.

Strange! The families don’t like each other, none of them came to their father’s funeral.

“For what?” Mkhuleko asks. He might just be the coldest and rudest of them all. Nombuso is just scared to crown him.

“To send Mvimbeni off and test-drive my new Range Rover,” Malibongwe says.

They both look around, expecting to see the Range Rover on the yard, but all they see is the old Tazz.

“You have a new car?” – Mkhuleko.

“A Range Rover?” – Sphakamiso.

He turns the meat, it’s almost ready.

Sphakamiso comes back and stands in front of the braai-stand. He’d like to think his brother is just fooling around because who is he to own a Range Rover? Can his salary even make the monthly installment?

“Does it belong to them?” – Sphakamiso.

“It belongs to me now,” he says with so much arrogance.

Forget prison, Mpatho will only sleep when he knows he’s cold inside a coffin.

“I’m going with you for one thing only; salads,” Mkhuleko says.

Sphakamiso turns his head and glares at him. This one thinks this is a war of Power Rangers that Malibongwe is starting.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 27

PHUMELELE

I knew it would hit him differently when the funeral comes. I don’t know if good or bad but I was a distraction throughout the week. He talked, he laughed, he sat at the table with a bunch of people and ate food. But it’s been different since yesterday, he’s in grief and I don’t know how to comfort him. He’s not open to being comforted either, he’s shut me out. Luckily there are relatives who in charge of all orders of the day. Beauty is not a typical village widow that sits on the grass-mat with a big blanket on the shoulders. No, she’s sitting on the chair wearing a big-ass hat and shades. The miscarriage didn’t affect her at all, when she came back from the hospital it was as if nothing had happened. I’m not feeling guilty anymore, she didn’t want that baby anyway, she’s moved on.

The service has started, it looks like a black-themed fashion event. Everyone went out of the way, except Aunt Brandi. She’s wearing an apron, doek tied clumsily on her head, and her role of the day is to tell everyone what they’re doing wrong. Her husband is here too, he’s wrinkled and walking with a stick. He

aged too quick, mkhulu looked better than him yet he was older. Mzimela is barely above 60 but he already looks 80 years old. I've avoided looking at his direction, I don't want to start thinking he's my biological father, I will never accept him.

It has become public news that Mpatho and I have been arranged to get married and that we've been intimate before the funeral. I've heard worse comments, some even guessing that we've been having sex. Earlier this morning I was called to the side by Aunt Brandi because of those rumors. I've made peace with her nose being poked deeply in my business, she doesn't care that we are not close, she involves herself.

"I only visited him in his room to talk, we didn't do anything," I defended my dignity.

"That Lindy girl says she hears noises coming from you two's bedroom. Was she hearing things?"

"I don't know what to say ke, I just told you we didn't do anything." She wasn't believing me and there was nothing more I could explain. It took a lot for us to have control that we had, it's frustrating to hear people claiming that we did something we both badly wanted but couldn't do.

Lindy is not drunk today, she's among lead singers at the front. Jealous down, she's got a beautiful voice, elders are mesmerized thinking she's a God-fearing child.

Things are happening too fast in this family. We are not the same, I doubt we will ever be. In a couple of weeks or months from now Beauty will be history in this family, just that her picture won't be hanging on the wall like those of everyone who have departed. She will be history because she will be canceled. Mkhulu was the only reason she set her foot here, with Mpatho taking over there will be no space for her and her cunning ways.

After long speeches and praises, the family is finally called to the front to view the body. I remain on my seat because I don't like seeing dead bodies. The last picture of a person is the one that sticks with you forever. Mpatho comes in with an uncle that only shows up for funerals only, he's mkhulu's brother's son. I feel bad for him because although the tent is full and everyone in the family is wearing black, he's still the only person feeling the loss. I have Aunt Brandi, regardless of how I feel about her, but she's here supporting me and making sure nobody messes with her husband's source of wealth. If it wasn't for the pending lobola they wouldn't be here. Beauty has her whole family, fellow villagers, ward councilors and extended-relatives supporting her. Mpatho's mother didn't reach out, mkhulu's death made news I'm sure she knows, Swaziland is not that far, surely her other kids are on social media as well.

I cannot deny that I care about Mpatho, seeing him this broken hurts me. I wish I can be his shoulder-to-cry-on, but unfortunately he wants to deal with it alone.

I need to get out before the exit gets crowded. I squeeze my way out of the tent, someone greets me before I exit. I turn to look at the person. Malibongwe? Sphakamiso? Mkhuleko with a walking stick? What the fuck is going on here?

"Long time," Mkhuleko says.

Yes, with him it's been a long time.

I would've asked what they're doing here but I can't speak anyhow with Malibongwe. I texted Sphakamiso two days ago, briefing him about the ongoing robbery investigation. He didn't respond, which is why I'm confused by his funeral attendance. These families don't get along, something between MaVilakazi and my mother, I don't know what it was but it's deep.

Sphakamiso doesn't say anything, our eyes lock for a second. He looks awfully different, he's lost a few kilos, his eyes look lifeless. I quickly turn my eyes away from him and look at Mkhuleko. He's wearing black tracksuit and a cap; respecting themes isn't one of his strengths. Malibongwe is in a three piece suit, he looks like those business associates at the front. "Sanibona," I say.

Him and Mkhuleko respond. Sphakamiso just looks at me. I don't think they're here to support me, I no longer mean anything to them, Malibongwe liked me when I made his brother happy, now he's just looking at me like a stranger. Mkhuleko looks excited, too excited for someone in the funeral.

I walk out before someone takes a picture of me talking to them and fabricates a story.

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MPATHO

It didn't sit well with him seeing the Mcinekas in the tent talking to Phume. She throws a fit everytime he has any kind of conversation with Lindy and Beauty, yet she can't give him the same respect she wants from him. He watches the coffin going down with the last parent figure that he had left. His chest is heavy but he's not going to cry over death; he's died too many times in this life as well. Beauty starts wailing, she's an Emmy-deserving actress. People are buying on the fake act and wasting their sympathy on her. He's never liked her, just like he never liked Phume's mother. There's something about women, they never like him. It started with his own mother, then Phume's mother, now Beauty. Even his grandmother, they

weren't close, even though she never made anything obvious but he knew that she wasn't attached to him like she was to Phume. The sad part is, he was the only child with the Mshazi blood running through his veins.

At 16 he didn't understand his father's reasons of wanting him to marry Phume. But he was promised that he was going to be given true love and he was going to have his own family to continue with the legacy. He was never a child that had a variety of options growing up, he took what was given to him and embraced it. He was never home during school season, he came home for holidays and Phume would be always on a summer vacation or girls trip with her mother. Them being away meant it was just him, his father and Mshazi. It could've been their bonding times but his father had a bond with one person only, that was his wife. The father and son relationship just rolled based on what being a man entailed at that time. Sometimes it would be bribing cops, getting competitors out of the way and sealing deals with bloodied hands. Whatever his mother did must've been unforgivable because no matter what he did, he was never prioritized. His grandfather hated his mother until he took his last breath. He still wouldn't explain why she was hated so much and why, after everything he's done for this family, he still didn't receive any accolades, instead it's more terms and conditions he gotten.

Right now as he stands here, he's the head of the family. He might need to fight Beauty because that one won't go down without a fight. He can't take comfort in being a married man, even though he's signed and recognized as one, Phume being his wife still remains a dream to be chased.

Most people came by foot since it's a short distance from home to the cemetery. However, someone decided not

to...Malibongwe. Not only is it surprising that they're here, but he's got new wheels. No number plate yet, it looks brand new. It's a black Range Rover Velar fitted with 22' Ferrada FT3 wheels. He didn't go closer to the grave, he's been leaning against it and watching 'the show' go down.

Not to judge him or anything, he can buy a car, in fact anyone can. But not a Range Rover out of nowhere, one that looks exactly like the one that was stolen from the Mshazi property at that. Although they've never known each other on a personal level, Mpatho can see that there's a bait placed for him. He remembers the phone call he walked into, he hasn't been suspecting anyone because the village has been the same ever since the robbery. Nobody was reported to be getting rich out of nowhere and there's no bad-ass criminal that's known by the community.

He stops by Malibongwe, this is one of his cars, no question about it.

"It's nice to see you here mfo kaGwazela," he says.

"You're welcome," Malibongwe responds while looking at his feet. There's something in the way he's looking at him. He's in a smart suit, no weapon in his hands, but he looks like someone who came for a war.

"Nice wheels," Mpatho says.

He dangles keys in his hand and leans back on the car. "I was just test-driving, it moves like a machine. I named it Captain."

There's a moment of silence and staring. This is a provocation and there's a reason for it. His eyes are full of hate and hunger for war. There's something he knows, when his brothers come over, one limping and one looking out of place, he doesn't even glance at them. His eyes are on Mpatho, he craves for him to make a comment. Anything that's going to justify him putting his hands on him near his grandfather's fresh grave.

But he only says, “Congratulations!”

Then he walks away.

Phume was watching, she's worried, the last thing she needs is someone getting hurt. Mpatho doesn't need this, neither do they. Sphakamiso didn't respond, she took that as positive silence, that neither he nor his brother had anything to do with stolen cars. But here they are, with a new Range Rover parked next to the cemetery for everyone to start asking questions. Because, unless you've won Lottery, you can't buy a Range Rover from being a Hardware assistant manager.

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BEAUTY

Think Beauty, think.

Phume and Mpatho are not married, she's in control of everything now. By the time he gets married, either to another woman or Phume because that one is getting loose, she'd be rich enough to go and start her own empire and leave the so-called legacy in the ashes. She has plans, fuckin' good ones. But if she's found guilty of arranging a robbery she'd lose everything and go to jail, if not killed.

Okay, now records need to be of good use. Stealing cars and getting that local rat to help her wasn't her original plan. Nope, cars weren't going to make her enough money. She's suck and rode that old man's wrinkled dick way too many times to be compensated by R2.5 million worthy cars. She's worth more than that, her vagina has seen the unspeakable and swallowed sperms that expired in the early 2000s.

Phume planned this with her boyfriend, the old brother was going to help, he's got a bit of a hijacking experience. Initially she was just going to blackmail the little girl with the recording she'd taken of her speaking to her boyfriend on the phone in her bedroom. But then she thought it wasn't a bad plan and decided to make it hers and find the Malibongwe pig. He refused at first, to get him on board she had to spill the beans and tell him how his father died and who was behind it. Mess with a man, but not his family. He agreed, they planned everything, she brought Captain Masinga into it. He was going to take 20% and the Malibongwe pig 30%, then the rest of the money was supposed to come to her. Masinga got his share, he's blocking all the sources that could lead to justice, he's working on the unruly brother's cases. So not only did she give that pig a piece of bread, she gave him an everlasting law-handler's connection too. And this is the 'thanks' she gets from him.

Well, she's not going down.

"You're already wearing Indian hairs and walking around with your shoulders bare," the annoying Brandi says. The only reason she ever liked her was because they had a common enemy, Phume's mother. If it wasn't for that woman, thank God she's dead, Mvimbo was going to hand everything over to her. He was going to trust her more than he did. That bitch was technically a "daughter-in-law" to her, she should've knelt for her and respected her because she was her husband's stepmother. But no, she was in charge and everyone feared her.

"I'm not wearing black clothes, if that's what you're expecting. Where is Mpatho?" she asks.

"In his bedroom, if not Phumelele's," Brandi says.

Phume is another headache, she's thinking with her pussy now and not using her brains.

"I need to see her, please give all those people outside food and alcohol and tell them to leave my house." She instructs and walks away. The funeral is over, they all need to leave.

Phume's room is still locked, she remembers that she saw her outside with her friend, Ntombi. Mpatho is definitely in his bedroom strategizing. Malibongwe has made it public that he took the cars, they can fight and kill each other, but her name must not come up.

She walks in without knocking.

He was standing by the window with a glass of whiskey. He turns with his forehead furrowed.

"Go back and knock," he says.

"Mpatho now is not the right time to be a spoiled prince, we need..."

"Outside and knock," he says firmly.

She rolls her eyes and goes back to the door and knock. He tells her to come in, surely that boosts his self-esteem.

"I think I know who stole the cars," she says.

"Of course you know Beauty, you gave access." Shit, he heard that phone call.

She needs to spin the story however she can.

"That was not related to the cars, remember my cousin, Gonzo?"

He just looks at her.

"Well, he came to me and borrowed money from me. R3000 to be specific, and I didn't have any cash with me. So I told him to go and ask from Ziyanda at the office because there was a

guest who paid in cash. When he got there he didn't take the money we agreed on, can you imagine? He took R3000 and went to the tavern. When you walked into me swearing, he was at Njilo's drinking, that's why I said he was only 10 minutes away from me. That's why he didn't even come to the funeral, he knows it won't be nice when we meet."

"Mmmm," he turns back to the window and empties the glass down his throat.

She takes a deep breath and unlocks the screen of her phone and opens her recordings.

"You need to listen to this," she says.

He turns and looks at her phone, "What is this?"

"Just listen, you will decide what it is."

He listens to his future-wife talking about hijacking cars on the highway, planning everything with her boyfriend and asking that he begs his brother to help. All their problems were going to be over, then they'd go their different ways after getting rich- it's her voice saying that.

He's sweating, he undoes two more buttons of his shirt.

"But Phume can't...I mean, she was still just angry and the events aren't the same." Stupid boy, what did he learn in the army?

"So it's all a coincidence that the Mcinekass now drive one of our cars? You don't think they changed this plan and came with another idea?" she asks.

"Can I be alone, please?" He picks his glass, there's nothing left inside.

He rolls his fists and paces around.

"Don't disappoint your grandfather please, fight for this family," she says before walking out with a smile on her face.

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PHUMELELE

I'm about to walk Ntombi out, she's that one friend who drops everything for me. My other two friends were here as well, coming all the way from Durban to park the car and request drinks while standing outside and taking pictures. Our friendship was built on what our parents had, Ntombi is the only friend I got because of emotional connection. She's like a sister, I can tell her everything, even being horny and craving for Mpatho. She judges me first and then tells me it's good that I finally have a developing sex life.

"Hubby is behind us," she says as we approach the gate.

"Whose hubby?" I ask turning my head.

"You're the only one married sis," she whispers before Mpatho gets to us.

We haven't talked since yesterday, he's been in his own grief shell.

"Can we take a drive?" he asks, without even greeting Ntombi.

I've been wanting to have a moment with him, just to tell him I'm here for him and understand what he's going through. I just don't understand why he'd want us to leave all these people in the yard with Beauty and her family.

I have to say goodbye to Ntombi and take this drive with him.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 28

PHUMELELE

I don't understand why I'm sitting on a cold metal chair in an empty-looking house. Everything is dusty, I can't even see through the windows. He's outside, he walked out and closed the door, I still don't know why we are here. But I know Mpatho a bit now, I know that his calm face doesn't always mean calm. I'm expecting anything, be it war or peace.

The door handle moves, he walks back in with blood-shot eyes and locks the door behind him with a gigantic padlock. I see that he has something on his waist, I know it's a gun, what I don't know is if he's going to use it here in this room with me.

"What's going on?" I ask.

He pulls his own chair and sits with his hand on his cheek. Something is wrong, I guess it's me who did something today.

"I need you to tell me the truth," he says, inhaling sharply and raising his eyes to me. I see his brokenness and grief, but behind is huge sudden disappointment.

"Is this about the Mcinekas attending the funeral? I swear I had nothing to do..."

"Shut up Phume, you know what I'm talking about."

I raise my eyebrows, confused. I'm not a sangoma and I'm not a mind-reader. How do I know why he's angry?

"The cars," he says.

Now I'm blank.

"What about them?"

"Did you help the Mcinekas steal from me?"

I can deny straight away and I'd be right to do so because I didn't do fokol. But then I'm not innocent of the thoughts, however if it happened it was going to be them helping me steal from him, not the other way around.

"Where did you get that?" I ask.

He stands, brushes his face, and paces around.

I know he's not a gentle man, I saw him almost man-handling Beauty in the kitchen, and I know he has killed, not only professionally but illegally as well.

"So Phume you've been playing a game all this time?" He sounds disappointed than angry. I don't know how he heard about it, but I know he's not going to take that gun out and shoot me. I know there are people he wouldn't hesitate to blow their brains off for business, or family, reasons. But I know I'm not one of them, I'm his wife.

"I asked you where did you get that?" I want to know the traitor, hopefully it's not Malibongwe because I don't know what conversation they were having by the car.

He stops pacing and sits, I lock my stare into his raging one.

"Mpatho?" I need an answer. I always drop names for him whenever I hear something about him that upsets me, so I'm not going to have him walking around me with a gun and not telling me who said things about me.

"Beauty has a recording, you planned a heist with...that boy." He hates even saying Sphakamiso's name.

I'm surprised that Beauty knew my plans and took this long to use that against me. I don't regret having her baby killed, the only regret I have is that I walked into the kitchen on that day and stopped Mpatho from hurting her.

“I don’t care about the loss that much, what hurts me the most is that it was you who did it.”

Whooah, ke!

“I didn’t do it,” I’m shocked that he thinks I pulled it off.

“I know who took the cars, he’s driving one in public and calling it Captain, provoking me on my grandfather funeral. What do you mean you didn’t do it?”

Okay, now I see what Beauty did. I must applaud her, she’s calculative.

“There are a lot of things I thought of doing when I found out I wasn’t a Mshazi. Suicide, robbing family businesses and going abroad to start over, hijacking cars and involving Sphakamiso in it, and killing you.” His eyes widen at the last part. Yes, I thought about strangling him in his sleep.

“But I didn’t do any of that, I couldn’t, I was clouded by anger.” I don’t care if he believes me or not, this is my truth. “Unlike you Mpatho, I didn’t know that my future was already planned out. When I lost my mom I was comforted because I thought at least I’m not an orphan, I still have a brother and a grandfather. You can understand the pain of having that stripped away from you out of nowhere and having marriage shoved into you and being given an ultimatum. I hated you. There was a time where I trusted Beauty and I was willing to do anything she told me to get back at you.”

“You’re saying ‘hated’ as if something has changed,” he says.

We are calm now, both of us.

“I’m sure you felt it when I did. If I still hated you I wouldn’t be sitting here explaining myself, I’d be telling you to shoot me and end it all. I would’ve been in my room the whole day today, you know me. I was present during the funeral only because of you,” I tell him.

He exhales heavily and sits up straight on the chair. He trusts me, that's one thing Beauty hasn't understood yet. "Why did he refuse?"

"Sphakamiso?" I ask.

He nods.

"He's a father before he's anything in this world. That's one thing he'd never cheat on or betray. He'd never do anything that's going to put his son in danger, or put him in jail or coffin. He's a good guy," I say.

He raises his eyebrow, "Good guy?"

"Not being a good boyfriend doesn't mean he's bad in every aspect of life. That's why I was angry with you after finding out you had a hand in Mcineka's death and the police harassing him constantly, because he doesn't deserve that. Before everything that happened he used to think highly of you, he respected you even though he didn't know you that well."

He feels bad, I can see it in his eyes. He's not cruel, he takes care of business when there's a need to, and some of the things he did were out of his control, out of his will.

"Beauty arranged the robbery," he says, taking a deep breath.

"Then why am I here?" I mean, we already knew this, yet he brought me into this empty house armed and put me on the cold chair.

"Because anything that involves your name messes with my emotions. I was hurt...and earlier I saw you in the tent talking to him," he says.

"We are not enemies, I can still talk to him."

"But I can't talk to Lindy?" He's comparing oranges and apples.

"Lindy wants to fuck you, she's employed by her sister."

He frowns, “Usukhuluma kanjani? This is not how you speak.”

The same thing Sphakamiso said. Didn't they ask me and force me to grow up? I can't be growing up and still talking like a scared teenager that I used to be. You can't expose me to things and expect me to stay innocent.

“To fuck is to fuck Mpatho,” I say.

“You've never fucked, how do you know that?”

“Haven't I?” I mean, hello, I've seen your dick and had it inside me.

“We had sex, we didn't fuck, there's a difference,” he says.

Now I'm confused, maybe I need to explore more in future.

“Come here,” he says.

I don't move from my chair. He still has a gun on his waist and he hasn't apologized for bringing me here and almost traumatizing me. I mean, if this happened a year ago I would've shat on my pants. I'm a princess, interrogate me in a French restaurant and keep it classy. What's this bare-walled house with dusty windows and stained floors.

“I want to talk to you,” he says.

“Talk from there, I'm not coming next to you while you have a gun in you.”

He takes his shirt off and wraps the gun with it and puts it by the door. Then he comes back wearing only his vest and sits.

“Woza-ke.”

I drag myself off the chair and stand in front of him. He pulls me down to sit on his lap.

“I'm sorry,” he says.

I'm not angry at him, I understand he reacted to shock.
But...never again.

"Don't ever do this again. Were you going to kill me if I did it?"

"I wasn't going to kill you for 5 cars," he says.

"I should've went ahead with the plan yazi." He pinches my thigh when I say that.

It's 30 minutes later and we are already laughing.

"But seriously though, what are you going to do to Malibongwe?" I'm disappointed in the way the Mcinekas acted, it wasn't necessary, in our culture funerals are treated with respect. But a part of me will always care for Sphakamiso regardless of what happened in our relationship and how it ended. I want him to be lenient, I don't want him to send Malibongwe to jail.

"I don't know," he says and heaves a sigh.

Okay, at least he's not that angry about it.

"He knows something, I can't shake off that feeling," he says.

"What do you think he knows?" I'm confused.

"I think he knows about his father. Beauty told him, the same way she told you. Maybe it was to get him on board and it got out of hand. The way he looked at me I could see the deeply-stemmed hatred. He wanted to fight, he came with my car to start a war."

I know I didn't tell them anything about that, I fought about it with Mpatho and that was it.

"What are you going to do?" I'm worried because the last thing I want is to see neither of them getting hurt. He fucked up but it was beyond him.

“I don’t know Phume, I’ve never had to deal with the family before, I don’t know what I will say to him.” It’s good to see that he understands why Malibongwe is mad.

“If you had to apologize, would you do it?”

He nods, “For peace’s sake I would.”

I hope Malibongwe gives him a chance. He’s got the cars now, he’s made money from them, even though nothing is going to bring his father back but it’s something.

“Just like I’m apologizing to you, I know when I’m wrong,” he says.

I smile, “I forgive you.”

He pulls my face down and kisses me. His hand slides between my thighs and caresses me.

“Kukhonani la? What’s inside here?” He’s brushing my panty and looking at me in the eyes with a smirk on his face. Did I say I’m grown now and saying adult stuff? Well, that was short-lived ke, here I am blushing and unable to tell him what’s inside my panty. I mean, he knows, why is he putting me on a spot?

“Inkomo kaMzimela?” Yey, he must never!

“Mzimela my foot!” I don’t like that man, I will never call myself a Mzimela.

“Okay, so it’s mine?”

I don’t know how his hand slide under the panty. He’s caressing my clit and I’m getting wet instantly. We’ve had many moments where we wanted each other but couldn’t. We still can’t, or must I say not allowed to? The funeral was today, some locals are still driving at home, the tent is still there.

“You’re still mourning,” I say, opening my legs to give him more access. I’m just reminding him, I don’t want him to stop.

“I’m not going to do anything,” he says, still rubbing his thumb on my clit.

My nipples are getting hard and itching. I don’t know what’s happening, my clit is also throbbing but at least he’s taking care of it. I lift up my T-shirt and start rubbing my nipples while moaning to the tenderness of his thumb on my clit.

“Phumelele,”

I want him to give me more, I’m crying for it.

“I can’t give you my dick,” he says.

I’ve never heard more heartbreaking news in my life. I feel like my life is between getting this orgasm or death. I’m crying real tears, it’s such an awkward place to be in.

He lies on his back on the floor. I expect him to change his mind and say let’s do it.

“Sit on me,” he says.

I sit on his waist, he spanks my butt and tells me on his face. I’m wet, the moment I sit on his face and he starts licking me it sounds like a cat having milk. It feels good though, so good that I don’t feel like I need him to be inside me anymore. He sucks, licks and penetrates with his tongue. I reach the break I’ve been dying for. It’s even better than the last time, my body is in a different zone.

Luckily there was a toilet roll, he wiped me clean. But there’s no toothbrush, that means he’s going to smell of my private part for a while. He’s still hard as we get in the car but he’s happy that I had that experience with him. It was a worth apology, I want him to wrong me everyday and apologize this way. I turn

his face to me and kiss him before he drives off. I think he likes it more when I'm the one initiating a kiss.

I kiss him again before I get out of the car. I leave him wearing his shirt and get inside the house. People have left, half of Beauty's family did the honors to and went back home.

"Where is Aunt Nomusa?" I ask walking through the door.

It's Aunt Beandi, God knows why she's still here, Lindy and Beauty in the kitchen.

"Phume?" Lindy almost fall off the chair.

What is it now? They look like they're seeing a ghost.

"Aunt Nomusa has left?" I ask.

"Yes," Aunt Brandi responds. She's the only one who doesn't look scared.

Mpatho walks in behind me, I turn to him, he's dressed up properly. Aunt Brandi won't suspect a thing, and he only gave me oral, we didn't have sexual intercourse.

He walks past without saying anything.

Aunt Brandi leans to me, "Go and run him a cold bath."

"Why?" I ask.

"Because he can't walk around like that, the kids will think he's hiding their bananas in his pants." Oh, shit!

He should've wrapped the shirt around his waist.

"So you're not dead?" Beauty asks, her cousin is standing next to her looking like a rained chicken.

"You will need to be very patient for that, grandma," I say and walk away.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 29

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I haven't got a call from him throughout the weekend, he only sent a couple of texts saying he misses me warawara. I don't think he's not coming because he's busy, he just didn't do what I advised him to do and he doesn't know what excuse to bring. It's his family matters at the end of the day, I'm not going to beat him up if he doesn't intervene and make peace with his siblings. I have my own problems too. Njabulo is out of jail, he's home as I speak. The thing about him is that you can never know if he's out legally or he jumped prison fences. I know better than to celebrate his homecoming, it never last for too long, he will be going back to jail soon. I'm just worried about my father because Njabulo is likely to stress him out. He's my aunt's second son, she's late, his father remarried and the stepmother doesn't get along with him so he prefers living at home than at his father's house.

I call him, I want to know if they're not going to be short of anything. I'm covered with grocery for at least three weeks, thanks to Malibongwe. The phone is ringing unanswered, I bet he's busy with goats.

I try again, this time someone picks up.

"Mimi,"

Oh fuck!

"Hey gazi, long time." I didn't expect him to be the one answering phones.

"I'm back gazi, don't worry. Ugrand?" he asks.

"Yeah, I'm okay. I heard that you're out, congratulations. Hopefully you'll stay longer this time, I missed you." I'm lying, the world minus Njabulo equals to a peaceful place.

“Ngizok’shayel ‘iround tomorrow, Sundays are for cousins.”

Oh, I thought they were for lovers.

“You will come here?” I’m not comfortable with that, what if he comes here and starts a fight? I can’t control him, he’s a 33 year old with a mindset of a 21 year old.

“Yeah, jampasi nje ng’zoba lapho,” he says.

“Okay,” I say.

There’s a church in the yard, my landlord is a Mamfundisi, I will drag him there to repent. He will never set foot here again.

“Where is Nyambose? I want to talk to him,” I ask.

“He’s with his girlfriend, he borrowed me his phone to reconnect with my Gees.”

My father has a girlfriend? This one is lying, I would’ve known if there was a woman in his life, he’s been celibate for years. He’s just waiting for his day to go to heaven and reunite with my mother.

“My father doesn’t have a girlfriend,” I say, he’s being delusional.

“Hhayi Mimi, you’re a grown-up now. Do you think Ankel lays his pipe in the mud? Uyambona uZonke?” WTF! Not Zonke, Zonke, please.

“Which one?” I ask.

“The one who sells inhloko. I had it with dombolo for lunch, I left both of them at home. They were together when I came home two days ago, she’s a woman of the house,” he says.

I don’t like this, yes my father deserves to be happy but I don’t think Zonke is the one for him. Everytime I see Zonke she’s hurling insults and collecting debts from people with violence. There are good women back home; women who go to church

and carry themselves with dignity. My father is not even an outspoken person, that Zonke will just bully him.

I'm going home next week.

"I will 'buzz' you when I'm with Ankel, your sister is here," he's talking about his girlfriend. I don't know which one, I've had over ten girls being introduced as my sister in this lifetime.

Now I'm worried about two men. One is not calling me, he's avoiding me and I'm bored to death in this room alone. And the other one is dating the craziest woman in Matshamhlope.

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MALIBONGWE

Sphakamiso has always been known as the hot-headed one, but this time around he's the one preaching peace. Malibongwe hasn't told them why he's mad at the Mshazis yet but the minute he dressed up and said he was going there they both stood up and followed him. The unity they showed today is the unity they don't have at home. As soon as they were out of the enemy's presence everyone went to their respective bedrooms and shut themselves in.

He tried but it was not enough. Sphakamiso didn't even eat the meat he prepared the other day, Nombuso and Mkhuleko still argued at the table and he couldn't shut themselves in. He can't even bring himself to call Miyanda because she has so much faith in him yet he's failing.

MaVilakazi knocks at the door, disturbing him from a race of his thoughts. He sits up and puts his T-shirt on.

"Ungangena Ma," he says, allowing her in.

His mother has been depressed, the past few months have been the hardest of her life. It all started when Nombuso separated with her husband and came back home. Then Sphakamiso lost his job, he hasn't found another one to this day. Mkhuleko didn't pass his matric. And now, her only hope is being accused of robbery. News travel fast in the village, people saw him driving a new car at the funeral and having an argument with Mpatho, and they concluded that he's a criminal.

"How was the funeral?" she asks, taking a seat on the wooden bench.

"All funerals are sad Ma, it was no different."

"It was nice of you and your brothers to go and support. But if I knew that it would cause so much gossip I would've told you all not to go. I don't need this, I know I didn't give birth to a criminal. So please son, if you were driving their stolen car take it back to them."

He didn't want to stress his mother out but it is what it is.

"I spoke to Mpatho, he knows why I have the car," he says.

"But people are saying you two were having a serious argument. I don't want you to start a war with that family, your father did and it didn't end well," she says, begging him.

"What happened between him and Mshazi?" He's always wanted to know, both families have hatred so deep but they're not being direct with it.

"Childhood feuds between your father and Mbongeni. They blew things out of proportion and dragged it for too long that even I and Mbongeni's wife had to get involved. But one thing we didn't do was getting our children involved, that's why I allowed Sphakamiso to bring that girl here. You are a pure generation, please keep it that way." She doesn't want to let him in too, she's beating around the bush and not giving details

to what started the feud. Something tells him she knows how their father died, she's always known and kept it to herself.

"Baba fell sick and died, right?" Both him and Sphakamiso were not at home. All they know about his death is what their mother told them. Mkhuleko was too young, he didn't know a lot of things.

MaVilakazi frowns, "Yes, why do you ask?"

"I'm asking because I want to know exactly what was wrong with him. If there were people involved, why are you protecting them?" he asks.

"I'm not protecting anyone, your father was sick." She stands up to leave, this is not what she came here for.

Malibongwe stands too. "What caused those bruises that were all over his body?"

"I told you that's normal if someone had been at the mortuary for too long," – MaVilakazi.

"I was 21 then, I'm old now, I know a lie when I hear one. My father was never in a hospital, he was tortured to his death and you are protecting those people. This dishonesty is one of the things causing division in this family," he says.

MaVilakazi takes a deep breath and keeps a straight face. "I don't know what you're talking about."

She takes one step out the door.

"I will kill Mpatho," Malibongwe says.

She turns, fear is written all over her eyes.

"No, you can't do that." Again, she's defending that family.

"I can," – Malibongwe.

Her face transforms from fear into rage.

“You will not touch that boy!” She’s never had this energy for Sphakamiso, she cries like a little girl whenever he’s having a disagreement with her, but here she is standing up and acting like she’s going to burn down the whole country if anything happens to a boy who possibly killed her own husband.

How misplaced can one’s priorities be!

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SPHAKAMISO

Life has been unpredictable; he’s the only one with an academic qualification, yet he’s the one cleaning people’s yards to get money. But at least he afforded cigarettes, airtime to call his son and this chicken. Aphelele is doing okay, he’s also getting used to him being away.

“Bafo,” he said excitedly over the phone earlier.

He needed to hear that little voice after being at the funeral and seeing the love of his life and being unable to tell her how he feels because she no longer belong to him.

“Are you okay bafo?” he asked.

Aphelele giggled, “Yeah, gogo gives me ice-cream if I don’t say futek (voetsek)

“But I told you not to curse, only bad children do that.” Raising a child is hard, there’s no formula to it. It wasn’t easy telling Aphelele not to say things that adults were saying everyday in front of him.

“You’re a good boy, right?” he asked.

“Yeah, I’m a good boy,” Aphelele said.

“Then don’t ever say voetsek to gogo. I will see you soon, don’t ever forget that your father loves you.”

“Okay,” Aphelele said, laughing. He sounded happy, something he’s always wanted and unable to do.

Aunt Teekay took the phone and told him they were going to have a trip to her sister’s house in Mandeni. There’s a child there, Aphelele would be happy and play with someone. She’s a blessing, both her and Khulekani. Aphelele’s mother is still untraceable, he’s long given up on her.

He goes to the big house and find Mkhuleko watching TV. Nombuso is sitting quietly in the kitchen, she didn’t make a single comment when he walked in. Their mother is with Mkhuleko but she’s not watching what’s playing on TV, she’s reading a Bible. Very strange for someone who last went to church probably a decade ago!

“Bafo, can we step outside for a moment?” he asks Mkhuleko. Him and Mkhuleko never talked about the shooting incident but he knows that he owes his brother an apology. The ancestors as well, but he doesn’t afford to apologize to them yet.

“What’s up? I’m watching a game here.” Always has an attitude!

“It’s important,” Sphakamiso says.

MaVilakazi raises her eyes, “What is it?”

Nothing is ever safe with her children, she’s always worried.

But Sphakamiso doesn’t speak to this woman, he turns and walks out.

Mkhuleko takes his walking stick and follows.

He's standing below the yard with a chicken in his arm.

Mkhuleko stands with a frown, "And then?"

"I want to say sorry," – Sphakamiso.

"You took your time. Is that my chicken?"

Sphakamiso exhales heavily, "Please kneel with me."

"Bafo, this trackpant is new, you know I'm unemployed, I only buy clothes once a..."

"Please, I want to talk to you," Sphakamiso begs.

He sighs and finally kneels down.

"Okay, I've been wanting to do this but amachankura enqaba. I'm sorry for hurting you and landing you in hospital. I didn't mean to shoot you, I don't know how you caught the bullet, but I'm thankful you survived.

Out of everyone here, you're one person I hardly fight with. I know you have my back, we have each other's backs when necessary, maybe all of us except your sister. The only thing we lack is love, but that's the story of another day. Today I just want to say I'm sorry Gwazela."

Mkhuleko drops his eyes and takes a deep breath. He didn't want a chicken, his brother saying sorry would've been enough for him. With all the stress they have in this family, and the constant fights, the last thing they need to do is apologize with chickens to one another.

"You didn't have to buy a chicken though, I only got a wound, nothing deep," he says.

"I know, but this is how siblings do if they hurt each other to the point of having injuries inside the yard." He pulls a knife and presses the chicken wings on the ground with his foot and slaughters. "I don't know if it's blood or gall that I need to rub on your wound for immediate healing."

Mkhuleko laughs. “Why don’t we ask Mpatho or mom?”

“What I’m doing doesn’t need impepho, so I don’t need them.”

Yeah, this is where they are as a family now.

“Bafo,” – Mkhuleko.

He looks up, “Sho.”

“Do you really hate them?”

“I don’t hate them, I just learnt not to depend on them.”

“Do you think he robbed the Mshazis?”

“He did,” Sphakamiso says.

“Then why are we not rich?”

“I don’t know, what I know is that between him and Mpatho one is going to die if nobody intervenes and stops this before it escalates.”

Mkhuleko shakes his head, “There’s something we don’t know about that Mpatho. I just can’t figure it out yet, but trust me, I will. Am I going to eat this chicken alone?”

Really now, Yoli is already standing in the verandah and dancing. Plus, Nombuso would stand on top of the mountains and erect billboards to tell the world that after everything she’s done for everyone they couldn’t even thank her with a chicken thigh.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 30

PHUMELELE

I needed a cupcake, I didn't think I'd find anyone in the kitchen, worse this woman. She's having a glass of wine, sitting high on the chair like a queen. She had her sister, Noxolo, cleaning up her bedroom and taking out everything that was mkhulu's to the spare bedroom. She saw through me, and now I've seen through her. I'm the Legacy Wife here, not her, she's got nothing to do with anything.

"I was worried about you," she never stops.

I look at her, "For what?"

"I thought he was going to kill you." She's a madwoman, there's no way all her screws are in place.

"After you told him I stole the cars you were worried about me? Come on Beauty, have some class in your lies, don't make yourself look stupid," I say.

"Fine, I'm sorry, I just felt like you were betraying me and acted stupid. I still want you on our deal, we are close now," she sounds so pathetic.

"Beauty you're on your own, I'm going to do me, you do you as well." I add two more cupcakes, Mpatho is not into cakes but I believe today is the hardest day of his life and he could do with a cupcake.

"So you're going to forget your boyfriend, the love of your life, because of Mpatha?" she asks.

"I will do whatever I want," I say.

"But they're going to be rich soon too, they confessed that they stole the cars, you know those cars were worth about 2 millions." Now she's trying to convince me to go back to Sphakamiso. I loved Sphakamiso, okay? With him it was never about the money.

"I'm not going anywhere Beauty," I say, not looking at her direction.

I feel the wine splashing on the side of my face. She threw a glass on me, what the heck!

“Stupid bitch,” she’s livid.

I’m still trying to wipe the wine off my face. I’ve never had anyone attack me before, I don’t even know if I’d able to fight back if she decides to jump me.

But I don’t fear fokol, one scream nje and Mpatho would be here. She also knows this.

“I’m the Legacy Wife here. I’m not going anywhere, you can take this and print it wherever you want.” I step closer to her, she didn’t expect it. “And if you dare try another stunt Beauty Gwala, I swear it’s going to be you whose life gets terminated this time.”

“Excuse me?” She frowns.

I pick the plate with my cupcakes. I don’t know what I’ve become, I mean what I’m saying.

“Phume uthini? What are you saying?” She’s behind me.

I stop and turn to face her again. “I’m saying if you ever try to do me dirty again I will get you killed.”

She freezes, I stand staring at her.

“So you’re your mother’s daughter?” She takes a step back with a frown on her face. “You’re just like your mother.”

I turn and walk away. Suddenly there’s pain weighing down my heart. I don’t want to ever be compared to my mother. I don’t know what she was that was so bad but I know that I’m not capable of half of the things she did. I will never sign my daughter in a marriage contract and I will never order for people to get murdered...fuck.

I put the plate down and pace around my room. What is happening to me? I'm getting cold, not so long ago I let Mpatho killed an innocent baby and now, just now, I just swore to kill Beauty. The strangest part is that in my heart I meant it. At some point I know that if she keeps being a threat I will push for something to be done to silence her forever.

"No, I'm not like you Mom!" I heard dead people can here, if she still remembers my room she's listening to this. "I have a good heart, if Mpatho and I ever become serious with this marriage thing, we will be good citizens and run our businesses without shedding blood and wronging people. I'm not like you, I'm a good person!"

"Phume,"

I almost scream, it's Mpatho. I don't know why he didn't knock, now I look like a mad-woman talking alone.

"You didn't know," I say awkwardly.

He walks back to the door and knocks. He's really dramatic.

"Come in," I say and sit down on the bed.

He comes in and sits next to me. He has a questioning look on his face, I don't know how much of my rantings he heard.

"Your top is wet, what happened?" Oh, that's the only thing he noticed.

"Beauty threw the wine on my face," I say.

"Sorry, what?" He stands up.

I pull him down, "It's okay, sit."

"It's not okay, nobody has the right to throw anything on your face as long as you're my wife." He really needs to calm down.

"But only you and I and Ntombi know that," I say.

"Ntombi knows?" He still looks angry but this amuses him.

“She’s my best friend, come on.”

“Mmmm, it looks like the wife has certain exclusive privileges. Telling her best friend that we are married, talking to other men, including her ex, and...”

“Please don’t start, we already talked about that,” I say.

He stares at me for a minute and then inhales a deep breath. I don’t know why he’s this jealous because I no longer talk to Sphakamiso like I used to. In fact after we officially broke up I’ve only texted him once and it was nothing that concerned love matters.

“I was about to come to your bedroom to share cupcakes with you. How are you feeling after today?” I ask.

“I need a cuddle, let’s go to my room,” he says.

I smile and peck his lips. His room is better than mine; sound-proofed and spacious. I take our cupcakes, we go to his bedroom.

There’s a pen and a blank pad on the pedestal.

“Were you writing Bonnie a letter?” I ask.

He chuckles, “Beauty told you about her, right?”

“A long time ago, I didn’t entertain it though.”

“You’re entertaining it now. Even if I was writing to her, she’s an ex, not an enemy.” He looks at me with a grin. Those were my words and I realize now that they’re inconsiderate and hard to hear.

“That hurts, right?” He’s amused.

“You’re still married to me, until we are divorced you have to respect my wishes.”

He takes a cupcake, squashes it in his hand and shoves it inside his mouth with its paper cup. I'm grossed out watching him, because why would anyone do that. He takes a bottle of water and gulps it down.

"Did you really eat a paper cup? Do you know how dangerous that is for your health?" I'm perplexed.

"Do you know how dangerous the divorce talk is for my health?" He's glaring at me. I shouldn't have said that, I'm here to cuddle him and comfort him for losing his grandfather.

"I was going to write a letter to my mother but I stopped, she never respond anyway," he says.

My heart sinks. The Bonnie thing just came up, I wasn't trying to stir anything.

"So you have her address?"

"No, someone knows someone who knows her. My father hooked me up with him before he died, he's a taxi driver," he says.

"Maybe you should find the person who's known by a person and get directions. Then we can go there and get answers," I say.

"If we are not divorced yet because I doubt you'd have my time after all this is done and over." He looks at me, he wants me to convince him otherwise.

"Kanti when are we divorcing?" I ask, not looking at him in the eyes.

He shrugs, "I don't know."

I turn my eyes to him, we lock a long stare.

I clear my throat, "We are never going to wear rings, not even for a week."

“I don’t care about the rings,” he says and buries his face in his hands and takes a long breath.

“But I can get you one if that’s what missing in your life,” he says looking at me again.

I didn’t mean that the ring would make me happy. We are not cuddling, which is something we came here to do, instead we are being emotional about our temporary marriage issues.

“I need love. I need your love, Phume,” he says.

I can’t look at him in the eyes, I just can’t.

“Mpatho, I...I...” Gosh, this is awkward than it ever was before.

“I wanted to tell my mother about you. I wanted her to know that it finally happened, we are together. I wanted her to pray for me to be with you forever so that I never bother her again. I’m not so lonely with you in my life, I love you.” Those words can’t just be thrown in a conversation like this.

He can’t do that to me, I lie on my stomach and press my face on the pillow and start crying. I’m overwhelmed with emotions, I feel like he’s...I feel like he loves me, that’s why I’m crying.

He lies next to me and puts his arm over me.

“Even if you were the only thing I got from that will I would’ve been happy. Please give us a chance, give this marriage a chance, I don’t want to divorce.” His voice trembles next to me, I cry harder.

He turns me to sleep on my side and lets me cry on his chest. He holds me tight, I cry until my chest is dry and there are no tears left.

He gently pulls my chin up, his own eyes are bloodshot.

“I love you,” he says it again before gently rubbing his lips against mine.

I open my mouth for a kiss, he grabs my neck and fully captures my warm, trembling lips. I wrap my leg over his thigh and run my hands on his back. My waist rubs against a hard rode that's already standing up.

He breaks the kiss, but I still want more.

"Phum..." I cup his face with my hands and kiss him again.

Last time can't be the last time I felt him inside me. Gosh, I think I love him too.

I think I want this to be real as much as he wants.

"How did you do it?" I mean, he was my half brother less than two months ago. Then I was hating him, undoubtedly hated him. When did these feelings grow?

"Ini mommy?" He's squeezing my butt, looking into my eyes with desperation and lust.

"How did you make me feel this way?"

"Khuluma nami, what is it that you feel?" He shuts his eyes and moans as he grinds on my pyjama pants.

"I feel like I don't want to see you with any other woman." That's how I can describe it better.

I don't know if he heard my explanation, he's opening his zipper and making ugly faces. Is everything okay here? His hand comes out with his penis wet on the tip.

What the hell is going on with him? I need to stick around to know. Divorce lawyers need to start side hustles for a time being. It's not happening anytime soon.

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>>>>SATURDAY MIDNIGHT

It's been a while since Ncedziwe said she received another letter. She's going over the last one she got from Ncedziwe. She's not well emotionally, things are going out of control and all the people who were involved with her are all dead now. They didn't keep things the way they were supposed to.

Sphakamiso started it, because out of every girl in the village, why that one? Now Malibongwe is about to go extreme. Why didn't any of this happen when all of them were still alive? Ncedziwe was just a nanny...nothing more.

-Dear Mommy

I decided to write again. It's a torture to be the one that tries the hardest but loved less. I wish that wasn't a case with you because somehow I feel like it's the root of everything. I'm broken inside, in ways that I can never explain. I've written to you about my every 'first', even my first kill. But there's one first that I can only talk to you about in person, it's one that I've tried so many times to forgive myself for. I know you think I'm a man now and I don't need you, but there are things that a child can only talk to a mother about. I need you....."- incompleted.

She can't.

She folds the letter with tears running down on her cheeks.

They can never understand, not a single one of them. It was complicated, it still is. Now more than ever, because she's all alone now. Where is she going to start putting this fire out? Blood can't kill blood.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 31

MPATHO

He slept well, Phume coming to his room and cuddling him until the deep hours of the night helped. They wanted to spend the night in one bed, but he'd already messed his boxers while grinding against her panties, spending more time with her could've led to the forbidden love-making. He feels her, the connection is like fire, his body and heart just burns for her when she's closer. It's now beyond his dreams of getting married to a particular lady and having a family, it's her and only her that she wants. It's her that he craves to be inside and fill up with his cum. She's playing a hardcore queen now, maybe because of everything she's been through the last couple of weeks, but deep down she's still just a shy, innocent girl. She can be untouchable everywhere, with anybody, but when she's on his lap with his fingers under her panties she drops the character and be 'his innocent Phume'.

It's not strange that he wakes up with her in his mind and a hard dick. When he adjusts his pillow a body shifts closer to his back behind him. Soft hands wrap around him and touch his chest. It's not Phume, she doesn't have such big breasts and this isn't something she'd do, she's not sneaky.

So he freaks out, his heart starts racing when the person rubs her nakedness behind him.

"Let me go," he says in a very low voice.

"Baby, it's me," this tiny voice belongs to Bonnie who's supposed to be at Empangeni. Not in his house, not in his bed.

He's relieved a bit, but he still wants her to get away.

"Bonnie what are you doing here?" He turns and sees her completely naked. Yellow thighs, big breasts and belly ring that

caused their biggest fight, all exposed to him. She's neatly shaven, when he shifts away, she rubs her V-shaped thick honey-pot and smiles.

"I'm sorry I couldn't come to the funeral," she says.

This woman is crazy. They broke up for fuck' sake! How did she even get here because Phume only left the room after midnight? When did she arrive in the village?

"Bonnie please leave my room, what you're doing now is not cool, we broke up." He's trying not to let anger control him and be loud. It's still early in the morning and the last thing he'd want is for Phume to come and see this. Beauty's name is written all over this, she's taken it too far.

"I miss stripping and twerking for you. It gets you harder than you are right now." She's smiling and looking at his hard dick. It's not her who made him like this, he doesn't want to be stripped and twerked for. He's grown now, he wants to have a wife and kids.

"Beauty actually explained to me why you had to break up with me. Shem baby, why did they put you through that? I can imagine the pain you went through." She's trying to get closer again, he shifts back.

"Come on, what kind of a man runs away from all this? I'm here to tell you I understand why we can't be together at the moment. But still, I need you inside me, filling me up and pounding me in every corner. I know your sister can't do any of the things you like."

"Bonnie don't make me drag you out of here. I've asked you to leave twice, what the fuck is your problem?" He's getting worked up.

"So you're going to beat me?"

That stops him from doing anything.

“Bonnie, you’re provoking me,” his voice is soft again.

“Didn’t your therapist tell you to walk away when you’re being provoked?”

“Bonnie.....”

“No baby, don’t talk about dragging me out, you’re triggering me, you know what I went through.”

“If you’re triggered, then why don’t you get out of my bedroom?”

“Because you’re still my beast and I can see that your body wants me.”

Okay, this is it. He walks around the bed and comes to her side to drag her out. She will scream abuse if she wants to, but he’s not having her naked in his bed and ranting about the things they talked about long time ago.

“Mpathooo!” that’s Beauty’s voice.

The door opens.

“Oh sorry, I’m here to...” Phume appears behind her, she woke her up and brought her here on purpose.

“I didn’t know you were with Bonnie,” she says the name to remind Phume of whatever she told her.

Phume still looks shocked, she’s looking at them. Bonnie is butt-naked, Mpatho is wearing only his boxers, their bed linen is messy.

He lets go of Bonnie’s arm, she quickly grabs her dress and slips it on.

“Beauty hey,” she says, as if she’s seeing Beauty for the first time.

“Long time babe, I didn’t know you were here.”

They hug each other. Beauty must've paid Bonnie a lot of money to do this, she used to be a lady that carries herself with dignity. This is not like her, it's like she's high or something.

Phume finally finds her voice and asks, "So you thought it would be better for you to bring your ex and sleep with her?"

"I didn't sleep with her." He's scared, this time the odds are against him. Which woman would believe a man after she walked into him with a naked woman in bed?

"Okay," Phume says.

Bonnie is already outside the door, she's finished her job. Beauty follows her, confused by the 'okay'.

They don't speak the next two minutes, Mpatho is staring at her hoping she can see through him. He really didn't do it.

"You can come and sniff my bed and boxers. I don't smell of a woman, I didn't do anything."

Phume blinks back tears and heads out the door. Her scars from being cheated on are still fresh, Beauty knew what she was doing.

This time it could be over for good.

Phume walks into the kitchen and grabs a bottle of water. No fuck, she needs something stronger. Beauty's wine will do, she can go and kill herself for it if she wants. She pours a full glass and stands against the counter sipping.

"Umjolo!" Beauty is here to sympathize with her, supposedly.

"I didn't think they're still seeing each other." Yes, she's here to rub the salt.

"Who?" Phume raises her eyebrows.

"Bonnie and Mpatho," she says.

“Oh, that naked girl I found in his room. Mpatho said they didn’t do anything, so they didn’t do anything.”

Beauty laughs at first, then she’s shocked and embarrassed on behalf of women of South Africa.

“Men deny, that’s what they do best,” she’s in disbelief. How naïve can this girl be?

“I don’t know about other men, but if Mpatho says he didn’t do it then he didn’t.” She stands up and throws the wine in the sink.

“Is that my wine you’re wasting?”

“Girl, bye.” Phume walks away.

She’s angry, heartbroken, disappointed and all. But she’s not going to give anyone that satisfaction. That Bonnie wasn’t here last night, Beauty probably arranged for her to come in the crazy hours of morning to disrupt peace.

She makes her way back to her bedroom and finds him waiting for her outside the door. He’s still just in his boxers. Phume stands in front of him, she’s hurt.

“I need a place to stay,” she says.

“What do you mean?” He expected an exaggerated reaction but not moving out.

“I want to move out and as my husband you need to find me a place to stay. I’m your responsibility.” She means it, she’s tired of the constant fights and tests from Beauty.

“I don’t hear well when I’m standing, let’s get inside,” he says.

“Mpatho, you don’t have a hearing problem, I’m saying I want to move out.”

He walks in and goes to sit on the bed. She shuts the door and remains on her feet.

“I want to move out. Can you hear me now?” she asks.

“No, come closer,” he says.

She sighs and steps closer.

“This is not a game anymore, I want to move out.”

“Sit here,” he pulls her down on his lap. “Do I smell of sex?”

“I don’t know, she was naked in your room.”

“I woke up to her in my bed, I don’t even know how she got in. Do you really think I had sex with her?”

“You were with her in bed, she was naked and...” He pulls her hand down to his boxers. The erection he woke up with has died. His boxers are dry, nothing happened.

“Don’t put my hand inside,” – Phume.

He pushes her hand inside his boxers and looks into her eyes.

“This is all yours Phume, yours alone. I’m many things but a whore. Everything I have inside here is saved for when I’ve been cleansed, all for you.”

She blinks back tears. “It’s too much now, I’m not built for this back and forth.”

“I will call Crawford, it’s time for her to know that we are actually married.”

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THE MCINEKAS

“I’m not boiling this water again, and nobody is going to touch the kettle, anyone who misses tea will drink water,” Nombuso says.

It's Sphakamiso and Mkhuleko who are late for breakfast.

"They're coming," MaVilakazi says in their defense.

Luckily they both walk in. They had a long chat last night after the apology. They talked about Mkhuleko's dreams, Sphakamiso's break-up and their seemingly dead future.

Mkhuleko takes 6 slices of bread and peanut butter.

"That's for Yoli, please use butter," Nombuso says.

"How is it for Yoli only because Ma bought this? Not you, not your ex-husband." Morning fight loading!

"Ukhuluma njengomfazi shem," Nombuso says, annoyed.

Mkhuleko spreads the peanut butter on his bread anyway. Everyone else is quiet, Nombuso is shaking with anger on her chair. "You've never contributed anything in this house. Your peers are in Joburg working for their families and you're here fighting a 4 year old for peanut butter."

"And your peers are still in their marriages eating breakfast with their husbands and you're here fighting your young brother for peanut butter," – Mkhuleko.

Nombuso stops eating, "If anyone ever brings up the marriage issue again, I will go and rent somewhere and never come back here."

"Keep your mouth shut if you don't want anyone to talk about your failures," Mkhuleko says.

"Am I the only one whose heart got broken here? You don't mock Sphakamiso for losing his girlfriend to her own brother. Who gets istina from usbari wakhe?"

"I'm not in the mood today sfebe," Sphakamiso says.

MaVilakazi gasps in shock. "This is your sister."

“I don’t have a sister, she mustn’t talk about me, I don’t talk about her.”

“Okay, Nombuso can you leave him alone?” MaVilakazi asks, looking at her daughter.

“I was making an example. It’s public news anyway, why am I the only one who can’t talk about it?”

MaVilakazi exhales heavily and sips her tea. It gets harder everyday, she’s losing sleep because of these children.

Then Yoli screams, “Malume is crying.”

All eyes search around the table. The malume who is crying is Malibongwe; he has his hand over his face, tears are pouring down. Everyone is alarmed.

“Bhuti,” Mkhuleko touches his arm.

No response.

Nombuso clears her throat, “What’s going on?”

Still, no response.

“Teyte, malume is crying,” – Yoli is not making anything better. But in her whole 4 years of life she’s never seen an adult crying, this is new to her.

“Mkhuleko can you take her outside?” – Nombuso.

Mkhuleko pulls his brows. She looks at him and firmly says, “Now!”

He exhales heavily and picks Yoli up with her bread and walks out.

It’s now her, MaVilakazi and Sphakamiso trying to talk to Malibongwe. He just broke down at the breakfast table, that’s not normal.

“Did your girlfriend break up with you?” Nombuso asks.

To others it's news that Malibongwe has a girlfriend that someone in the family knows. He's only introduced a girl once in the family, after they broke up he never brought anyone home.

He's not saying anything, just crying.

MaVilakazi knows that out of her children, Malibongwe is the one that struggles to talk about things. Maybe it's girlfriend stuff.

"You can talk to your brother about it if you're not comfortable with Nombuso and I," she says.

They get no response but hiccups. Now everyone is worried, Mkhuleko is pacing up and down outside.

"I will get you a glass of water," Nombuso leaves the table and rushes to the kitchen.

She comes back with a glass of water and puts it in front of him.

"Bafo, you can't just cry like this and not say anything," Sphakamiso begs. He doesn't hate his brother, he'd never watch anyone hurting him. Even Nombuso, as bad as she is, but he'd never let an outsider hurt her. Her ex-husband knows this, that's why he still sends money for Yoli every month.

Malibongwe shoves the glass of water away and stands up and leaves them there.

Ten minutes later Mkhuleko walks in and finds three of them with mournful faces on the table.

"And then?" He looks at Sphakamiso for answers.

"He walked out without saying anything."

“Walked out to where? His door is still closed, his car is outside. You know he never walk by foot, even for cooling down his head.” He’s panicking, all these people are just relaxed. He’s been having a lot of dreams lately, none of them have been good.

“Bunch of useless people!” he hisses angrily.

“Don’t call us useless, you were outside and you didn’t see where he went. All of you, go and find your brother,” MaVilakazi blows up.

“But Ma, he is...” Nombuso doesn’t finish her sentence.

“Nombuso, I mean it. Go and find your brother, Malibongwe wouldn’t just cry for fun, be siblings for once and care for one another,” she says.

Sphakamiso stands up, “I will go to Mondli, maybe he’s there.”

“He wouldn’t go to his friends crying, he’s a man,” Mkhuleko says.

“Then predict where he is for us, sangoma es’khulu,” – Sphakamiso.

“Sphakamiso leave this empty-head, go to Mondli and ask if he’s not there,” Nombuso interferes. She’s tying her head-scarf and getting ready to take her own direction as well.

“Empty-head unyoko!” Mkhuleko responds angrily.

MaVilakazi glares at him, “Excuse me, ang’ zwanga?”

“Ma, I’m not talking about...eish.” He rubs his head.

“Get out of my face! I don’t want to see any of you unless you’re complete.”

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 32

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I didn't ask my father anything about Zonke on the phone. He pretended as if it's just him and Njabulo at home, not knowing that I already know of his secret affair. The whole thing makes me feel some type of way, I can't describe it as anger but I'm not happy.

He gave his phone to Njabulo, the recent Itel that I bought for him cash at Pep. That one is on his way here, he said a friend gave him a lift and he's around the corner. I've ironed my clothes for church, when he gets here I will give him breakfast and ask that he accompanies me to church to pray about our family problems. Zonke is a part of our problems.

Malibongwe has been quiet all morning. I'm not his girlfriend yet and now I'm even thinking maybe we are not even compatible. I like attention, a lot of it. I don't want to be with a man who gives me space and goes six hours without speaking to me.

Njabulo calls again.

"Mimi, I'm outside," he says.

By the way I'm no longer Mimi, I'm a grown-ass woman, my name is Miyanda. But of course he's been in jail most of his adulthood, he can't tell the difference.

"I'm sitting outside the door, you will see me, come."

After a few minutes he appears wearing sporty tracksuits and a beanie. His face is covered in beard, he's grown taller than he was the last time I saw him, with a bit of weight gain. The big shopping bag in his hand puzzles me.

I stand up and hug him. "Gazi!"

He's my aunt's son, I still love him to bits despite everything.

“Mimi wuwe lo ohlala emakopini kafish?” He’s looking around the block of rooms in awe.

He’s always talked like this; more banter, less disregard of people’s feelings. I laugh because I know my cousin, nothing will ever change him.

“Forget about the rooms, we are renting here, it’s not our homes. What did you bring me?” I honestly didn’t expect him to come with anything, he just got out of jail, he has no money.

“Meat, I know you people live on cabbages in these places,” he says.

I take the bag, it’s a lot of meat inside. Not braai-pack from Chester or redmeat from Spar butchery. It’s meat that was taken straight from a dead cow. He didn’t even wash it, he just packed it inside a bag with cow dung and grass.

“I thought you bought it for me, kanti yincuba,” I say dragging the bag inside the room.

He’s following me inside with the chair that I was seated on. This meat won’t fit in my small bar defreezer. I have to wash it and share it with my neighbors, otherwise it will rot in here.

“I got it from kwaNtombela, freshly slaughtered,” he says.

“Was there a ceremony at the Ntombelas?” I ask.

“No, the cow had a headache, I told Ntombela and we slaughtered it,” he says.

He’s back, there’s no time to rest for my village people. Ntombela is an old man who lives alone, it’s easy for young people to fool him and convince him to do something.

“Gazi how did you know that the cow had a headache?” I’m already disappointed in him for toying with an old man’s livestock.

“I saw it lying at the side of the road and went to tell him,” he says.

I pour juice for him. “So cows that lie at the side of the road are suffering from headaches?”

“Gazi stop with these lot of questions. I brought you meat, just say thank you.”

Hhayi bandla! “Thank you Gazi, I will wash it and share with my neighbors.”

“Sell or share?”

“Share, I’m not stingy hawu.”

I give him food and a glass of juice. Then we sit and catch up beyond the craziness of killing Ntombela’s healthy cows.

“AmaNdiya awakuphalazel’ ubreyane nje?” (are the Indians not troubling you)

“No, my boss is good, I get paid reasonably.” Look, I can say everything that Singh does to me and that store of his would be empty tomorrow morning. But I won’t, I still want my cousin around. I don’t have any siblings, the only sense of siblinghood I get is from them, my cousins.

“I think I’m going to find me a good job too, I’m tired of prison,” he says.

“Do you think anyone will hire you?” I’m just being realistic. You can hire this one and then next morning he comes and kills you because you made him work.

“With a criminal record, I doubt yazi. Maybe I should start a business, something that’s going to bring me money. You can’t be looking after Ankel while we are alive. You have to find a man and get married and have kids,” he says.

I smile, only if this was real.

“Why are you smiling? Has that Thabani person proposed?”

“We broke up a long time ago with that one.” I even regret that I stopped Njabulo so many times from whipping his ass when he was still asking me out. Good for nothing idiot!

“You did well, he didn’t deserve your beauty. I don’t know what you saw kuleliya sende.” The jailbird language!

“Don’t curse, we are still going to church,” I say.

He chokes on the juice and looks up, laughing.

“Where Mimi?” he asks.

“Church. There’s a church in the yard, my landlord asked me to come with someone from my family because we need prayers, there’s a dark cloud over us.” Lies just slip out of my mouth smoothly.

“Dark clouds are for rain. I didn’t come here for church,” he says.

I knew he’d be difficult, I mean him and church are water and paraffin.

“There are girls in their church, with curves and big asses,” I tell him.

Now he’s looking at me differently. No longer that ‘angiyi lapho’ face.

“Good girls love bad boys,” I say.

“Hhayi Gazi, uyabona-ke manje you’re tempting me. The Mini Minaj type of ass?”

“Nicki Minaj, yes,” I say.

“But I don’t have a suit.” He’s slowly giving in.

“I don’t have any church dress either, I’m wearing this skirt and blazer. I will tell them to pray for you to get a job as well.

There's a powerful prayer warrior there who's blessed people to become millionaires and win Lottery," I say.

He's coming with me, dark or blue, I just pinned the last nail.

"Are we not late?" He's eating faster.

"The service will start in 10 minutes now."

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The service proceeds and it's not what he expected. But he can't walk out, not when he's between those four cousins of Jesus. I'm trying so hard not to laugh at his face as he looks at each person that preaches with his arm folded and one hand rubbing his beard. The girls are here but not with 'Mini Minaj's ass'.

Mam' Ndlozi starts a song and sings while praying in between. She's the prayer warrior I was telling Njabulo about, however I don't have any experience with her, this is actually my first time being in the same room as her. She's sweating and hitting her chest; there's something she senses. I hope it's the demons that my lovely cousin over there possesses.

I see them running around in circles, her and other spiritual women. I don't know how I got in the middle, my head is getting dizzy because they're running around me. Then someone grabs me from the back and starts praying for me. Tossing me around and hitting my back. I don't like Zion churches for this. I prefer those foreign owned ones with miracle-performing pastors who make people faint by saying, 'Fire!'

"The finger has pointed you," – it's Mam' Ndlozi.

Others are still singing, at least she's telling me this in private.

“God will be with you. It’s going to be hard but umunwe wedlozi has pointed you. The ancestors appointed you. Be a healing space, bring them peace and give them love.” She says that and then sings along with others. Her grip is still on my shoulder, I can’t move.

Two more women pray for me, I haven’t wrapped my head around anything that woman said. It was all riddles, the only thing I heard is that I’ve been appointed by the ancestors to heal some people and love them. I don’t know which people and why am I chosen for those duties.

By the time they let me go I’m in need of fresh air. I’m suffocating in myself. I step outside feeling dizzy.

Njabulo is standing against the wall puffing a cigarette. My senses resettle quickly. We are in church for Christ’ sake, when he walks back in there everyone will be able to smell the nicotine.

“Couldn’t you wait?” He’s frustrating me. I think he’s one of the people I’m meant to heal and love, maybe even insult a little bit.

“Are they done panelbeating you?” He’s laughing.

This is not funny at all, that was a godly beating, I didn’t feel anything.

I search through my pockets and find minty sweets and give him one. He doesn’t think it’s necessary but he takes it and throws it inside his mouth. We get back inside, the service is still ongoing.

After women have prayed for women, children come forward and ask for blessings. Most of them just want to pass their grades without studying and they aren’t afraid to ask for bluntly like that. MaNdlozi is having a hard time praying for every one

of them, some wants to repeat twice. Then they open space for Bab' Mfundisi to pray for men, Mam' Ndlozi helps him.

With men the beating is even worse, they're throwing each other at the walls and summoning demons to come out. It's all beating and understanding until one man in blue church uniform grabs Njabulo's arm. I know he will tolerate this service to the end because of me, but not the beating.

He stands still, looking at the part of his shoulder where the man's hand is. They just want to pull him to the middle to pray for the prison demons out of him. I don't know why everyone stopped singing, they're making this even more awkward.

"Ng'nequnga mfethu, don't put your hands on me so carelessly," he says and everyone can hear him.

The church man slowly removes his hands from him. The silence! You can hear a pin drop.

I made a mistake, I shouldn't have brought him to church.

I need to start a song, any that comes to my mind first. I'm trying to remember all the church songs I know but all my mind says is; "Sista Betina!!"

Luckily someone comes through and starts a song; "Nkosi Sihlangene..."

I look up, that's Njabulo singing with his voice that sounds like it was scratched and finished by Smirnoff in 2010. Wrong person, wrong song! I'm about to die of embarrassment here. The service is about to end and he's starting the Nkosi Sihlangene song.

People sing along, I thought they'd keep quiet after he confessed to having iqunga, which means he's clearly taken lives before. I'm always making wrong choices, my landlord is definitely having a conversation with me after this.

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After church people still came up to us and talked. I thought they'd be keeping their distance and whispering in groups. But this is a different kind of church. I saw him talking to one lady at the door and punching something in the phone. I think he found his Mini Minaj.

We are heading to my room, he's still reviewing the pray and beat sessions. I notice a Tazz parked where Malibongwe always parked. It looks like his, I've been wanting to see him but now is not the right time. Njabulo can be crazy, Malibongwe is a shy guy although he's funny and all. I don't want them to meet yet.

"Sanibona," someone says behind us.

I stop at the door with a key in my hand. It's Malibongwe's sister, I don't know the other person she's with.

I'm confused, why she'd be here?

"Miyanda, can we talk?" She looks very humble today.

Something is wrong. I look at the guy behind her and I immediately know that I'm looking at the crazy brother. He doesn't look like them but I know it's him.

I give Njabulo the key, he opens and gets inside my room.

"That's my cousin, Njabulo. We are coming from church. Is everything alright?" I don't know why I'm explaining myself to them, Nombuso didn't even like me the last time she saw me.

"So Malibongwe is not here?" she asks.

"No, I haven't talked to him since last night. What happened?" I'm freaking out.

"He was...." The crazy brother interrupts her.

“We need some things from him, we thought he was here.” - Sphakamiso, I need to get used to his name.

“No, I haven’t seen him,” I can’t help but notice the worry on Nombuso’s pain.

“Okay, no problem sisi. Don’t worry, we will see what we can do. Stay well.” He’s hiding something from me. He’s in a hurry to pull his sister and leave.

I must say I’m surprised to see them walking together. I thought they hated breathing in the same space.

Before I go inside my room and explain to Njabulo, I try Malibongwe’s phones. I have two of his numbers, one is off, one goes through.

The first thing I ask when he answers is; “Are you alive?”

“Yes, I’m okay,” he says

“Where are you? Your family is looking for you.”

“I’m somewhere around, can I come over later?”

“Yes, please call them and tell them where you are.”

He drops the call on me!

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THE MCINEKAS

It’s after 6pm, Mkhuleko is the last one to come home. He’s empty-handed as well. The other two are sitting on the veranda, MaVilakazi doesn’t want them inside her house. Yoli has been peeking through the door and laughing her little lungs off. Her grandmother won’t let her mother and uncles inside,

she's been changing channels and watching cartoons all day without anyone disturbing her. She's already in her pyjamas, today she's sleeping with her grandmother.

She stands at the door again, looking amused.

"Ugogo uthi nizolala phandle," she says with excitement.
(grandma says you will all sleep outside)

Sphakamiso doesn't mind her annoying updates, it's Malibongwe he's worried about. Nombuso is annoyed, she's hungry, this child will end up getting a clap for yapping in her ears.

Mkhuleko is still limping, he wasn't searching that much.

"Any luck?" he asks them.

No response, just empty stares and sighs.

Okay, it's bad.

"Yoli ask your grandmother to give us food," he says.

Yoli runs back inside, she's very happy to be the messenger.

MaVilakazi appears after a moment with one big bowl filled with uphuthu and chicken stew. Yoli is behind her with a basin of water.

All three of them are looking at her with frowns.

"Ma what is this?" Ibhoklolo goes first, Nombuso.

"It's food, what does it look like? Didn't you all say you were hungry?"

"But one big bowl?" Mkhuleko asks. This is disturbing, they're not some Pneumonic kids from the poorest village of Africa getting lunch from an American actress. It's their home, they have their own plates, what the fuck.

"I'm way too old to be eating with kids in one bowl," Nombuso.

MaVilakazi puts the bowl in front of them and takes Yoli's hand and gets back inside the house. She closes the door and locks it inside.

"This is fucked up!" – Mkhuleko.

Nombuso inhales sharply, "I wish I was never born."

Sphakamiso drags the water basin.

"Wash your hands and eat," he tells them. Crying and wishing they didn't exist won't help the situation. They need to eat, sleep and wake up and look for their brother.

They gather around one bowl like orphans and eat using their hands. She didn't even put spoons for them, you'd swear they dragged Malibongwe out and lost him.

"Where am I going to sleep?" Nombuso asks, worried.

"I will sleep with Mkhuleko, you can use my room," Sphakamiso says.

She nods with relief, they continue eating with sad faces.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 33

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

He's here, I don't know how he got here, his car is with his brother.

The first thing I ask is, "Have you gone home?"

He takes his jacket off and sits on the bed without answering.

He didn't go, I guess this time whatever fight took place was the last straw. However, one can never be done with his own

family. He can ignore them, run all over South Africa and not answer questions about them. But they're still his family.

"Are you hungry?" I ask.

He takes his shoes off and lies on his stomach with his face facing down. Okay, I have a big baby now.

I dish for him and put the food next to the bed. He will eat when he's in a better mood. Not having a TV makes life boring. I can't afford data to stream movies, I can only save videos on YouTube and watch them over and over again until I know every single line by head.

My friend from back home has been on my Whatsapp all day asking about Njabulo. Maybe it's because I'm his cousin, we live together when he's not in jail, but I don't see why any sane, peace-loving girl would be attracted to someone like Njabulo? That one can traffic his own girlfriend to China if he's promised money. Because I care about Thola I've been saying all red-flagging things about Njabulo. I don't want her to date him and get hurt and then start hating everything that's related to him, me included. I love her, okay.

My own walking red-flag sits up and finally takes the food I dished for him. Is it not too early for tantrums? I understand he's going through the most at home, but come on, why am I suffering for it?

He eats silently, I'm on my phone watching YouTube videos and trying to convince my friend that she can do better than dating a Njabulo.

He clears his throat after eating. I turn and look at him.

"Can I drink water?" he asks.

"Yeah, water is in the bucket," I say.

He takes the empty plate to a washing basin on the table and then drinks water. I will talk if he talks, if he doesn't I will watch YouTube.

Now he's sitting, stealing glances at me and clearing his throat every now and then.

"Ngiyabonga," he finally thanks me for feeding him.

"You're welcome," I say.

"I'm not in a good mood."

That's very obvious.

"Sleep then. Do you need to bath?"

"Yes, please. But first, I need to talk to you."

I look at him again. He takes the phone from my hand and puts it aside, then he pulls me.

"I needed to calm down, if I opened my mouth I would've cried and I don't want to do that in your space," he says.

"Why do you feel like crying? What happened?"

"It's family issues, I...I'm annoyed by my mother more than my siblings."

"What did MaVee do?" I ask.

He chuckles, "You call her so nicely, she'd love you. But then your MaVee can love you and still not fight for you. She did that with my father, she allowed people to kill him and get away with murder."

Yeer... that's too heavy for me.

But I asked, I have to look at him in the eyes and listen without a flinch.

"I'm going to kill Mpatho," he says.

I'm looking at him and I don't recognize my Bonga.

“Okay, kill that Mpatho person and then what? Your family will be reunited, your siblings will love and tolerate each other when you’re in jail? And you will show the love that you said you have for me behind bars? Murder is 25 years, I’m 29. You think I’m going to wait for a man for 25 years and start living life at 54? Is this what you expect of me?” I’m angry. I’ve known this person for less than a month, never once have I told him about my own life, how hard it’s been to grow up without a mother and having to depend on a male parent who can’t relate to any of your struggles as a young woman. No, I listen to him everyday, I support him, I advise him, I put him on my chair and feed him.

“How important is this Mpatho person to be worth such big part of life?”

“Please don’t shout.”

“I’m not shouting, I’m not fuckin’ shouting!”

I get up on my feet and throw his shoes in front of him. Where is the knife? If all don’t work he might need to finish this Mpatho person with a knife, right?

“Here, take it and go kill.” I throw the knife at him carelessly, it lands right on his elbow while he’s trying to shield his face. Before I know it he’s bleeding, that’s when my senses crawl back in.

I rush to him, he looks scared more than pained.

“Let me see, I’m so sorry,” I’m panicking. It might be me who goes to jail instead of him.

“Miyanda,” he’s looking at me. The fear is still written all over his face.

I grab a cloth and press it on the bleeding spot. When I remove it I notice that it’s just a little cut.

“It’s not big. Are you going to tell the police?” I’m going to shit on my pants. My father wouldn’t handle the news of me being in prison. So Njabulo was paving a way for me all this time.

He takes out his phone with the other hand. Is he calling them?

“Bonga I’m sorry, please don’t get me arrested.” I grab the phone from him and hide it behind my back.

He looks at me and starts laughing uncontrollably.

“Can you calm down? I’m not hurt, I just need Vaseline on this, it’s just a scratch. But grabbing my phone while I’m checking something is not cool,” he says.

“I thought you were calling the police,” I give it back to him.

“No, I gave someone my Range Rover to...” He stops and looks at his elbow. “Ah, I think I need painkillers.”

“What Range Rover Bonga?” I’m not distracted by his sudden need of painkillers.

“I meant Tazz, I gave it to someone to take it for a service.” Lies don’t suit his cute face.

“Your crazy...I mean Sphakamiso is driving your car today and you haven’t talked or seen him. So why are you lying? Are you a criminal Bonga?”

“No MaMthethwa, I’m not a criminal,” he says.

“Then don’t lie to me because I lose it really quick.” I go and take Vaseline out of my cosmetic basket and one wipe to clean the cut before applying Vaseline on it. It’s really small, I only need to cover it with a strip of elastoplast.

“I didn’t think I was going to hurt you. I was just mad that you were talking about killing someone, I was giving you the knife to go and do as you please,” I say.

“It’s okay, I shouldn’t have said that,” he says.

“No, you shouldn’t have thought about it Bonga. Unless if everything you said to me on Wednesday was just a lie. Futhi it was a lie, if I didn’t call you today you’d have gone the whole weekend without talking to me or seeing me.” I’m ranting and all he’s doing is just stare at my face as I shout my heart out.

“My cousin who’s been in jail for two years is back. He was here earlier and I promise you if you dare hurt me or tell me lies, you will have him to deal with.” All these threats just because he said he loves me! Sometimes I wish I wasn’t me. I’m sure he regrets putting himself in this.

“So it’s a family of gangsters?” Now he looks more amused than freaked out.

“No, we are good citizens,” I say.

I’m done with his cut, I put everything away and come back to sit next to him.

“Now that you’ve almost cut my arm into two pieces, ayikho intombi engaqom is’goga, no other woman will date a handicapped person, you have to take me,” he says.

I roll my eyes. Now I almost cut his arm into two pieces? With that little scratch nje.

“Seriously, I haven’t felt like I need to give love another chance until you. This room has become my place of sanity because of you. I think any place that has you can become my sanity. I have fallen in love with you, I heard everything you said even though you were shouting, and I apologize for prioritizing grudges over us,” he says.

“Us?” I ask.

“Yes, you and your armless man.”

I laugh, leaning close to his shoulder.

He holds me and kisses me on the forehead.

“You’re good at not responding to my requests,” he says.

“What didn’t I respond to?” I ask, lifting my eyes to him. With stress and all, he’s still such an eye candy.

“I asked that you and I just become an item, officially,” he says and stares down at me.

I like how thicker his upper lip is, and he pushes it up when he’s quiet.

“So unenyevu?”

He chuckles, “See, you’re doing it again. Awung’ thandi? Don’t you love me?”

“I do and I hate you for making me say this in less than a month.” Like what happened to my core Zulu-ness? A man should chase a woman for a few years before she says yes. But me, not even a month but already seng’qomile.

“There’s no timetable when you meet uswahla lwakoMcinaka,” he says turning my face to him and capturing my lips into a slow kiss. I feel a flight of butterflies in my tummy.

His hand gently runs on my waist, he's smooching my lips deeper.

He lifts it up to my face, breaks the kiss and caresses the side of my face.

“You taste good as you look,” he says, staring down at my lips.

I drop my eyes, blushing.

He lifts my chin and kisses me again.

He pushes me down on the pillow and continues kissing me with my face in his hands.

“Sthandwa sami?” he says, more like requesting permission to call me that.

“Yes,” I respond.

He smiles and kisses me again. He drops his hand down to my breast and caresses it.

Then down to my tummy and massages it around. Down to my waist, he lifts my dress up and touches my thighs. I haven't been touched by a man in a long time.

“Thank you for letting me into your life.” His hand is still between my thighs.

He lowers his face and kisses my lips again. Then he runs his tongue down to my neck.

I let out a little moan; his hand between my thighs starts rubbing right over my panty.

Is it not too soon?

He kisses me on the lips again, his hand has left my thighs, he's pulling down his pants.

“Bonga, it's too soon,” I say.

“I just want to...” He doesn't complete his sentence, he kisses me again. His pants are down on his knees, all with his boxers. I'm seeing his nakedness, his thin and long down there. I'm old, I've done this with three people before, but my nerves are still scattered.

“I want to feel you,” he says with a soft stare on my face.

I inhale a deep breath. I still think it's too soon, I just agreed now now to his love proposal.

He places his hand on my panty and gently taps his fingers over. He drops his head next to my face and begs in a low, lustful voice. “Please MaMthethwa, ng'yacela.”

I take out a deep breath. He lifts his face and trails kisses from my neck to my lips.

Then he pecks the tip of my nose, my panty slides down.

Sexually I'm not against this; morally I am.

He stands on the floor and pulls the panty out of my ankles. Then he grabs my legs and pulls me to the edge of the bed. He leans down and...his mouth smooches my moist cookie-jar. He's got both my thighs in his arms spread apart.

Rooms are close to each other, I have to cover my mouth not to make too much noise.

He gets up and lies between my legs. He rubs his tip against my clit, at this point I'm weak and down for anything. He pushes in and locks a stare with me.

Once he's fully in, he pulls out.

Then pushes in again, my walls are stretching and easing his way.

He pulls out the third time and rubs my moisture from my opening, spreading it all over my cookie. This time when he pushes in, it's less eye contact and more pressure on the thrust. He presses his thumb on my clit and starts pumping into me.

I feel my legs trembling, I want him to stop pressing my clit like that but I want him to press it. What the fuck! I'm screaming his name, my nails are on his back, digging into his skin.

"Sthandwa sami! Babeeee!" He groans like a bull and spills his seeds inside me.

I lie still, catching my breath. He's still inside me, his eyes are shut, his jaws are clenched.

He felt me, like he wanted to.

It was too soon but it has happened. Even if I had a chance I wouldn't take it back.

He pulls out, his sperms leak out on my thighs.

My phone rings, I get a glimpse of the caller. It's Thola, I watch it ring. The time is 7:52pm, still early.

I shift my eyes back to Malibongwe. He still hasn't fetched the towel to clean me up. He's just standing between my legs and looking at me like I'm coated in expensive cream, not his sperms.

"The towel, Bonga!"

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PHUMELELE

I hate to admit this but Beauty is winning. She has pressed both of us in the corners and pushed us to our limits. We pretend not to be affected by everything he does but we still fight behind doors. I'm packing some of my things and moving to his bedroom. It wasn't supposed to happen today or like this. But my insecurities were dug up, Mpatho said I will move to his bedroom for peace' sake. Now I don't know how we are going to abstain if we start sleeping on the same bed.

He takes a break and sits on the bed. I need to return for my towels.

I throw my two purses on the bed and go. When I come back with a stack of my towels I find him standing in front of a mirror

with a face-cloth pressed on his wrist. It looks like he's bleeding.

"What happened?" I ask.

"The zipper of your purse scratched me here," he says.

"When I threw it on the bed?" I dump the towels on the bed and rush to him.

"Yes, but I saw that it was a mistake. Don't worry, it's just a little scratch, I will put a strip of elastoplast on it," he says.

"I'm so sorry." I'm still worried because he's bleeding.

"Stop worrying," he says, pulling me for a light peck.

He nurses the scratch while I clear everything from the bed. We have a movie to watch at 8pm.

"You dropped something," he says, sitting on the bed again.

I look down, it's my red G-string.

"I thought I put it together with the nightie that I'm going to change into." I pick it up.

"So you're not wearing anything right now?" he asks.

What? I look at him, he's staring at me.

Oh gawsh, no!

"I'm about to change to my sleepwear nje," I say.

"So you're not wearing any panties?" Seriously now, I just explained. After I took a bath we started packing what I was going to move into his bedroom with.

He pulls my arm and playfully lifts my skirt up- the primary school childish way.

"Mpatho, seriously?" I pull my skirt down.

He lifts it up again and wraps his arm around my waist to block it from going down.

“Do you how much I want to be inside you?”

Now he’s turning me on.

“I know, but you can’t, right?”

His hand slides between my thighs; he penetrates my folds with his fingers.

“Mpatho!” I’m giggling but I’m seriously trying to put him back to his senses.

“Ngilambile mina, I’m starving,” he says, laying me on my back and lying on his side to take out his fully erect dick. We are meant to wait for a certain period of time, and we’ve been committed to it. The G-string on the floor caused problems.

He kisses my lips, he’s breathy and rushy.

“We will be quick,” he says.

I don’t think that makes any difference. But I let him in, he rubs me until I’m wet and smooth for him to slide in. He grabs my head and smashes his lips on me. His dick is inside me, he’s pounding me hurriedly, with less patience than he had the first time. I like it, his low groans fulfill something inside my soul.

I’ve always wanted to feel his firm buttocks. I hold his waist and then move my hands to his behind. I grab his buttocks, he moves his waist in circles, my fingers are digging into his butt.

“Mommy!” he groans deeply.

“Yes baby!” My toes are curling up. I feel like pushing something out. It’s coming out and untying every knot on my body. My joints are trembling.

“I love you,” he says, pumping into me harder.

“I love you too. Please, I love you.” My body finally comes to a rest.

I close my eyes and feel like I’m drifting to a different, peaceful world.

Then I feel him tensing up on top of me. He’s groaning and calling my name.

I feel his warm cum filling me up. I was hoping he’d pull out like he did the other day. But I guess today is different; bleed and cum inside.

Oh shit, our movie! 8pm must be a few minutes away and this man doesn’t want to take his dick out of me.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 34

PHUMELELE

I knew sharing a bedroom would come with a lot of challenges and temptations, but I didn’t think we’d fail to hold ourselves this soon. I mean, I had just stepped into the room and he couldn’t keep his hands off me. Now opening my eyes I feel his hard dick on my butt. His hands are wrapped around me. We slept like this; he held me throughout the night.

“You’re awake?” he asks, rubbing himself against my back.

“Yes,” I say.

He plants soft kisses on my back.

We slept naked, maybe that’s why he’s horny so early in the morning.

“Did you sleep well?” He’s lifting my knee up.

Yesterday was a mistake, we can defend ourselves and say so. But if we repeat again, what is that going to be?

“Yes, I slept well, thank you.”

“Nami futhi.” He’s sliding his dick from behind and rubbing his way to my clit.

I woke up moist and he’s taking that to his advantage.

“You still remember that you’re mourning, right?”

“Mmmm! Yeah, I do,” he says directing his tip into my opening.

I know I will get it again. I want it, even though I know I shouldn’t be. Mkhulu wasn’t my blood, I don’t think his death required me to abstain from anything. But now that I’ve been intimate with a mourning person it puts us both under darkness.

Voluntarily, I lift my leg, he holds it up. He’s taking his time with each stroke, moaning as he hits into deeper spots, calling me and telling me that he’s in love. I understand why sex is so popular; with each stroke I feel my clit throbbing. My body is trembling; there’s a wave of pleasure that’s breaking me apart.

“Mommy!” his voice rumbles.

He pounds me harder, I’ve splashed on his dick, juices are running down my thighs and messing the sheets. It’s too much this time, I think I peed a bit because he just slammed into me before I even went to the loo.

I know when his body tenses up that I’m about to feel something filling me up. He groans one last time and I feel it warmly shooting inside me. He lets go of my leg and pulls out.

Soft kisses on my back.

I think we will be having a lot of sex; his drive is high.

He cleans me up and then gets in bed. I turn to face him and snuggle myself on his broad chest. His bulky arms always wrap me in like a little doll.

“I thought about what you said about looking for my mother,” he says.

“Okay....are you going to do it?” I ask.

“Yes, I want to be happy with you and not carry any pain into our marriage. I will call Thokozani, the taxi driver, and see if he can’t talk to his contact person for me.” He pauses and takes a deep breath. “Maybe this time, seeing that both my father and grandfather are no more, she will agree to talk and have a relationship with me.”

“Because you’re now legally rich, is that what you’re sugarcoating?” Look, I want him to meet his mother, but if she wants to have a relationship with him I want it to be based on the fact that she loves him, not to milk his money.

“I really don’t care about money.” He’s tripping now.

“Money is the reason why you and I are married. What do you mean you don’t care about it?” My tongue may have been too blunt, but I’m just annoyed that he wants to buy his mother’s love with the money we’ve fought, and still are fighting, for.

“Aw’khulumi kahle nami, I don’t like what you’re saying.” He’s offended, I shouldn’t have put it like that even though it’s nothing but the truth. Love didn’t start us, Phume and Mpatho. Money did.

“Okay, let’s say you meet her and starts showering her with money and she becomes a mother that you want her to be. Are you going to fund her mothership for the rest of your life? And double it up when you have kids so that she becomes a grandmother to them as well?”

“You had your mother, Phume. And you had a father more than me. And now you have me. You’ve never had nobody; only I can judge how I feel.” He’s not taking the logic of what I said, just catching feelings.

“I’m not judging you, I’m just saying don’t start what you can’t finish. I don’t want to see you get hurt. I’ve faked to love you and I saw how badly you held onto it and ignored everything else. That’s not a healthy way to live.”

“Last night you said you love me. Is it still fake?”

I hold his stare, I can’t believe I once sat at the same table with him as a little girl and wished he could bring a girlfriend home for me to be friends with. But now I want to keep him away from every female species.

“Do you think it’s still fake?” I ask him the question instead.

He’s been in love before, so have I. We both know what love looks like.

He touches my face and links his forehead onto mine.

“No, I don’t think it’s fake. But can you say it again?”

I smile looking into the need of affection in his eyes.

“I love you,” I say.

He closes his eyes and inhales deeply.

I kiss his cheek. “I know protecting is what you do best, you were trained for that and you’re professional. But I’m your wife, I’m going to need you to let me protect your heart. My love may not be the only love that you need, but we are not paying and we are not begging anyone for love. Do you hear me?”

“Okay,” he says and then smiles.

His smiles broadens, I see happiness in his eyes, not the neediness he had a minute ago.

“You’re growing so firm and sharp. I love the woman you’re becoming, but I’m scared as well.”

“Am I scary?” I ask.

He laughs, “No mkami, you’re not.”

Did he just call me that? I’m melting; butterflies in my tummy.

“Mkami?” I’m smiling.

“Yes, I will send lobola and do everything right as soon as we are cleansed.”

I plant kisses on his chest, he’s all mine now, and I’m all his. We are going to cuddle without shame or fear. I’m done playing hide and seek with Beauty, I want to focus on being a wife and being rich. The lobola issue is another thing I need to figure out.

“I’m going to make breakfast,” he says.

“Is Aunt Nomusa not coming to work?”

“She’s coming, but don’t you want breakfast from your husband?”

I smile, “Don’t get me used to the lifestyle you can’t keep up with.”

“I’m not saying get used to it. You’re a wife, when I wake up in the morning for work I will prefer to have my cereal and eggs done by you. But today I’m the reason why you’re tired, so I will take care of you.”

Yeer, wifey duties sound like a bad song on Christmas.

“What time do you wake up for work?” I ask.

“5:30am. I exercise until 6, then take a bath and eat around 25 pass.” Someone come and kill me now.

“So next week I will be waking up around 6am to make you eggs?” I ask.

“Yes. I’d also love to have you choose my daily outfits rather than Aunt Nomusa doing that.”

Sigh! It sounds like there’s a list.

“What else?” I ask.

“Can Thursdays be our official date-nights?” This one is music to my ears.

“Okay, I love that. Anything to get out of this house and have good food elsewhere.”

“And a baby...”

Now, ahem!

“A baby. When?”

“I don’t know when you plan to take this out,” he says rubbing my left arm where the implanon was injected.

“Next year,” I say.

“Mmmm okay, we will have our first child next year and then second one soon after. I don’t want to have any kids once I turn 40, that’s 8 years from now.” These are disadvantage of being with someone who is older than you.

“What about what I want?” I ask.

“I don’t know what you want, you haven’t told me anything.” He’s right, I haven’t.

“When everything has been sorted out I want to own a boutique,” I say.

“You will get it. I knew you’d want something close to that.” He’s smiling.

“I will be running it myself, hands-on,” I say.

The smile disappears...there’s no way I was going to be a housewife whose only responsibility is to make eggs at 6am

and stay with Beauty the whole day wondering if she's not planning my murder.

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My mother was a bad bitch. From sleeping with her sister's husband before her wedding day, to ordering people to be murdered, and signing contracts for her only daughter to be married to her husband's son for inheritance. I understand why Aunt Brandi hated her, and me as well for the last 16 years. Sphakamiso wasn't even my husband but the first day I saw Aphelele I wanted nothing to do with him. His mother, the prostitute with my real surname that I've never met, I will forever hate her guts for sleeping with my then boyfriend and bearing a son and abandoning that son in dodgy prostituting flats in Durban.

I know exactly why Aunt Brandi has come back to my life. Her sister enemy is dead and there's a possibility of her husband getting all the lobola money. But I'd be damned if that man received any cent from Mpatho. My lobola will be paid at the Shandus, my grandmother's house.

I need to give Aunt Brandi a call and have a serious talk with her. Mpatho went to the gym after serving me breakfast. I will join him tomorrow...or next week. But next month sounds good as well, I will start when a new month starts.

"This is a surprise call," she says.

"Hey Aunt, we haven't talked since you left. How are you?" She actually called me but I ignored her call.

"I'm good sisi, how are you?"

"I'm also well. Are you alone?"

“No, why?”

“I want to talk to you when you’re alone. Give me a buzz when there’s no one next to you.” I drop the call and make the bed. I need to take these dishes back to the kitchen and have my first Monday-Beauty moment. I wonder what she has cooked this time around. What I know for sure is that Beauty doesn’t sleep.

My phone vibrates; it’s Aunt Brandi.

I call her again, she answers immediately.

“Are you alone now?” I ask.

“Yes, you’re scaring me. What have they done this time?” She knows that I’m not the most-liked person in this house.

“I want to tell you that I’m married, I was married before mkhulu died,” I say.

“What? And you didn’t invite me? When did he pay lobola? To who? Amasaka- when did he pay them?”

“Relax, we only signed the papers, all that will follow once you and I have settled things out.”

“Okay, I’m listening,” she sounds relieved now.

“My lobola will be paid at the Shandus, not to your husband.”

“But that’s your father.” Obviously she’s going to defend him despite of everything he’s done to her.

“That doesn’t make him anything. Since I don’t have an uncle you will go to the Shandus and stand in. But on one condition,” I say.

“Hhayi Phumelele, this is not how things are done.”

“My way or high way. If you receive my lobola you will not share it with Mzimela because he’s not worth it.”

“That’s your father Phumelele!”

If that's my father, then the second round of having a father can miss me.

"How many kids did he bring to your marriage beside me?" I ask.

"Three, but..."

"Jesus Christ! And you're still with him aunty? He even slept with your sister before your big day."

"I know, but people make mistakes Phumelele, especially men." How outdated is that!

"Do you think once he gets this bride price he won't 'make more mistakes'?" I mean this man has proven to her so many times that she's not enough for him.

"But he will know anyway that I took your lobola money."

"Not if you open a bank account and keep it there without him knowing."

"I don't know, I don't want to mess around and anger the ancestors."

"Why weren't they angry when he cheated on you?"

"I hear you, I just didn't expect all this so early in the morning."

Maybe I'm just bad as my mother; from playing part in killing unborn babies to breaking people's marriages. Brandi is not the aunt of the year but I want her to turn against that miserable man who didn't even say hello to me. He's hurt her, I don't know how many times, it's time for Brandi to put Brandi first. And she will be useful to me as I embark on this marriage journey. I need an elder to advise me every now and then.

"Aunt before you go," I say, clearing my throat.

She's listening and I know she's going to judge.

“What happens if one doesn’t respect the 7 day no bedroom-stuff after losing a family member?” I ask.

“Phumelele! I talked to you about it and you swore that nothing was happening in that bedroom. Couldn’t you hold your skirt down for one week? One!”

Judge Judy! Her husband can make 4 breathing mistakes but I can’t make any.

“Am I going to die?”

“Yes, you will die.”

“Just like that?”

“Stop asking me questions and go get isqunga and bath. I don’t know what’s wrong with kids today. I stayed a virgin for 5 full years before marriage.” She’s shouting, I don’t think she remembers that I’m still on the phone. I think I took after her with the ‘I’m not ready yet’, and both of us were cheating on with our sisters. Aphelele’s mother is a Mzimela, even if it’s a different one she’s still my sister. Sphakamiso got tired and cheated on me, creating a whole Aphelele human being. And her, Mzimela had a pre-wedding glory with the bad-bitch that’s still making rules even from her grave and I was created.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 35

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Meeting a rich guy who’d make me his housewife was my dream. Especially after working here and suffering the Singh regime, I wanted nothing more than my own knight in shining

armor who'd come and save me from poverty. Three weeks ago I would've jumped with joy if I stepped out of my workplace and saw my boyfriend waiting for me in a brand new Range Rover. But not now, I'm mature enough to know that no man resigns from his hardware job and then wakes up with a Range Rover. Not in the movies, not in real life.

He opens the door for me and kisses my cheek before I get inside. He talked about this car and quickly took it back and said he made a mistake, he was talking about his Tazz.

"Whose car is this?" I ask.

"It's my car. Why do you look so grumpy? What did they do to you?" He fastens his seatbelt, with the Tazz he never, this one will make him respect road rules.

"I'm not grumpy, I'm just confused about this car that's just popped out of nowhere. Are you rich?"

He chuckles, "No, I'm not rich."

"Did you win Lottery?"

"No, I had my retirement funds from the hardware."

Maybe on my forehead it's written; Miyanda Popayi Mthethwa.

"Retirement funds, really?" Aside from his cute face and panty-dropping smile, he's really a disappointing human being.

"Do you want us to grab something to eat before we go?"

Hhayi-bo this person really got rich while everyone was sleeping.

We head to McDonald's, I haven't had a McFeast in a while. I order for both of us, we sit down and eat.

I'm not cooking today.

"Since you're now suddenly rich and driving Range Rovers are you going to buy bread? I don't feel like cooking today?" I ask.

“I will buy take-aways at the taxi rank,” he says.

So he’s sleeping at my place again today, he’s not going home.

I’m worried, I don’t want his family to think I kidnapped and hid him from them.

“Did you call anyone from home?” I ask.

“Can you not spoil my mood? I’m here with you, I’m happy, I have peace.”

If he’s moving in then he needs to contribute towards rent. Or even better just pay it up himself since he’s now rich.

“Are you going to wear same clothes everyday?” I ask.

He didn’t come with any clothes. Thank God I had an extra towel and toothbrush that I bought for when I go home, he used that and my Camphor. Imagine driving a Range Rover wearing a striped T-shirt that looks 30 years old.

“I bought some clothes,” he says.

This person is determined not to go home.

I will let him stay for a few days, then revisit the ‘go home’ conversation because I’m not ready to be a queen of vat’n sit.

“There’s a place I want us to see before we go,” he says.

Are we ever going to leave kodwa? We finish up and drive yet to another destination.

This time we are in an empty building at the other far side of town. I don’t know what we are going in this empty place. He has keys, he opened and pulled me inside. For a second I thought I’d find young girls crushed up and tied with chains and hear, ‘this is the business I’m into; human trafficking.’ My mind just can’t let go of the sudden wealth issue.

“I bought this place,” he drops a bombshell.

Buying property is another costly thing in this country. A Range Rover, now property!

I take a deep breath and look around. It's a building that's dividend into two parts; it's big.

"What are you going to do with it?" I ask.

"Selling car parts and doing repairs. Sphakamiso did Mechanism, that's his territory. But I will talk to them first and find out which one they think is the best idea," he says.

"That would be awesome. I'm proud of you." Yes, I was questioning and unimpressed with everything just a moment ago, but this one impresses me. There's nothing I'd like to see more than him having a better relationship with his family and I think starting a business together would be one step towards the light.

I wrap my arms around his waist, he's slim and taller than me.

"Did you have a good day?" I ask.

Yazi I'm such a warm person, I just needed someone like him to dig up this side of me.

"Yes. How can my day be bad when I got myself a beautiful girlfriend yesterday?"

I could blush, but...

"You were talking about killing people yesterday," I say.

He doesn't say anything for about a minute, then he takes a deep breath.

"I want to know why my father was killed," he says.

"How are you going to know and what are you going to do after you find out?"

He drops his chin on my head and releases another deep breath. Undecided. He might and might not kill the person in question.

“I will tell him that I want to see him,” he says.

“If he agrees, can I come with you?” I’m taking a big chance here and gambling with my life while at it.

“Hhayi-bo Miyanda, that’s for men to handle,” he says.

“I will stay in the car, I just want to be there.” And make sure you don’t kill anyone, because if you do, not only will you deal with the police, but Njabulo as well for traumatizing me.

“You stress me out babe,” he heaves a sigh.

I lift my eyes and look at him. “Then why are you with me Bonga?”

“Because everytime you call my name I get hard.” He rubs his front against me.

It’s time for us to go. I’m not getting fucked in an empty building. I need to save the last quarter of my morals that I have left.

And, save him and the other guy.

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MKHULEKO

Waking up and seeing no sign of Malibongwe means one thing; another day of searching. Mkhuleko stands at the door, trying to exercise his leg. He religiously wakes up everyday at 00:00; again at 3:45 after having the last dream of the night.

Sometimes he sleeps again before 5, but some other days, like today, his sleep ends at 3:45.

Sphakamiso knows his sleeping patterns. He started smoking at 14, he wasn't caught until Nombuso came back home and turned pretty much everything upside down. He still doesn't smoke in front of his mother but everyone knows that he smokes. Sphakamiso joined the skuif-gang last year after tasting the bitter effects of unemployment last year.

Failing matric wasn't disappointing to him. He's known since he was a little boy that he was made for a different school, going to a normal one wasn't going to bear any fruits. But he schooled, it's what his parents wanted, every normal child goes to school. He passed all his grades leading to matric. Sphakamiso came home with CAO forms and helped him apply to different high education institutions. Malibongwe paid for the application. His mother bragged that another son of hers was about to finish matric and go study to become 'something'. Nombuso was complaining about the electricity he wasted by turning his light on throughout the night. She's always unhappy about something.

But he was getting too far ahead of himself and they couldn't allow that to happen. Being in university would've made him lose the core of his existence, which is different from anyone's. He failed his matric, that was their way of stopping him from straying from his right path. Even though he doesn't get shaken easily, some days Nombuso gets to his head and he starts wondering what would happen if he found a job. They don't miss anytime he's having those thoughts, they remind him who he is and how much of a stumbling block they can be. He's not to leave unless 'the special female' comes home.

But last night wasn't about him and the maternal grandfathers he needs live for. It was about babies, blood and umbilical

ords. He knows and understands that bleeding means something powerful and different in his maternal side of the family, the Vilakazis. He's attached to them more than he's attached to the Mcinekas. The dead grandfathers have followed him up to this stage. Harassing him and sometimes comforting him. Maybe Sphakamiso knows this as well, because after wounding him and causing him to bleed, he bought a chicken and properly apologized by slaughtering it.

"Why are you standing outside at this time? I hope you weren't committing any crime last night," Nombuso.

He was in his thoughts he didn't even hear the door opening. Sphakamiso gave her his room and now she's playing security guard. When they bump heads it gets chaotic. Others can tolerate her, he doesn't tolerate nobody.

"You still smoke?" She still hasn't disappeared.

"Ya," he puffs the smoke out of his nose.

She coughs, the smoke has affected her but she's four feet away.

"Do you see what you're doing? Not all of us want to have lung cancer." It's like she craves chaos every second of the day. It's barely 6am and she's already starting a fight.

"You need to get on Tinder," he says.

She frowns, "What's that?"

"Money saving app. Do you know where our umbilical cords are?"

She frowns again. From the Tinder money-saving app to umbilical cords!

"They're in a box in the rondavel, ngezansi," she says.

"Okay, good morning." He gets back inside his room leaving Nombuso confused and angry.

He leaves half of the cigarette for Sphakamiso and puts his T-shirt on. Sphakamiso is still asleep, he quietly walks out and closes the door.

He enters the rondavel below the yard and looks through the boxes. He tries to follow every clue given to him but most of the times he ends up with nothing. His time will come, his light will shine, for now he's going to stay home and fight for peanut butter with his sister and catch bullets until the special female comes home.

Oh, here they are.

But it's just them, there's nothing special. Useless bunch of ancestors!

He puts them back inside the little box he found them in. All five of them.

Five???

He picks the box again and looks at them. Yes, they're five and there's only four of them.

He looks around and grabs a bucket and sits. Who was the other child? MaVilakazi has never told them about another child. If he or she died, then where is the grave?

Well, his answers are not here, he was here to get questions.

He puts everything back in its place and walks out. Just as he locks the door MaVilakazi appears. She's always been an early bird.

"What are you doing here?" She startles him.

Mkhuleko looks at her, she's been a different person since Malibongwe left yesterday morning.

"I'm about to go and look for him," he says.

“I’m asking what are you doing in this rondavel?”

He scratches his head, “Oh that, I was looking for my earphones.”

“Okay, go and wake your siblings up, your brother is still not home.”

“But Ma, what if we find him and he doesn’t want to come home?”

“What if something bad happened to him?”- MaVilakazi.

“He’s my blood, I’d know,” he says.

“Oh, but I still want you all to go and find him.” Mkhuleko has been always weird, she wants all of them out anyway. It’s peaceful without them, she gets time to be alone and think about the madness that she’s been left into by three men and a woman.

“Ma,”- Mkhuleko.

Wasn’t he assigned to go and wake his brother and sister up?

“Did we have another sibling?” he asks.

What is this child saying? She’s looking at him trying to figure out where the question came from. And he’s looking at her straight in the eyes. There’s always been something unruly about him.

“No. Why are you asking me that?” she asks.

“Because you’ve cut five umbilical cords but there’s only four of us.”

Her heart is beating fast but she’s keeping a straight face.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she says.

Mkhuleko was about to let this go, but now his curiosity has been piqued.

“Is there anything you’re hiding Ma?”

“No, I’m not hiding anything.”

He heaves a deep sigh, “Please, if there’s anything I should know just say it. I have a life waiting for me and I’m stuck here because I was promised someone will come and put things in place. Do you know who that is?”

A she? That she doesn’t know.

“Who said that?” she asks.

“I just know, so if you know who’s expected to come here to solve your madness please tell her to hurry up. I will ask clarity about the fifth umbilical cord.” He turns and walks away.

He can’t ask for clarity. What kind of a child is this? So secretive and weirdly-behaved.

But how does she stop him if she doesn’t know his sources?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 36

PHUMELELE

I’m alone with Beauty, every relative of hers that came for the funeral has finally left, Aunt Nomusa had a Sassa trip today, she’s not at work. Mpatho said he’s rushing to the office to have a quick meeting with the stuff. I thought it would be a ‘quick meeting’ but now it’s past 11am and he’s still not back. I’m getting worked up a bit, I’m so used to have him around that I don’t even remember what I used to do with my time before us.

I’m trying my best not to be in the same space as Beauty. Our plotting-relationship is now over, we’ve gone back to how we were before the arranged marriage thing was revealed. After

my mom's death I was only close to Aunt Nomusa and mkhulu in the house. Mpatho was a stranger, on purpose. Beauty was just a woman I shared a space with and mkhulu's trophy. I never saw anything more to her; she was never someone I could ask advice from or say I look up to. She wasn't special, just like she isn't now.

"Well, well, well!"

Think of the devil.

She pulls the chair and sits. She's wearing a long black dress, black doek and scarf across her chest. I don't understand her look, she hasn't been mourning all these days, why now?

"Look at who is occupying my space," she says.

Her space? This kitchen belongs to the whole family.

"Crawford is coming tomorrow, it's finally a big day." Now this explains why she's suddenly acting like a widow. It's all about the will, she remembers that the dead man was actually her husband.

"Had you stuck with me both of us would be celebrating right now," she says and pulls a bottle of champagne that's been sitting on the counter all morning. She's popping it. She's in a big mood; her smile stretches to her ears.

She stops smiling, "I will kick you and Mpatho out."

Where is the surprise in that?

"Tell me something I don't know," I'm bored.

"I think something will compel me to keep him in the businesses because he's the only grandchild," she rolls her eyes saying that. "But I will demote him from the Chairman Enterprise Officer and find someone more suitable for the job."

“Chief Executive Officer,” I tell her. As someone who’s about to become so influential and powerful she should learn her abbreviations.

“I will make him a receptionist,” she says.

I can’t help but laugh, her jokes are really funny.

“So, if you’re any clever you will take what you can from him before kukhala icilongo,” she says and sips her champagne. I think she’s suffering from a certain syndrome, there’s nothing normal about her.

“Let’s hope you’re not pregnant, you still stand a chance with your boyfriend,” she says.

I don’t even think about Sphakamiso anymore. I don’t see us getting back together, even if Mpatho and I don’t work out. He was my first boyfriend; he gave me all my firsts. But I think for me to grow him and I had to go our separate ways. He fell in love with the pure princess that I was, not this crazy woman I’ve become. Loving him is something I will always do. And wishing him well; I will always have his back.

“He’s a good boy,” Beauty says.

She’s still on my case about Sphakamiso.

“Can he paint?”

“Why?”

“I want him to come and repaint my bedroom. But I want him to come once Mpatho is home.”

Is this woman drunk?

“Don’t you get tired?”

“Of what? He needs money, he’s unemployed. I’m for the people, I want to help him get money to spoil his son. Don’t make this about you.”

“He’s my ex-boyfriend, you know Mpatho will be angry.” We’ve already fought so many times because of her. Doesn’t she get bored and pick a book and read, instead of trying to ruin lives?

“I don’t want you to be with Mpatho, that’s the point I’ve been trying to make. I don’t have any problem with you,” she says.

“But why don’t you want me to be with him?” I thought I could take it to whatever length she wants it to reach, but no, I’m tired. I don’t want to do this anymore.

“Because babe, you don’t want to be with him either. It’s a good life that you want, do you think sacrificing your life for money is fun and games?” she asks.

I look at her face and see that she’s serious. No devilish smile, no mockery.

“You don’t love Mpatho, you love your boyfriend, just that you’re still angry at him and he doesn’t have anything to offer. If you had anything in your heart for Mpatho you wouldn’t have left and came back when you realized that your prince charming had a little progeny he’d been hiding from you. Mpatho was your last and most comfortable option. And that’s the thing about these Mshazis...” She chuckles and takes a little sip. “Without money they’re nothing. We all had our special people before them. Me; you and your boyfriend; your mother had Mzimela; MaMdletshe couldn’t even share the same bed as Mvimbo, she also had her person in the past.”

“And what makes you think your point of view is the only one that matters? Who died and made you the expert of relationships?” I’m on my feet, I’m angry.

She’s still sitting, there’s a smile on her face. “Sit down and have champagne. This is a girls’ talk, he also knows that he’s not the kind that gets true love.”

“I’m not sitting here and listening to this. You don’t know me Beauty, you don’t know anything about me.” I walk away fighting back tears. I don’t know why her analysis and choice of words cut me so deep. She’s not right; I do love Mpatho. I didn’t at first, but I got to know him, feelings grew.

“Do you want your room to be repainted as well?” she asks behind me.

“Beauty please stop,” I beg.

I’m tired of fighting. I lost my mother, it hasn’t been that long and I wasn’t given a chance to mourn her death properly. I’m dealing with a lot, I’m trying to accept my destiny and I’m finally feeling okay with the way things are.

“If he comes I will forgive his brother,” she says.

I don’t even have the strength to go back to the issue of Malibongwe stealing cars. She just admitted that it was her, she’s out to destroy this family.

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I hear footsteps but I don’t lift my head. He puts something on the pedestal and then sits next to my feet.

“Are you crying?”

Yes, I’m crying. I threatened Sphakamiso and he didn’t come to do a piece job that could’ve given him something. I hate that I did that to him, I offered to pay him what Beauty was going to pay him and he refused. I’m becoming so cold-hearted, I can’t even recognize myself anymore.

“Phume talk to me, what’s wrong?” He peels the duvet off my head.

I can't look at him, not after everything Beauty assumed about what we have. I feel bad because I don't have any grounds to dispute what she said.

"Please," he turns my face up.

I'm sure I look like a mess. My eyelids feel heavy, my nose keeps running, I'm messed up.

"I don't want to do this," I tell him.

"Our marriage?" He's frowning. He's in a blue shirt that I picked for him. I was happy to do so, even though he ironed it himself I felt like a responsible partner.

"The constant fighting, I can't do it anymore." At this point money doesn't even matter, it feels like I'm about to trade my peace for it.

He takes my hand off my face and looks at me. "Crawford is coming tomorrow and you want to give up now? Love, come on."

"Nothing is going to change people's perspectives. I don't want to change and I'm already turning into something I don't recognize because of this," I'm crying again.

He doesn't let me cover my face. I look ugly when I cry, I don't want to turn him off.

"At least you had 24 years of innocence, I started these battles at 19," he says.

Zero sympathy. I expected more from him. Where was I when he fought those battles?

"So I deserve this?" I glare at him.

"No, you don't. But at least I'm here for you, I care less about people's opinions of us, only you and I know the magic that we have. The deep connection and how happy we are when we are together."

“Because nobody is going to say you married me for money. I’m looking like a gold-digger; a sister who sacrificed her morals and went to warm her brother’s bed to be included in a will.” He lets go of my hand as I say that.

He stands up, “Okay, we will have a divorce then.”

Just like that? I’m thrown back.

“A divorce? Before we even have a wedding?”

“What do you want? Marriage or divorce?”

Is he being serious right now?

“Peace, I want peace!”

“With me or not with me? I can’t go around putting tape around people’s mouths so that they don’t talk about us.”

“That’s not my point,” I’m angry all over again.

“Eyy suck it up!” He storms out of my room.

What the fuck just happened? Beauty arranged a robbery that resulted into his grandfather dying. She’s crushed him to dust, he fears her, there’s nothing I’m going to suck up.

I follow him, I want to give him a piece of my mind. He mustn’t mistake me crying for something else. Stupid soldier! I doubt he was even a real one, maybe he was a military cook. As I charge towards Mpatho’s bedroom I hear a giggle behind me.

I turn and look. It’s her standing with her glass of champagne. Not today, I’m not going to have it!

I turn back to her. The only thing I remember is her throwing her glass away and shielding her face. Next thing we are both on the floor, I’m hitting her head and she’s scratching my arms trying to remove me. This is the first time I’ve ever put my

hands on anyone and I'm going in like crazy. I don't want her to have a chance to hit back on my soft face.

Strong hands grab me and lift me up. I grab her hair and go up with her.

"Phume stop this!"

I don't stop, he has to put more force and drag me to the side. Beauty wants him out of the way, now he's stopping her and I'm behind him catching my breath. I feel better, I needed to get that aggression out of my body.

"Wena uzobona!" she threatens.

I know she will do something, there's nothing she's not capable of.

"You are going to jail," she says, wiping blood from her lip.

I expected her to talk about hiring hitmen, not jail. Mpatho doesn't stop her when she goes off dialing something on the phone.

"Why did you do that?" He's frustrated with me, not with the person who's calling the police on his "wife".

"You're not going to make me choose between marriage and divorce simply because I asked for peace," I say.

He frowns.

Yes, I'm continuing with the other fight.

"If anyone talks about me and I hear, I will beat them."

"Excuse me?" He's acting confused.

I didn't stutter, he heard me very well.

"Make sure she doesn't arrest me because I will deal with her goad when I come back. What do you want to eat?" I ask.

Why is he quiet?

“Eggs and toast?” I ask.

“It’s almost midday,” he says.

“Okay, I will make you spaghetti and chicken. If they come to arrest me you will continue with the pots.” I need to wash her make-up off my hands first and then go figure out how to cook spaghetti and chicken.

“I will have something delivered,” he’s following me.

“No, I said I will cook.” What’s wrong with him? He said he wants a cooking wife who styles him and wake up at 6 in the morning.

“Phume,”

He’s still here?

“What?” I turn to him.

“I don’t want you to be like this.”

Is it now?

“This is how I’m going to be if I don’t get peace. I’m not going to divorce you, until you start defending us I’m going to be like this.”

“But aren’t we coming out tomorrow as a couple?”

Oh that, I forget.

“Eyani imzuzu? I’m going to tell her, she will decide if she’s still calling the police on me or not.” I turn to leave the bathroom but he grabs my arm.

“I found her, I know where she lives but...”

“Who?” I’m not patient enough to engage in the conversation of pronouns.

“Ncedziwe, my mother,” he says.

Oh fuck! There's his mother issue that I persuaded him to follow.

"There's a chance that we can go on Tuesday next week, I don't want to go alone. Go and apologize to her," he says.

"Are you kidding?"

"No," he says.

Beauty is going to make me lick the floors she walks on before she grants me forgiveness. After everything she's done to me I'm the one who needs to kneel and apologize for wiping off her make-up with a few claps!

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 37

PHUMELELE

I'm not a fan of apologizing because I'm hardly ever wrong. People have pushed me to my limits. Beauty has done a lot of things to me, yet I'm the one being walked to the balcony to be a bigger person to a 37 year old who can't stop picking on me. She's venting to someone on the phone, when she sees us coming she lowers the phone.

"Talk," Mpatho says behind me.

I'm starting to feel like he's on her side, he doesn't see anything wrong with what she's been doing to me.

"You and your animal sex-buddy are in my space, I'm having a private conversation," she says. The person she was talking to is still on the line. She's still insulting me by calling me Mpatho's sex-buddy.

“She wants to apologize,” Mpatho says. He’s my spokesperson now.

She raises her eyebrow, shifting her eyes to me.

“Is it?” She’s about to have fun.

I take a deep breath and nod.

“I’m sorry,” I say.

“Hold on,” she cancels the call and switches her camera on.

I’m not doing this if she wants to have clout from it. I turn to walk away, but a gigantic body blocks my way.

I look up at him, he keeps a straight face. I feel ganged up on.

I look back at Beauty, “I’m sorry.”

“You attacked a widow who just lost her husband and all you have to say is two words? The only reason I haven’t called the police is because I’m still talking to my therapist.” She wants to make a mountain out of a mole. Being a widow doesn’t affect her life, just like it doesn’t affect her sharp mouth.

“What do you want me to do?” I ask.

“Get on your knees and apologize. Keep the same energy you had when you were attacking me at the passage,” she says.

“I’m not getting on my knees.” She must just forget about it.

Knees? I don’t get on my knees for anyone, only God.

Mpatho grabs my waist and pulls me back. “Please do it.”

“On my knees Mpatho?” Is he being serious right now? When has he ever gotten on his knees for anyone? He’s got more sins than me. He’s beaten up many people than me, even killed some.

“We can do it together,” he says.

Beauty is still recording us.

Before I can say anything more, Mpatho gets down on his knees for a crazy woman. He's kneeling down.

He looks up at me, I know from the look in eyes that he desperately needs me to do this. I know why; he doesn't want me to go to prison and then go meet his mother for the second time in his life alone. I told him to do it, I have to get down on my knees with him and apologize up to Beauty's standards for his sake.

"Beauty, I'm sorry I lost control and attacked you," I say.

She's standing over us with a grin on her face. The lip I cracked with a clap has stopped bleeding, it's a bit swollen, I hope she doesn't request medical compensation for it.

"Did you tell him why you were angry?" she asks.

She's starting again.

"It's okay Beauty, just accept her apology and let's move on," – Mpatho.

"No, she was angry because I wanted to hire her ex-boyfriend because he's a good painter. I guess she knows that she can't control herself around him, so she just blew up." She's igniting another fight. I didn't tell Mpatho anything about it because I had already sorted it out.

"Don't worry ke, he refused to come because you texted him crazy. You can get up, I will have my medical bill sent tomorrow afternoon, this better not happen again." She walks away, leaving us on our knees.

Mine hurt, I've never had to kneel on the bare floor for so long.

We stand up, I'm still mad, I didn't mean that wack apology.

"You still talk to him Phume?"

Beauty wins again!

“Can we get inside the house so that I can make you something to eat?” I don’t want to have another fight with him. Not so long ago he was telling me not to mind what people say, but now he’s doing the same thing.

“You were crying for him?”

I release a deep sigh, “No, Beauty is lying.”

“Phume,”

Now he’s making me angry.

“What?” I turn back with an icy glare.

“I need you to hand over your phone,” he says.

“MY phone?” Is he hearing himself?

“I will give you a new one to start afresh with because it looks like you’re having a hard time accepting that you’re someone’s wife now, not accessible to everyone.” Whoaaaaah!

“You’re not serious,” I mean, he can’t be.

“I am, you’re not going to keep communicating with your ex-boyfriend after you said you love me.”

“Are you going to hand your phone over to me as well or this is you starting to control me?”

“I’m not controlling you, it’s you who is secretive and that’s not how I want us to start this journey.”

“You’re not answering me. Are you going to give me your phone and use a new one too?”

“No, I haven’t done anything wrong,” he says.

This is what I wanted to hear- he’s controlling me.

We are no longer talking to each other getting in the kitchen. This got to be first time in my life that I’m this drained because

of a relationship. With Sphakamiso and I it was all roses, we'd hardly ever have serious arguments. I want something like that with Mpatho. I don't see us lasting 6 years if things continue being the way they are, and the sad thing is that I now love him.

He's standing in the middle of the kitchen and I'm taking out my ingredients from the fridge. I don't know how to cook but I remember some things that Aunt Brandi taught me about chicken. Defrost, season and...I will Google the rest. With the macaroni I will read instructions on the packet.

"I can still get someone to bring us something," he says.

He's got no faith in me whatsoever. How am I going to be the wife he wants if he doesn't let me have my trial and failures. I'm cooking and he will eat.

His phone rings, he steps out of the kitchen. Can he not come back? I need space to make my mess. Google is helpful but I think it's more time-consuming than I thought, especially the chicken. And it's not coming out the way Google shows. Ayy, cooking is not my department.

It doesn't taste that bad, especially for a hungry person. I take out two plates and dish up. On the plate it looks better than it tastes.

"Where is mine? Nomusa is not here and you know what you did to me, I can't cook for myself." And that's Beauty with no beauty. Mpatho opened a can of worms for me, I'm about to become the slave of the house. I get another plate and dish for her as well, just to avoid more drama. I take mine and Mpatho's to his bedroom. I hope he eats, even if he doesn't enjoy it.

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He walks in with another long face, I wonder what has happened now.

“Lunch is ready,” I tell him.

He sits and takes his shoes off. “Malibongwe wants to see me.”

Lord, not the Mcinekas and war!

“About the cars?” I ask.

“No, something else.” That something else is him killing their father.

I don’t know why on earth they told Beauty about it.

“You see this Beauty you’re so adamant to protect!”

“I cannot handle everything with anger, I’m still a reputable business man, I can’t afford any scandals. Right now everyone is curious about the future of this family, if anything happens to her I will be the first suspect.”

“You can strangle her to death and put a rope around her neck as if she killed herself because she couldn’t handle the loss of her husband,” I say.

“Okay, I think you need to see a therapist before you turn into a complete psycho,” he says. This is just an insult. What do I need to see a therapist for? I’m not depressed.

“You’re turning into a bully and I don’t like it,” he adds. This is serious, he thinks I’m a bully for standing up for myself.

“How am I a bully?” I’m confused.

“You’ve developed ‘demanding’ patterns, not taking no for an answer, and worse throwing your hands on people. If you go to therapy you will be able to reflect,” he says.

I take my plate and eat. He does the same, quietly. I don’t have anything against therapy but I’m not going, simply because I

don't see the need. The environment we are in is toxic, whatever I'm doing is just to protect myself.

"Are you going to meet Malibongwe?" I ask.

"I don't feel like it's the best thing to do. Something just doesn't feel right," he says.

"What if I come with you? He won't do anything while I'm around." I regret saying that immediately because I know he's going to read a lot into it.

But he doesn't.

"I want to see his mother," he says.

"MaVilakazi?" I'm confused, what makes him think that's a good idea.

"She's an elder, after all it was their feud, they know the roots. I don't want it to continue to me and the boys," he says. It's just him now this side, 'the boys' as he calls them outnumber him.

"I don't see how this is negotiable with MaVilakazi. One, uyisdudla esidelelayo, secondly she hates this family and wouldn't mind if her son avenges her husband's death."

"She knows that I did it, that's one of the reasons why she hated your mother, and I believe she will know to stop her son because if I defend myself it will be fatal," he says.

This is new information for me. MaVilakazi knew that her husband was killed all this time. Sphakamiso has always been under the impression that Mcineka fell sick and died shortly. It was just a week of him being sick if I'm not mistaken. Sphakamiso didn't care that much though, they didn't have a good relationship.

"Why didn't she tell the police?" This doesn't make any sense to me.

“Because I would’ve been arrested and your mother, who masterminded everything, would’ve been free. I did it, but it wasn’t my idea and I wasn’t enjoying it, that woman knew that when she came to fetch him from where we’d locked him up,” he says.

“What were you doing to him?” I’m trying to look at him as a murderer, not my husband, but I can’t. We are chatting about murder over lunch like it’s normal.

“A lot, he died after 6 days on the way to the hospital.” He’s not going into details but ‘a lot’ means that man was tortured to death in every way possible.

“Why did my mother want him dead?” At this point I’ve accepted that my mother is sipping blood-champagnes with the devil where she is.

“He was a threat for some reasons I never got to know,” he says.

“Was MaVilakazi into it?” I ask.

He frowns, “What do you mean?”

“Was she happy when he died?”

“Who would be happy if her husband dies?”

“Beauty was happy,” I say.

“I’m talking about people with functioning brains.” We both laugh at that. At least I’m not the only one suspecting that something is abnormal with that woman.

“But she was neither happy nor too sad. She was just angry that I was made to do it.”

“So she wanted him dead too!” This is so fucked up.

If someone was to kill my husband I’d be running to courts every week to get justice. MaVilakazi is a bad bitch too. The

only thing puzzling me is what did she stand to get after her husband's death? The man had nothing to his name, just few cows he got from Nombuso's lobola and goats.

"I can't go with you if you're going to see MaVilakazi, I don't want to collect insults," I say.

He pulls me for an unexpected kiss, "You're Ncedziwe's daughter-in-law now, she'll have to deal with it."

"Mmmm!" I don't like him referring me to that woman's daughter-in-law, I don't like her before I even meet her. I feel like us going there and meeting her will do more harm than good.

His phone rings, I move from his shoulder to give him space.

"It's Thokozani," he says with a pleased smile.

Am I supposed to know who Thokozani is?

His face changes with everything that the Thokozani tells him. I guess it's not good news, at the end of the call he promises to make a plan and asks for paperwork to be e-mailed to him.

I'm curious now.

"We have to postpone," he tells me.

I look at him cluelessly.

"That was Thokozani, he got hold of the man who knows my mother's house but she's not home. She's been stuck in the hospital for over a month," he says.

"Okay...so what plan are you requested to make?"

"There's a surgery she needs to undergo to be okay. If I pay for that surgery she will get discharged and be able to meet with us and talk, she's willing to do so. I asked that they ask the hospital to send me all the paperwork," he says.

The fuckin' audacity!

"How dare she expects you to pay for her surgery when she's been absent from your life for 32 years? It doesn't make any sense."

"I will talk to her and confirm with the hospital, then pay for it. I'm not going to rob myself an opportunity to have a conversation with my mother. It's all I've ever wanted."

"What if she's a scam? She only wants you now because she's sick?"

He wears a huge frown looking at me. "I thought you'd be happy for me."

Okay, now we are having an argument. I understand that he's more emotional than logic at this point, all he's thinking about is having a mother. His mother is a scam, she's the MMM of the season and I suspect that she's going to come back here and milk every cent from him.

Beauty would've been useful. How I wish we got along as the family!

"How much do you trust this Thokozani?" I ask.

"I've known him for years." His phone beeps.

He checks and instantly smiles. "He's sent me the neighbor's number."

It gets worse!

"Let me call her," he says standing up.

I don't know what the neighbor is telling him but I have a feeling that it's all lies. I don't trust his mother at all. Why is she only willing to talk now when she's lying in the hospital fighting for her life?

He drops the call and sits with a heavy sigh.

“And then?” I ask.

“She will give her the phone tomorrow morning, she’s going to visit her at the hospital. I don’t even know what I’m going to say. Do I call her ‘Ma’ or Ncedziwe?” He’s both excited and nervous.

And I’m just annoyed. I need to get a monster-daughter-in-law persona ready.

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CHAPTER 38

PHUMELELE

The wheel of life! Today I’m sitting here eager to see Beauty’s reaction when she finds out the big secret.

Crawford is here again because we keep dying. I think I’m going to get a different lawyer for myself, maybe a female one who’s not white.

He reads out: “I, Mvimbeni Nzuzza, declare this to be my will. And I revoke any and all will and codicils I previously made. I give all my tangible personal property and residential house to my wife, Beauty Nzuzza...” What the hell! Beauty owns this house now, what madness is this?

She’s smiling. Mpatho doesn’t show any reaction.

“I urge her to survive her last name to receive property under this will, and thereafter take care of it and make it a home for my grandson and his family. If she doesn’t survive me I leave all her shares to my grandson.”

Her smile disappears when she hears that. I bet she wasn’t planning on staying in this house as a widow for too long. Mkhulu knew very well that Beauty won’t make this a home for anyone, if anything her sister and cousins would’ve been

moving in tomorrow morning. If she remarries or drops the last name this house will belong to Mpatho. This sweetens my soul.

“I direct my grandson, Mpatho Nkosiyaazi Nzuzza, to pay my enforceable unsecured debts and funeral expenses, the expenses of my last illness, and the expenses of administering my estate.”

“I leave R200k to Miss Nomusa Luthuli and a retirement package of R850k that my grandson will settle to her in two years when she retires. If she doesn't survive me, I leave her share to her two daughters; Zimele and Zanezulu Luthuli.” This one makes me smile, I'm happy for Aunt Nomusa. She's stuck through for this family. I mean, we aren't easy people to hang around with everyday.

“I leave my car dealership, all my private cars and my boat to my wife, Beauty Nzuzza.”

Am I the only one who find this weird? Mpatho is just still; no reaction, nothing.

“I leave Mshazi Properties and Mshazi Inn, Mshazi Enterprises, and Mshazi Recreational Club to be directed by my cousin, Daniel Mqadi...”

Beauty stops him, “He's not here. Why are you reading this will if some of the beneficiaries are not present?”

She sounds both angry and disappointed that she wasn't appointed for this one.

“Can I continue?” – Crawford.

I can't say I'm still breathing, I'm a sitting corpse.

He continues; “...until my grandson, Mpatho Nkosiyaazi, takes a wife to run and continue my legacy with. If not the appointed wife, then one of his choice, at least within 5 months after the reading of this will.” He raises his eyes to Mpatho.

“Can I have the marriage certificate?” he asks.

“What certificate?” Beauty asks.

I knew she wasn't going to shut up.

Aunt Nomusa looks just as confused.

Mpatho gives our marriage certificate to Crawford. He runs his eyes over it and brings it back.

“You two are married?” Aunt Nomusa asks getting off her seat.

This woman, she's ululating!

I hug her and put her back on her seat, she needs to calm down.

“They're not married, that's certificate is fake,” Beauty blows up.

“As long as their marriage is recognized by Home Affairs they're married and legally wife and husband. Can we conclude?”

She glares at me. “Phume, how can you do this?”

Here comes the part I looked forward to the most.

“What did I do?” I'm leaning against my husband's shoulder.

“You're worse than your mother.” She stands up and storms off without hearing the conclusion of the will. Can't Crawford revoke her from the will over this nasty behavior?

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I'm drinking a second glass of champagne; I'm in a big mood. I don't know why Mpatho is still grumpy, we won. And the funny part is that Beauty arranged robbery for the dealership that she now owns. I pray and hope that Malibongwe is busy planning the second round, just so she learns a lesson. I'm sure he's

angry that Mpatho refused to meet up, he's going to strike again.

Beauty drove out like a maniac about an hour ago, she's still not back. I gave Aunt Nomusa an early day, just because I can. Beauty owns the house but she can't kick us out because Mpatho has to raise his family here and have his wedding here. I'm not planning on staying here for the rest of my life. Nothing binds us here, I'd like for us to build our own house and move out after we get married. Mkhulu left his livestock to Mpatho, for him to pay the bride price and other wedding expenses.

He comes back and fills a glass with water and sits.

"You don't want champagne?" I ask.

"No, I'm good with water," he says.

"You don't look happy. I expected you to be, this is what we've been fighting for."

"My mother is in the hospital awaiting surgery, I have nothing to celebrate."

Gosh, not that woman again!

"She will have her surgery tomorrow," he says.

"Oh, you talked to him already?" This is new information for me. I thought he was keeping me updated with everything.

"We talked in the morning but not much, she's in pain. I talked with her doctor more, she's in a critical condition," he says.

"So you've already paid for the surgery?"

"I had to," he says.

I'm disappointed, I'm angry, I'm feeling broke.

"How much did you pay?"

"R75k."

I almost spill the champagne on my chest. 75 what? I, Phumelele, have never received that kind of money from him throughout the three weeks of our marriage.

“Without discussing it with me first?” I ask.

“Discuss with you?” Now he’s forgotten that he’s married.

“I’m your wife, the same way you don’t want me to be speaking to certain people is the same way I don’t want you to be giving money to people without talking to me. I’m not only your wife when you need sex and inheritance, I’m your wife, w-i-f-e!” I say.

“It’s my mother – not people, wife!”

That last part was sarcastic.

“To me she’s ‘people’, I don’t know her,” I say.

“You’re my wife, not my everything, I’m not going to ask permission from you to take care of my mother.” Yeses, I understand why some girls pray to meet only motherless men in life. This is bullshit. My mother this, my mother that!

“You can even pay for her soul if you want, but you can’t buy love.”

“I bought yours,” he says and walks away.

I cough out the champagne. What the fuck did he just say?

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Maybe I was harsh on him, clearly the void of his mother is bigger than his brain size at the moment. He’s emotional about everything. But what he said about buying my love was out of line. I don’t care how angry he was, that shouldn’t have been said. A childish part of me wanted to spend the night here in my

room. But then I'm a wife, I have to have a mature way of handling things. I don't want to start a habit of sleeping apart when fighting.

I find him in his bedroom, now to be called our bedroom, wrapped in the duvet with his face covered. He didn't eat, I had bread and leftover meat waiting for him. Beauty didn't come back either. I'm a bit lonely and sad. We are fighting constantly, just when I thought I was going to have a rest after Beauty's era, his mother and her money-requiring issues pop up.

"Hey, are you sleeping?" I ask.

His breathing pattern changes, I know he's not asleep.

"Can we talk?" I ask.

"About what?" He's still mad.

He wronged me too.

"We are both adults, let's get over it and make peace before we sleep. It's what good wife and husband do," I say.

"Maybe we are not good husband and wife," he says.

I didn't expect that and it hurts. Yesterday I was a good wife, today I'm no longer good because his mother is back in his life.

"Look, I don't have a problem with you having a mother. I know I'm not 'all that', you need her for different reasons. I'm just worried that you've dropped down all your guards and you're doing things without looking deeply into them. I don't want to see you get hurt."

He removes the duvet and sits up. I can see that he's hurt, all he sees is an unsupportive partner who doesn't want to see his dreams of having a mother come true. He's not that strong Mpatho I know; he's just a desperate 'young boy' seeking for love. I'm here but I'm not everything, he told me this and maybe he was right.

“We haven’t even met her and had a conversation. Why are you so negative?” he asks.

Maybe I’m too harsh and quick to judge. But I’d be surprised if this Ncedziwe person turns out to be a good mother. I don’t understand why now. Why not when he traveled to meet up with her when he was 19? Didn’t she want to have a conversation with her son back then? Or was it because she was still healthy and not requiring any surgeries.

“I’m sorry, please don’t think I’m not happy for you, I’m just leaving a space for disappointments.” I lean closer and kiss his lips. He doesn’t respond, I peck him until he gives in and kisses me back. I’m married to a big muscly baby.

I cuddle him and ask if he’s not hungry for the fifth time. He doesn’t want to eat, his heart is with his mother. I want my first child to be a boy, maybe he will love me this unconditional as well.

I’m drawing maps on his chest.

“You said you bought my love. In which way did you mean that?”

“I was angry, I didn’t mean to say that, I’m sorry.”

“You could’ve said anything to hurt me. Not that, don’t ever pretend like getting me was easy. I’m not cheap, don’t make me regret my decisions.”

“But I just said I’m sorry.” He lifts my chin up and brushes his lips against mine tenderly.

“I’m warning you for the next time, don’t ever say something like that,” I say.

“Okay, it won’t happen again.” He opens his mouth and captures my lip in a passionate kiss.

I'm getting turned on being squeezed in his arms like this. Today was supposed to be the day we kiss and have a lot of sex, just to celebrate the first public day of our marriage.

"I need to take a shower, please wait up for me," he says.

"Okay," I nod.

"I love you." He kisses my lips once again.

I watch him strip his clothes off and walks away with his firm naked body. I already took a shower, I would've joined him just to appreciate the view in the bathroom.

My phone rings, disturbing my horny thoughts. It's still with me, I don't know when he's going to take it away from me. I look at the caller and my heart starts racing. What does Sphakamiso want? He knows that I'm married and at this time chances of me being with Mpatho are high.

I pull up the duvet and answer in a soft voice. This feels like cheating...emotional cheating.

"I need to see you," he says. His voice is not firm, he's shaking where he is.

"Are you okay? What's going on?" I'm already panicking. He's been getting harassed by the police for no solid reason, I worry about him.

"I'm not okay, I need to see you or my son," he says.

Aphelele is in Durban as far as I know and he hasn't even turned 3 years old, there's no comfort or encouragement he can give to his father.

"You know I can't do that. Why do you need to see me?"

"Please, even if it's in the morning, I really need to see you Phume."

Shit! Mpatho doesn't want him communicating with me, let alone meeting up with me.

"I don't know, I will tell you in the morning. Please be safe and take care of yourself. Don't do anything crazy. Where is Malibongwe?" I ask.

"I don't know where he is...Phume?"

"I'm still here," I say.

"How did you move on?"

I'm puzzled by the question.

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"I still have your love in my heart, I don't know how to do it. I think about you and envy your ability to just move on. At this point, I no longer have any pride left in me; I'm in love with someone who no longer loves me. I think about you...I don't know how to stop, I don't know how to accept it. I just want to know, how to move on?"

The water has stopped running in the bathroom. I know I shouldn't be having this call and making promises, but there's so much pain in his voice, I tell him what he wants to hear because I don't want to hurt him more than he's already hurting. He's alone and he's crying.

"I will call you in the morning," I say.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 39

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

There are times when he looks at me and there are times when he just stares for way too long. His hand is on my navel, I don't

know what's so deep in his mind about me. Yes, we just had sex. I came from work to cooked food and a clean room and a horny man. I'm lying here thinking about how everything is happening too quick. I haven't known him for that long, yet he already stays with me and have dipped his dick in every corner of my vagina. Maybe I'm too easy, I don't know why I'd behave like this with anyone.

"Do you love me?" His unexpected question puts an end to my trailing thoughts.

I blink and put my focus on him.

"Yes, why?" I ask.

"I always see this doubt in your eyes everytime after we make love. I can't help but wonder why are you unsure of what we are doing," he says.

"It's not about what we are doing, but how we are doing it."

"Sex?" Worry engulfs his face.

"No, the whole relationship, I feel like it's too rushed."

"Does that change anything?" he asks.

"Not really, but it makes me think hard. I know you but not too deep, we've had sex a number of times and you've never used protection," I say.

"Are you scared of getting pregnant?"

I don't know why he's smiling. It's not funny, we are too irresponsible.

"I want to be stable before I have kids. But that's not even the main issue, I just feel like we'd do everything better not living together," I say.

"Ngiyakuzwa," he says turning his face upwards and closing his eyes.

I know very well that he doesn't want to go home, but this is turning into vat'n sit and my father would come here gunblazing if he found out I'm now living with a man. I lie with his hand on my navel hoping he's not taking it the bad way. I'm not kicking him out...but I am.

"Nothing changes from my side. I don't see you or I in any different light. I enjoy being with you and that's all," he says.

"I enjoy being with you too. That's not even in question. I just feel like you should go home and just visit me like my boyfriend before things get out of hand. I don't want to fall pregnant and I don't want you to be my unpaid-for househusband, neither do I want to be your unpaid-for wife."

"I'm going to marry you," he says.

He's only saying that because he doesn't get the point, I'm not going to celebrate this promise.

"I think you can take your brothers to your newly purchased building and show them around, see if there's nothing you all can resolve." I know if they work things out he won't mind going back home. And a huge part of me believes that his brothers aren't that hard to talk with, he just needs to do it.

"I don't want to talk to them," he says.

"Okay, I want to talk to them. I will tell them to come over with the Tazz, then you will all take the new car and go to the place," I say.

He sighs, "Okay, you can take the phone and call Mkhuleko."

I'm claws-deep into this family issues. I find his number and call. He doesn't pick up immediately, I have to try twice before he answers with heavy breaths.

"Hello,"

"Hey, it's Miyanda,"

“Who?”

“This is Malibongwe’s phone.”

“My brother? Where is he?” It sounds like he’s running where he is. I thought his leg wasn’t healed yet.

“He’s here, he wants you and Sphakamiso to come to my place, Sphakamiso knows it, he was...” I don’t finish what I’m saying before he starts begging for his brother to come home.

Something has happened to one of them....

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PHUMELELE

Mpatho rushed to work and promised to be back home early. I wanted it to happen but now that I’ve drove to the spot where Sphakamiso and I have always met up I’m getting nervous. I know what he wants; love back. I cannot give him that, I’ve already given my heart to someone else. I don’t know how to tell a person that I love him and care about him, just not in the romantic way. Is it even possible to be like that with your ex-lover? What makes it all awkward is that our families don’t get along. I can’t be friends with him, even being cordial with him is questioned and mistaken for cheating.

He’s already waiting, wearing a black hoodie and his brown quarter-pants. I can’t describe my feelings; a mixture of familiarity and fear. He’s lost weight, I don’t deny him a hug when he comes for one. But he holds me longer than I expected. His face over my shoulder, he’s not saying anything, just holding me.

“Hey unjani?” I gently push him back.

“I’m not okay,” he says. He’s got bag under his eyes, he looks physically exhausted. The fact that he’s not okay doesn’t give me peace. Maybe if he was okay I’d stop loving and caring.

“I need you,” he says.

I release a short sigh and look away. I knew this is what I was going to get coming here, I still felt like he needs to be heard even if his wishes wouldn’t be granted.

“Phume, please look at me,” he says.

I turn my face and look at him. I can’t stomach the emptiness in his eyes.

“When are you finalizing the divorce?” he asks.

I keep quiet, he keeps his stare on me. Divorce was once in my plans but not anymore. Mpatho and I last talked about divorce when we were in early stages of our relationship.

“Phume time has passed sthandwa sami. I’m still waiting for you to come back to me. I miss you so much.” He’s wrapping his arms around me, hugging me again.

“Phaka, we broke up,” I remind him.

“I didn’t break up with you. I said I will wait for the divorce, no matter how long it takes. I don’t see myself loving anyone else but you.”

Lord, this is hard!

“You had a chance to live by that and you messed it up nje,” I say.

“I’ve never asked any girl out. What happened was a moment of short-sight and weakness. There was never a point where I looked for love from anyone else. I wasn’t happy...I mean I wasn’t getting...”

“You weren’t getting what Sphakamiso?” My voice just rises. We’ve had this conversation so many times, I don’t understand why we are here reviewing his cheating again. Nothing justifies what he did, nothing.

“I wasn’t getting any sex from you and I wanted to respect your body and dreams. I made a mistake, I will never do it again, please forgive me.”

I’m not over it, I’m getting frustrated because this will lead to me getting worked up and I don’t want to be angry over the past. Him holding me does not help either.

“I’m not mad about it anymore, just stop holding me like that,” I say.

He doesn’t stop, he holds me closer until I’m two inches away from his face. He locks his eyes into mine and lowers his lips to me. No, no, we can’t do this.

“Sphakamiso please don’t.”

“I miss you…” His heavy breaths fans against my skin. He’s been smoking, he’s still going through his things.

“You called me saying you needed to talk,” I say.

“Malibongwe left home. I just needed your comfort…your touch…your lips.” His lips touch against mine. They open mine and capture my lower lip into a slow kiss. He turns me against the container and presses his knee between my legs and deepens the kiss. I’m allowing it to happen. He’s kissing me like he needs it more than oxygen. I close my eyes and let him kiss me. I listen to his low moans and needy harsh breaths. Then I listen to the smacking sound behind him.

I open my eyes and see his throat grabbed by a gigantic arm. I look up and everything starts making no sense. I came here, he was at work, I don’t know why I’m kissing Sphakamiso and how

Mpatho got here. One thing I know is that I have to stop him from killing Sphakamiso.

I believe Sphakamiso would've fought back if he saw him coming. But now he's on the ground getting kicks even on his head.

"Mpatho stop!" I'm trying to pull him back.

He's wearing leather boots and he's kicking Sphakamiso's chest and head while he lies on the ground bleeding. I start crying when I realize that I can't help him. I scream for help, that's when he stops and grabs me by my arm to my car. His Jeep is parked a few yards away, that's why we didn't hear anything. He gets in my car with me, on the driver's seat. The Jeep drives off before us.

Sphakamiso was on the ground bleeding, I don't know if he's dead. My hands are trembling as I dial the ambulance on my phone.

"What are you doing?" he asks.

I don't know this person roaring next to me; I cannot recognize him.

"The ambulance...he's going to die," I'm still crying.

"Don't make me throw that phone out of the window." He starts driving.

I cry all the way home. If Sphakamiso dies I will be the one to blame. I will be called names and the Mcinekas will never forgive me. I know kissing your ex is wrong if you're married, but he was too violent.

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I'm lying in bed trying to call Sphakamiso. I just want to know if he managed to get home. He's not answering, my nerves are all over the place. Someone walks in, I lift my head and see that it's him and lie back on the pillow.

"Sit and fit this," he says.

It's a strict instruction. I sit up because at this moment I'm just scared of him. I've never seen anyone beat someone like that. I don't see how he's ever going to negotiate things with the Mcinekas because when Malibongwe finds out about this he will have that push-button he's been looking for and fight. I never thought I'd ever be the reason why men fight.

Black box, shiny piece inside.

A ring? After everything that happened he wants me to fit a ring.

"Who blessed this ring?" I ask.

"I blessed it," he says.

I don't think this is the perfect time. I don't see how me wearing a ring is going to change anything that happened. He grabs my left hand pushes it down my fourth finger. It's a diamond ring and it fits me perfectly. However, the timing is wrong and his mood is just off. You can't put a ring on someone's finger while clenching your jaws and eyes flaming with rage. This should've been a special moment, he could've just postponed it to when things are better between us.

"Your hand looks beautiful," he says.

What an awkward compliment!

He takes his shoes off and sits with his feet on the bed. He pulls me to his lap and starts kissing me aggressively. I kiss him back, I don't know if Sphakamiso's nicotine still smells on my lips. A lot of things are going through my mind right now. His hand slides down to my panties, I close my legs firmly

together. He forces his hand between them and grabs my panties to the side. I feel his finger rubbing between my folds and penetrating me. It's a bit too much at first but it gets better as I get wet.

He pins me down on my back and grabs my panties out of my ankles and spreads my legs apart. He comes back to my lips and sucks them, not sparing me any second to breathe. He enters inside me in one long push and then starts pounding inside me. He's still dressed up, he just lifted his T-shirt up and pushed his pants down to his knees, took his dick out and got inside me.

His strokes are carrying his rage. He's not moaning, not letting out a sound, just pumping inside me. I remain quiet, he's thrusting in and out of me while holding my legs and making sure they stay apart. He could be gentle but he chooses not to. He chooses not to talk to me, not to look in my eyes, and just...fuck me. I wouldn't even call this sex, I don't think he cares for the pleasure to be mutual. Maybe this is revenge or his way of reminding me that I'm his wife.

He lets out an unexpected growl and spills his warm seeds inside me.

"Mmmmm, mommy!" he drops his head on my chest breathing heavily.

I didn't reach climax, he doesn't care to have another instant round as he usually does if he cum before me. He's still hard inside me but he doesn't do anything. He pulls out and frees my legs from his tight grip.

I lie with him heavy on my chest, my cookie and thighs wet with his fluids, and my cookie heated up than relieved. He slowly moves to the side and wipes his sweaty face with his T-shirt.

He goes to the bathroom with his pants on the knees, holding them up with his hands. When he comes out after two minutes

he's dressed up and rubbing lotion on his hands. I'm still lying on the same position, messed with his sperms and waiting for him to clean me up.

He comes to my side and takes my phone next to the pillow and walks out with it. I count to 30 then he comes back with a box of the new phone. He leaves it on the pedestal and changes into another T-shirt. He doesn't assure me of anything, he walks out and leaves.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 40

PHUMELELE

I slept alone, Mpatho didn't come to bed. Do I blame him? Absolutely not. I was mad about Bonnie waking up from his bed, I know exactly what he feels. I have no idea where he slept, I can't call him because I don't have a phone. I'm not going to use the one he bought. He could've made me change my number, not take my phone because I have a lot of memories in that phone. I'm angry about the phone situation but at the moment I don't have any grounds to stand on.

I wake up and take a long bath soaking my tears. Aunt Nomusa will know if something terrible has happened in the village, like death. I put my flare hem-dress on and sleepers and leave my hair uncombed.

I hope Beauty woke up and went somewhere. I can only imagine the kind of joy she'd have over this. This marriage is already threatening to fall apart.

I make my way to the kitchen and guess who I pass asleep on the couch? In the lounge where everyone can see him and

conclude with no doubt that there's trouble in paradise. Beauty appears with a cup of tea and a bowl of something.

I'm standing next to the couch unsure of my next move. He slept here because he didn't want to be anywhere near me. But I'd love for him to go to the bedroom, if I'm his problem I will take my things and move back to my bedroom.

"That's not how makoti dresses up here," Beauty says.

I slept peacefully last night after she disappeared the whole afternoon.

"Wear something longer, you're no longer a teen fake-granddaughter, you're a married woman, act like it," she continues. She's placing the cup and bowl on the coffee-table.

I don't reply to her comments. I'm only married by paper, Mpatho hasn't bought me any clothes and she, as the grandmother, hasn't put isidwaba around my waist. I will dress however I want to dress.

"Hey wake up," she shakes Mpatho.

So she woke up to serve my husband?

"What is that?" I ask her.

"What does it look like? Hangover treatment from his grandmother," she says.

Grandmother my foot!

"He's my husband, not yours." I'm getting so pissed so early in the morning.

"You don't even look like a wife. What time are you waking up to scream 'my husband'? Where did you think he slept last night?" All of a sudden she's this serious grandmother of the house and calling the shots.

Mpatho opens his eyes and looks around. You can tell that he slept drunk; his shoes and belt are still on.

“Nomusa made this for you, wake up and go to bed. Nobody is allowed to sleep on the couch in my house, you all have bedrooms. And please buy your wife representable clothes,” she says and turns and walks away.

Our eyes meet briefly, he sits up and picks the food that Beauty served him. Are we no longer on the same page? He heard how she just spoke to me.

“Are you going to eat that?” I ask.

No response.

Okay, I have to leave him alone. I have to let Beauty walk over me.

I find Aunt Nomusa making more breakfast and sit on the chair and take a deep breath.

“You’re finally awake. What are you eating?” she asks.

“I will eat later. Have you heard anything around the village?”

“Regarding?” she asks.

“Maybe death news or someone getting injured or something.”

She looks at me and shakes her head. “Why did you do that anyway? It’s not like you, I’m disappointed.”

“Is he alive?” I ask.

“Yes, I heard about the incident all the way home. Can you stop communicating with him for the sake of peace, before someone dies?”

“I will stop,” I say.

She’s one person I respect in this house.

“How do I apologize?” I ask her because she’s an elder, she will know how to deal with this better than me. I won’t even start with Aunt Brandi because she will bite my head off before giving advice and I’m not in the mood for any of that.

“You’re not going to be a perfect wife over night. But the first step is to accept that you’re someone’s wife and that means you need to put boundaries and not disrespect your husband publicly.”

I nod, she’s loud and clear. I think I’ve learnt my lesson, if I continue keeping Sphakamiso in my life because of how much we used to mean each other I will end up putting his life in danger. The best I can do is keep him in my prayers, hopefully life will turn out okay for him even without me.

I need to face Mpatho again and try to talk things out. He’s moved from the lounge, I find him in, just standing next to the bed looking at the phone he bought me still wrapped in its box. I sit on the bed, he clears his throat and moves further from the bed.

“I didn’t think you came back home last night.” I feel bad for not checking around the house and only seeing him in the morning.

“You left without saying anything,” I say.

He picks something next to the phone and lifts it up.

It’s the ring...I took it off last night. Another marriage offense!

He puts the ring inside his pocket. I wish I can ask for it back but it’s no use because I failed to show appreciation for it in the first place.

“Can we talk?” I ask.

“Can I talk?” – him.

Tenseee!

“You can go first,” I say.

“Please do me a favor, while we are still married can you at least do your things privately. It doesn’t work in my favor as a married man and a businessman if my so-called wife is having public affairs. Spare my dignity, I have nothing against you.” He’s talking as if he’s done; he’s over this marriage.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you, I didn’t think that would happen and I’m willing to make sure that it never happens again,” I say.

“It’s no use, you’ve chosen him over me twice.” He heaves a deep sigh and puts his hand over his forehead. “I don’t know why I keep doing this to myself,” he mumbles to himself audible.

“I can’t justify what happened yesterday, but Mpatho you’ve known about this arrangement for years. I’m sure it took you time to embrace it. It’s been barely even 3 months since I found out and I’m trying my best. Maybe it’s not enough but I’m doing it.” These are not crocodile tears, I’m hurting because every effort I’ve made has been wiped out by one fault. If I really chose Sphakamiso than why is he the one depressed and sleeping alone? Why am I here?

“I’ve opened up to you in ways that I never thought I’d do. In ways that I’ve never opened up to anybody. It hasn’t been roses; I’ve been fighting ever since my mother’s will was read. Most of the times you stand on the sidelines and I have to fight alone. You can’t tell me that you bear the same emotional baggage as me because most of the times I collect insults on both our behalf.” I’m not trying to justify myself or emotionally blackmail him into thinking that I’m right. But it’s a lot.

“I suggested therapy and you refused,” he says. He’s finally able to look at me in the eyes without flaring his nostrils and clenching his jaws.

“And I gave you a ring yesterday and you took it off,” he says.

“Because there was no significance to it. You just bought it and decided to give it to me and then have sex with me like I’m a sex-doll with no feelings. Leaving me second-guessing my self-worth. Tell me why was I going to wear your ring after you treated me that way?” Yesterday was a lot, the ring shouldn’t even be of any concern.

“You took my phone because you physically can. That phone isn’t just a communication tool to my past people. I have memories stored in there. Things I can never recreate anywhere else; important parts of my life. Including my mother’s last vacation pictures that I was still going to print out.”

“I will bring it back,” he says.

“No, it’s fine, you can keep it. I’m good, I was just saying. You have the right to do what makes you happy and conclude about your feelings. I guess you can have a refund since you bought this love, if you no longer wish to continue.” I’ve said my piece, now I have to take my stuff back to my bedroom, just so he doesn’t sleep on the couch again.

“So I’m not allowed to be angry that you went to kiss your ex, whose family I’m trying my best to avoid having any feud with?” He’s following me to the closet.

“I didn’t say that, I admitted that I was wrong first then I expressed what I feel as well.”

“But you’re blackmailing me with tears? Is it because I can’t sit and cry, that’s what makes you think your pain is greater than mine?” He’s making it sound like a contest. He said his piece and I said mine better, with a few drops of tears.

“I can’t even sit with another woman or eat food prepared by another woman, even when you had no intentions of giving me any food. You talk from sunrise to sunset, but you can meet up with your ex behind rusty containers and have his tongue down your throat because your life is so hard nobody can relate.”

“I apologized,” I’m getting frustrated with this argument.

“Can you unkiss him?”

Yooh, hhayi!

“Divorce?” I ask.

I think this is the big question that can put all this to an end.

“Do you want it?” he asks.

“No, I asked first. Divorce?”

“How about a faithful wife who can grow the hell up and dress up like a wife, not a soul-less teenager.” Beauty planted the seed and now it’s growing. My dress is not that short, he can’t see my bum, I’m covered to a few inches above my knees.

“All of a sudden you listen to Beauty?” I wish I can clap my hands a few times. People, very unpredictable creatures.

“She has a point, this is too short,” he says.

“Maybe you should buy me clothes and flowers and chocolates like every perfect husband who’s not capable of making any mistakes.”

“Oh, thanks for advice.”

Exactly. I close the closet, I’m no longer moving back to my bedroom.

“Was the couch comfortable?”

He stands behind me wrapping his arms around my waist. “I was drunk, I don’t know how it was like. You got me drunk after so many months of me being sober. And you made me hit someone.”

“Maybe we should go to therapy together. I mean we never had any before going into marriage. No elders advising us, and no pastor with guidance. We are two people who never had a

romantic relationship before jumping into marriage. I think it's going to be difficult to just wing it."

"I don't have any problems that I think I need to sit down and talk about with a professional. I'm good, I only need you to come through," – Mr Perfect.

I think he's going to be a stumbling block. I'm not the only one who need to open up, he's got issues from childhood that he's dragged into adulthood. For example, Ncedziwe, that needs therapy on its own. But until he's ready...

"I'm tired. Can we take a nap together?" He drops his head over my shoulder and pecks my neck softly.

A nap together? Beauty, the grandmother-in-law of the year will start preaching what a wife can and can't do in her house.

"No, I have other duties to take care of," I say.

"What duties? Aunt Nomusa is here, come to bed with your husband, please."

"I'm not interested, there's nothing exciting about being in bed with you."

He cups my boobs in his hands and pushes me forward as he tries to leans closer to my back.

"Can I prove you wrong?" he asks.

"No, I'm good." I'm happy he still knows how to beg.

"You will be on top."

More reasons for me not to join this nap. Be on top to do what?

The knock coming at the door sends us into silence.

"Mpatho please come, someone is here to see you," that's Aunt Nomusa.

I was still enjoying the back and forth. I turn my confused face to him.

“Were you expecting anyone?” I ask.

“No, let me go and check.” He kisses my cheek.

“Please keep the bed warm for me,” he says before he goes.

I kept the bed warm yesterday and he never came. I’m going to get myself a snack from the kitchen and come back to wait for him.

I hear the voice coming from the dining room direction; very loud and familiar. But I don’t know what she’d be doing here instead of nursing her injured son and helping the other two get armed.

Indeed it’s her, MaVilakazi.

I rush to Aunt Nomusa in the kitchen to ask.

“Why is she here?” I ask.

“Medical bills for her son,” she says.

That was all my fault. I know she hates me and Mpatho might have a problem with paying because he didn’t start trouble with Sphakamiso. He caught us together, I need to step in.

I walk into them chatting. Very calm and friendly. I didn’t expect it, I thought she’d be fuming.

“Sawubona Ma,” I greet.

She doesn’t respond, yet she’s chatting with her husband’s killer.

I look at Mpatho, “Can I step in? Yesterday you were paying for your mother’s surgery, I can talk to Ma about this.”

“Don’t worry mama, I will handle it,” he responds better than I expected.

I guess they're reaching a mutual understanding over the issue. I'm curious to know how Sphakamiso is doing but that would be stepping over boundaries. So I just stand up to leave them in their peace.

"Your mother had a surgery?" she asks as I leave. She sounds more interested in that than how Mpatho is going to handle the medical expenses of Sphakamiso. Izindaba zemizi yabantu, why is she getting invested?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 41

"This is too much, Naidoo costs R450," MaVilakazi says.

She's kind-hearted, regardless of everything he's done to her family she still addresses him like a child who committed innocent mistakes. At first he thought she was pretending and waiting for a moment to strike back once they've let their guards down. But here she is, years later, she hasn't revenged or reported the murder of her husband anywhere.

"It's fine Ma, please take it. I acted out of anger, I didn't mean to hurt him like that," he says with regret. He doesn't have a problem with Sphakamiso if he's away from Phume. He also holds nothing against them as a family, he knows Malibongwe's anger is justified.

"I will talk to him, I don't condone his behavior in any way," she says.

Mpatho nods, "Thank you Ma, I just need respect from him. I understand that he's heart-broken, but I never messed with her while she was in a relationship with him. He ruined that on his own. I don't want to fight with him. Neither do I want to fight with your eldest son."

MaVilakazi frowns.

“Malibongwe?” she asks.

“Yes, he was involved in the robbery that happened recently. I let that go because someone in the family was involved as well. I don’t know why he wants us to meet privately now. I don’t if Ma told him what happened or he found out through one of my family members.”

“Ummm no,” she clears her throat, looking unsettled. “He hasn’t been home in days. I didn’t know he went ahead and...I told him not to fight you because I know you didn’t do it on purpose.”

“I don’t know if you can talk to him again. If he wants us to talk, I’d prefer you to be there too, just to ensure that it doesn’t get out of hand.”

“You know what mfana, I will talk to him,” she says with confidence.

Nomusa walks in with drinks and leaves them on the table. She inherited Phume’s mother’s beef; she’s not fond of the Mcinekas, especially MaVilakazi.

MaVilakazi sips the juice and asks, “Your mother is still in Swaziland?”

“Yes, she is. I will be seeing her soon.” He’s smiling. Phume hasn’t hidden the fact that she’s not happy with his mother coming back into his life. There’s a lot to be discussed before they become good mom and son. But he’s willing to embrace her, he’s not holding any grudge against her. The Mshazis have always been ruthless, there’s only one type that can marry and stay in this family. The Beauty type; cunning. The MaShandu’s type; dirty to the core and willing to do anything and everything to secure the bag for herself and her outside daughter. And yes, the Phume type; able to cry and emotionally blackmail,

throw hands and bully her way out of situations. It's a bitter truth, even his own arranged wife has changed after marriage, she's no longer that sweet and shy princess she was.

"It's questionable that she's requesting money from you when she has other children that she raised," MaVilakazi says, she's put down the glass of orange juice after a few sips.

"Maybe they're not employed," he says on Ncedziwe's defense.

"Still, doesn't she have any shame? You've been doing very well without her, your family raised you and gave you everything that money can buy. You don't need her." She's getting too opinionated about this and it really has nothing to do with her.

"I will walk you out," he says, standing up.

He's kicking her out now, politely so.

She stands up with the R1000 he gave her folded in her palm. She still wants to warn him against communicating with Ncedziwe and giving his money to her.

"I knew her, she made a good decision by letting your father raise you. Focus on your wife and your legacy. Look how grown you are now. You're handsome, well-mannered and kind." She's staring at him with a smile stuck on her face. She has a warm aura, even though he doesn't like her talking against his mother, he smiles at the compliments.

"Walk me out, I don't want dogs to bite me," she says. Nomusa is passing by, there are no dogs kept here, obviously she's the dog because she was friends with Phume's mother. They share icy looks before Mpatho walks her out.

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THE MCINEKAS

MaVilakazi arrives home at the same time as her shortly-lost son who drives stolen cars. She's both relieved and angry. It's the next day, he was told yesterday that his brother was beaten. And he's been missing. He could've just called home and told them he was okay and why he left home. But Sphakamiso has to be the main priority today. He's in pain, she needs to make him something to eat so that he can drink the painkillers she just got from MaMsibi.

Malibongwe is behind her as she makes her way inside the house. Surprisingly Nombuso made something for her brother to eat. These two never get along, not even for a few hours. Nombuso was her father's daughter, she listened to him more than anyone, hence the ill-feelings towards Sphakamiso. His case was complicated, she couldn't give him to his father to be raised in the right home. He happened in marriage, with a married man. Mcineka didn't know right away, he started suspecting when people kept mentioning how different Sphakamiso looked from his other children.

"Bafo what happened?" Malibongwe asks, he's not even greeting.

"Nothing," Sphakamiso says, annoyed.

It's been days, they've been worried sick about him and he's walking in like nothing happened.

"He was beaten by Mpatho," Nombuso runs her mouth as usual.

"Mpatho Nzuza?" – Malibongwe. He needs confirmation then he's out for blood. The only reason why he wanted to sit down with Mpatho was because of Miyanda. But not she will have to understand that Mpatho is the one who doesn't want peace.

Twice? He's struck twice in this family and this time he won't let it slide.

"Why don't you tell him that Sphakamiso is the one who went to kiss his wife in public?" MaVilakazi asks, glaring at Nombuso. She loves her one and only daughter, but sometimes she wishes they didn't take her back when she returned from her marriage. Maybe if they built a shack for her outside the yard.

"She was Sphakamiso's girlfriend not so long ago, here eating our food and sitting on his bed. When was the wedding? Who was invited? Wife, my foot!" She's entitled to fight and hurt her brother any way possible. But she won't tolerate having outsiders like that rich good-for-nothing who looks down on people attack any of her family members. She's never liked him, he thinks his family is the America of the village.

"How they got married is none of our business. What I'm saying is that Sphakamiso must stop messing around with that girl," MaVilakazi says, making sure that her voice is firm enough to send a warning.

Sphakamiso doesn't respond. Mkhuleko is surprisingly quiet too.

Malibongwe is the one disrespecting her today. "She's the one married, Sphakamiso doesn't owe Mpatho any loyalty. And he mustn't think I'm going to take this lying down. He must face me like a man and not attack someone younger than him to charm the so-called wife."

"Where are you coming from to be fighting battles that have nothing to do with you? You left without saying a word and had us looking crazy in the village looking for you. We don't need more stress, sit down and respect me, or go back to where you're coming from."

“Why do you lick that family’s ass?” Malibongwe is worked up. His mother has this tendency of brushing off all the bad things the Mshazis do to them.

“Mind your language,” MaVilakazi warns.

“Why? You do lick their asses.” He clicks his tongue and sits. He looks at Sphakamiso, “Uright bafo?”

“Yeah,” – Sphakamiso says.

“Did he use any weapon?”

“No, he hit me from behind.”

“Fuckin’ coward!”

This is not how MaVilakazi wanted her children to be. Malibongwe is back to promote hatred amongst them. He should’ve stayed where he was. In his absence there wasn’t much noise.

“He apologized and gave me money to take him to the doctor,” she says, hoping it would calm them down.

“How much?” Nombuso asks.

“R1000, he wanted to give me more but...”

“What is R1000? He can’t pay his way out of this. He’s used to using money to get everything he wants. Even his so-called wife, without money he wouldn’t have her,” – Malibongwe. He never talks too much. His hatred for Mpatho is really poisoning him.

Nombuso puts her shoes on and stands up.

“I need some fresh air. Mkhuleko make sure Yoli comes from Amahle’s house before it gets dark,” she says and walks away before the youngest brat starts ranting. He’s one annoying child, only God can be thanked for that injured leg.

With his injured leg slowly healing he sits up straight and looks at his oldest brother. “Is Miyanda the same lady from the other night?”

They all look at him. Does he really wants to talk about girlfriends in the middle of all this?

“Yes,” Malibongwe says.

“Oh, she sounds nice over the phone. How long have you known her?”

“Not for too long. Ummm, Sphakamiso, do you need a doctor?” Malibongwe turns to Sphakamiso, hoping Mkhuleko will let go.

But he doesn't; he wants to know more.

“Does she have a nicer house?”

Malibongwe sighs, “No, I wasn't looking for ‘nicer’ houses. I actually wanted to be in a peaceful space where nobody is fighting after every second.”

“That's why you left?” Mkhuleko asks.

Sphakamiso looks shocked as well. They all thought it was something deeper, there's nothing new about them fighting everyday.

“Are you back now? I'm asking because later I will have a not-so-kind word with your sister when she comes back for throwing my shoes outside earlier. Maybe you might want to go back to Sis' Miyanda until further notice,” Mkhuleko says.

Sphakamiso slips into a fit of laughter. “Shit, my ribs hurt when I laugh. Stop scaring him off.”

“It's not funny, the way you all fight is not healthy at all,” MaVillakazi interferes. She's with Malibongwe on this; they need to try and get along.

“Phaka where is the Nobel Prize for peace? Give it to them.”
They continue laughing like idiots.

Malibongwe shakes his head and stands up to go and check how many of his cosmetics grew legs and left his rondavel this time around?

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PHUMELELE

I don't know why Mpatho isn't keeping an eye on Beauty anymore. It's like he believes this fake woman of the house she's portraying lately. I think she's up to something, I will never trust that woman again.

“Have you spoken to your mother's people today?” I ask him.

We are cuddling in bed. We've moved on from what happened. He settled with the Mcinekas and I'm going to handle things better from now onwards.

“I talked to Thokozani,” he says and lifts my silky nightie.

Distractions!

“And what is the progress with your mother?” I want to be updated.

“The neighbor's phone has been off, there's no electricity where she is. He said he will try and get me another number,” he says.

“Oh...” I'm staring at him.

Doesn't he suspect anything at all?

“Did you pay straight to the hospital or you transferred to a personal account?”

“Can we talk about something else? You’ve been wearing a short dress all day, now you’re wearing this sexy nightie, I’m horny.” He’s just shutting down the topic. He knows that his mother is playing a game but he doesn’t want to accept it. She doesn’t love him, the earlier he makes peace with that the better.

“Are we still going on Tuesday?” I ask.

“Yes, we will go,” he says and sneaks his hand under my nightie.

“When are you going to give me a blowjob?”

My eyes widen. “Huh?”

“It’s yours...when are you going to taste it? You have beautiful lips, I’d like to have on me...sondela.” Okay, he’s really horny.

I shift closer and throw my leg over his hip. He grabs my face and starts kissing me. I want it to be like this; show that you want me, touch me all over and whisper ‘mommy’ with low sexy moans.

“Mpatho! Phume! Beauty!” Aunt Nomusa is still here.

I told her to leave when she’s done cooking, that was two hours ago. She likes slaving herself even when mkhulu is no longer around.

“Mmmm, shit!” Mpatho groans with his hand on my panties.

I stop myself from laughing and respond to Aunt Nomusa.

“Come out, please,” she says.

She’d never disturb us for nothing. I get off bed and leave Mpatho because he can’t walk out with that erection. Beauty comes out of mkhulu’s study as well, God knows what she’s

doing there because she doesn't even know what CEO stands for.

"There is a..." Aunt Nomusa doesn't finish.

"Uphi?" she says, appearing behind Aunt Nomusa.

It's Nombuso holding her skirts above her knees. I thought the matter was settled already, why is she here?

"She was breaking the gate, I had to open," Aunt Nomusa says.

Okay, she's here to fight.

"Who is the fat woman?" Beauty asks.

Knowing how Nombuso is, this is going to be chaotic.

"Sphakamiso's sister," I tell Beauty.

She looks at Nombuso up and down. This type she only rates one star. "What is she doing in my house?"

"Where is Mpatho? I don't have time to listen to prostitutes," – Nombuso. She looks at me, "Wena, where is your brother-husband of two minutes?"

"Hey sisi, I understand that you're not used to sliding doors and big houses, you think this is a mall and you can just walk in. But this is my house, behave like a grown woman that you are," Beauty says.

"You tell your age-mate grandson to come out or I will continue screaming in this mansion and you won't do nothing about it," – Nombuso.

I take a deep breath and ask as humble as I can. "Is this about what happened? Your mother was here earlier and it was sorted."

"Sorted with R1000. Just because they could use money to marry you and this prostitute doesn't mean everyone can be

bought by money. I want my brother un-kicked, un-punched and un-choked.” This is crazy.

Since when she’s advocating for Sphakamiso?

“Go and kill him, when he’s reincarnated he will be all that.” Beauty just won’t back down from this.

I don’t know when Nombuso got from Aunt Nomusa’s side to Beauty. She’s two times her size and Beauty only knows how to run her mouth and keep her long nails neat. Nombuso pins her against the wall with her big breasts.

Aunt Nomusa screams for Mpatho to come out and help.

I don’t want to take a side but right now it’s fair that I save Beauty. Nombuso doesn’t like Sphakamiso but she’s fighting for him; the same with Beauty and Mpatho. I pull Nombuso’s arm, she’s heavy like a filled water tank.

“Please stop this, she’s mourning,” I say. Funnily, I also did the same thing not so long ago.

“She must mourn her mouth too. Let go of my arm!”

At least they’re separated now. Mpatho comes with a confused look on his face. He doesn’t know Nombuso but her looks will give her away.

“What’s going on?” he asks.

Beauty is fixing her hair; glam is forever.

“This hippo came out of the river and got lost.” Not even those slaps can shut her up.

Nombuso charges towards her again. Mpatho gets in the way.

“Sawubona sisi,” he says.

“Who the fuck do you think you are to hit my brother like that?”

He gets it. He exhales heavily and scratches his cheek.

“Your mother and I talked,” he says.

“You bribed her with R1000. Living in this mansion where people die after every two month doesn’t make you gods,” she says.

That’s super insensitive of her. Why bring up dead people? My mother and mkhulu.

“Hit me as well, sgora esikhulu.” She’s pushing him on the chest.

He doesn’t react to it.

“I’m calling the police,” Beauty says.

Nombuso looks at her. “Oh please do. I will be calling them as well, my brother was assaulted. Nina nidelela kabi nesinyama esidinga impophoma!”

Again, heartless and insensitive. How do you insult people about their bad lucks?

“Satisfy your wife so that she will stop running after my brother,” she says.

Mpatho’s jaw tightens. She’s taking it too far. I wasn’t even meeting up with Sphakamiso because of that.

She turns to walk away. I’m only going to start breathing once she disappears outside the door.

But nope, she turns to the wine wrack and takes two bottles.

“Hey that doesn’t belong to you or your brother,” Beauty says going after her.

She lifts the bottle up like she’s going to hit with it. Beauty stops and takes a step back. This woman is crazy.

“These expensive wines won’t make your dying problems go away. Niyafa, nisazofa bomufi!” She clicks her tongue and continues walking away. Aunt Nomusa follows her.

She grabs a packet of potato chips that I left on the counter. This is theft now.

“Devil-worshippers, niyalamana, jiki-jiki niyashadana, one minute you’re siblings next you’re getting married. Grandpas are introducing Nkomazi branch Beyonces with fake ass!” She trash-talks us all the way to the door.

I’m hurt by some of the things she said. I’m the first to walk away, my eyes are burning with tears.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 42

PHUMELELE

I know he doesn’t like me taking what people say about us to the heart. He’s sitting on the bed, I’m lying on my stomach sobbing. I hate myself for caring so much about Sphakamiso because it has given access to his sister’s insults. I was never a person that anyone can just walk up to and talk to however they want. My name is everywhere, people feel entitled to say things about me and judge me without getting all the facts.

He finally lies down next to me. “How long are you going to cry?”

“All night,” I say.

He turns my face and wipes tears off my cheeks.

“People are going to talk about us, now more than ever. But we need to stop giving them reasons to insult us...stay away from your past,” he says.

“So you think she had a right to talk to us like that?”

“No, I’m saying it could’ve been avoided. I really don’t want to keep stressing MaVilakazi.”

Now he’s a MaVilakazi fan? I’m looking at him with my puffy eyes widened.

“Don’t look at me like that, she’s a good woman. And I feel like most of the times that she’s been hurt were because of me, yet she still looks at me as a child and gives me chance after chance. I’m not used to that, I’ve never been looked at the same way she looks at me by my own family.”

I look at him lost for words. I don’t think MaVilakazi is a good person, or rather a good mother. Sphakamiso is a mess because of her and that Nombuso. She failed to be a grandmother to Aphelele until he was sent to stay with people he’s not even blood-related too.

He takes my hand and plays with my fingers. He doesn’t look okay and I don’t think it’s related to the chaos Nombuso just caused. He was already like this when she came.

“She asked about my mother, she feels the same way as you,” he says.

“What did she say?” I ask.

“She questioned her intentions. I’m starting to think maybe I’m taking a big gamble and things may not be as they seem. Maybe she hasn’t changed her mind about me, she just needed the surgery funds,” he says.

I don’t want to comment much on his mother’s issue because he doesn’t take it well most of the times. But he knows how I feel about this whole situation.

“Let’s wait for Tuesday,” I say.

“I feel like I’m going to be disappointed and you will be telling me you told me so.” His hopes are getting low. I don’t want him to be negative, I just want him to keep an open mind.

“Whatever happens, I’m your family and I love you. If we have to fight, we will. Hopefully your slayqueen grandmother will support us as well, just like she did today,” I say.

He chuckles, “That was surprising. I’m just not happy with the fact that she’s been getting a lot of physical attacks while going through this period. I know she’s bad, but she’s my grandfather’s widow and nobody should have the right to beat anyone inside this house.”

That’s directed to me as well. I already apologized and got on my knees for that, I’m not going to revisit it again. If Beauty knew how to close her mouth none of it would’ve happened.

“I’d be happy if you can learn to manage your anger. Beauty is always going to be Beauty, you don’t have to stoop down to anyone’s level,” he preaches.

“Okay,” I’m just putting an end to the Beauty conversation.

“When are you going to buy my boutique?” I ask.

He chuckles, “I haven’t seen you drawing up any business plan.”

“Hhayi-bo you haven’t confirmed anything with me, you just said I will get it and didn’t say when. You’ve already went back to work, I also need to start my business,” I say.

“Okay, we can start working towards it after we’ve met with my mother.”

He’s not easy when it comes to giving, I’m starting to wonder how many things Beauty was right about.

“Are you stingy?” I ask.

He frowns, “No, why?”

“Beauty said you are, and you haven’t really done anything for me ever since we got married but I’ve been putting efforts in my wifey duties. I need new clothes, Beauty has complained. I also

want to have a flat somewhere far, for those days when I want to be away from home and breathe,” I say. He hasn’t bought me anything beside the ring that he took back. I only had a romantic picnic that one time, many moons ago.

“You have 35% shares at the Mshazi Enterprises and our shared private funds among other things that our parents left for us. You talk like a broke wife that needs to be fed and clothed.”

Beauty was right, he’s very stingy. I may have married him to access my inheritance but I still need him to fulfill his husband duties.

“You’re my husband, from now on you have to start spoiling me,” I say.

“Okay wife,” he kisses my hand again. “You’re making me feel bad now. A lot has been happening, we haven’t even commenced our weekly dates and financial plans for our kids. I’m not a bad husband, my head is just...”

“Hey, it’s okay. I wasn’t bashing you, relax.”

“I understand where you’re coming from. But don’t worry, I will spoil you and you will have a honeymoon of your dreams, wherever you want it to be. As sad as it may be, I will have to discuss lobola with Beauty after a month.”

“Why does it feel like you’re okay with her despite of everything she’s done?” I’m really confused.

“She killed my grandfather, I will never be okay with her. But I will move forward smoothly; nobody can ever read me,” he says.

I’m not sure what he means by that. But I will leave my fate with Beauty in his hands, I’m not fighting her anymore. She no longer underestimates me, that’s going to set some respect boundaries for a while.

He touches my left upper arm and caresses it gently.

“This, when are you taking it out?”

My implanon. I thought we already discussed this.

“I said next year,” I’m repeating myself now.

“Not open for discussion?”

My eyes widen. “Hhayi-bo Mpatho, we talked and you agreed.”

“I’m just asking if we can discuss about it again and review it as wife and husband?”

“I want to wait. I don’t think we are ready for a third person yet.”

He’s stressing me out. Even removing the implanon this coming year was thoughtful of me. It’s supposed to be in my body for 3 years. He was okay with it, now all of a sudden he’s changing his mind. I guess my fate lies on whether his mother comes back into his life and gives him the love he wants. If not, he wants children and I’m not ready in any way. I have to pray for Ncedziwe to be a trustworthy and loving mother, just to keep his focus on that side of the family.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I just got off the phone, I was telling my father about my day at work, which wasn’t so great. I’m going to see him next weekend, I’m going home. He’s not complaining about Njabulo yet, he’s still well behaved. I hope he stays like that for at least a year.

I put rice on the stove and lie on bed. It gets lonely sometimes, I regret kicking Malibongwe out. I miss him, he’d be cooking for

me today and I'd be resting as much as I want. We haven't talked much but he told me that his brother was okay. I've been trying not to worry too much about what Mam' Ndlazi said but questions still linger in my head. I've thought of every poor family that may need me to save them, but everytime I do I remember that I'm also one of the poor families. I'm no Jesus Christ, neither am I Mother Teresa, I can't save anyone.

Once the rice is cooked I make spicy chutney porched with eggs. It's enough for me to eat now, in the morning, and carry some for lunch. I hardly get visitors, I only have friends whom I hang out with during Saturdays at the tap while doing our laundry. I didn't expect anyone, especially the Nkomazi man whom I talked to three hours ago and didn't mention anything about coming.

"Why do you look so shocked?" he asks, I haven't blinked since he stood at the door.

"Who are you with?" He looks behind the door and under the table.

I crack into laughter. Insecurities are overflowing!

"I'm shocked because you didn't say you're coming," I say.

It's been only 3 days since he left and he already missed me.

"I'm coming from town, I decided to come and say hello," he says.

"Oh, you were not missing me." I stand up and hug him.

He has to lean down to reach my lips and kiss me.

I step back and frown. "You smell alcohol. Are you drunk?"

"It was sibling-pressure, we had nothing to do," he says.

Him spending time with his siblings is good news.

"Did you guys talk?" I ask.

The sigh tells me not. I must just give up, he's never going to address their issues.

"They think it's funny," he says.

"Then express how it affects you emotionally, make them understand that there's another way of life and coexisting as siblings." I'm turning into a preacher and it's starting to look like I need them to be united more than he does.

"Can they come in and say hello?"

Say what now!

"They're here?" I'm whispering.

"Yeah, outside," he says.

Jesus Christ! I asked him to take them out and talk to them, not to bring them here. I live in a small room, I got only one chair and a single bed. It's too soon for him to be introducing me to his family members, even though I've already accidentally met them.

"I don't even have drinks to welcome them," I scold him in a hushed tone.

"You don't need to give them anything." He kisses my cheek and walks out to fetch them.

Yeses! I don't even know when was the last time I washed my bedsheets. Unlike him, I was brought up differently, when you have guests you offer them something to drink.

Mkhuleko is leading them in. He's still limping a bit, I think it's intentional now. Then it's my tipsy boyfriend and the crazy one that shoots people who make him angry. My rooms looks even smaller with the three of them standing inside.

Malibongwe gives the chair to Sphakamiso, then him and Mkhuleko sits on the bed.

“Sawubona,” Sphakamiso greets.

Mkhuleko tails his greeting. He looks a bit uncomfortable.

I greet them back and ask how they are. Sphakamiso answers, he’s well and happy to see me.

I look at Mkhuleko, “How is your leg?”

Sphakamiso chooses to answer for him; “U-right manje, he’s just limping because he wants disability grant.”

I laugh. I didn’t expect him to be the one setting the mood. I had concluded that he’s the unstable and violent one. But I guess I judged too soon. He talks more and laughs more.

“Your brother didn’t tell me that you were all going to pass here. If I knew I was going to cook something nice and buy cold-drink ngicubuze,” I say.

“They eat everything,” Malibongwe says.

I shoot him a look, I’m trying to tell them I’m not going to give them any food and he’s shutting me down.

“Mina nje ngilambile,” he’s even the first to cry of hunger.

That place he bought is next to a shisanyama, he could’ve bought food there. I’m embarrassed getting up to dish rice and egg chutney. It will finish, I will carry money to buy lunch at work.

“This is your sister bafana,” Malibongwe tells them.

I’m official, this relationship is more serious than I expected it to be. I leave plates on the table, Sphakamiso takes his and Malibongwe’s. My poor one-legged boy, they’re not giving him any soft treatment, not even the one who injured him.

I get up and take his plate for him. They’re all eating with appreciating looks on their faces. Malibongwe wants to be eating and touching me.

I clear my throat and deliberately ask for the second time, to all of them. “Did you guys talk?”

“About?” Sphakamiso lifts his eyes to me.

I look at Malibongwe. “He didn’t tell you why he got angry and left home?”

“Oh that, he said he wanted peace and this is the land of peace,” he chuckles.

“You don’t think it’s something he should worry about?” I ask him.

“It’s never about him, I get most of the ‘fights’ and less peace.” He’s saying it calmly, with a slight shrug. But I feel like it’s a weight he’s carrying on his shoulder; more reason for Malibongwe to get through them.

“And you?” I ask Mkhuleko.

He shrugs, “I don’t care.”

I turn to Malibongwe, all of a sudden he’s quiet.

“Sir?”

“We will focus on business.”

This attitude won’t make things better.

“I’m moving to Joburg, I might not be a part of it,” Sphakamiso says.

Stumbling block one. Him relocating will make things worse, he will be more distant.

“If I had a brother and he wanted to start a business and hire me, I’d take the offer. I’d choose growing a family brand than to slave for a white man. Well, unless if you have a stable job waiting for you there because job-hunting is another thing that can give you depression,” I tell him.

“I have way worse situations that can depress me at home.”
He’s stubborn as they come.

“I think Malibongwe needs his siblings.” I’m now his
spokesperson, he’s quiet and not saying any of the things he’s
always expressed to me.

“We need him too but he’s never there,” Sphakamiso says.

I cannot defend him on this, he needs to give his side and
make them understand why he’s never there.

“I don’t like being home, but I do come and the only thing you
all ever do is fight over stupid thing. And you out of everyone
had the audacity to insult me and cut me out of Aphelele’s
heart. You specifically, I’ve always been for you, I was taking
care of your son’s needs and even looking after your girlfriend
when you were away. Nobody supported that relationship more
than I did and you know that. So I was shocked when you
insulted me and said I’ve never been of any help to you.”

“I wanted to to apologize for that but you weren’t home,”
Sphakamiso says.

“I’m home when you all need money for electricity, bread and
other daily needs. And I’m home when you have to insult me.
But I’m not home enough when you have to say sorry?”

“You’re never home, that’s the truth,” – Sphakamiso. He looks
at Mkhuleko for back-up but this one is not getting involved in
this.

“Me being home to listen to flying insults and food fights
wouldn’t change anything,” he’s defensive. I don’t know if it’s
alcohol or he really doesn’t to take any responsibility.

“For me it would change a lot because things happen and
you’re never there. If you were home enough and paying
attention you’d know how Aphelele was treated, you wouldn’t
question me for making the decisions that I made. You’re angry

that someone killed your father; I never met mine. I don't know if I have other siblings. I've never stepped my foot in my father's house, I don't know where it is," – Sphakamiso.

"You want to go there?" Malibongwe asks.

This is heavy family stuff. I wish they had discussed it in my absence.

"I want to know who I am. I have a son whom I owe a true identity to. I don't care anymore about most things, I can live with them as long as my son is fine where he is," Sphakamiso says.

"I think that's something the family elders have to discuss and decide on. You were conceived in marriage, that culturally makes you a Mcineka," – Malibongwe.

"And I fuckin' hate that surname!" – Sphakamiso.

Deep. Hate is not a small word to say.

"You hate us?" Mkhuleko finally gets in the conversation.

"No, I don't hate anyone. But I think holding that surname which doesn't belong to me is what makes Nombuso hate me," Sphakamiso says.

The heavy silence follows. Maybe I placed responsibility on the wrong shoulders, this is bigger than Malibongwe. He wasn't there when all this started, their mother is the reason for all of this.

"Can we talk outside?" I say to him.

He gets up and follows me outside the door.

"Look, I think you should talk to your mother about everything he's telling you. I don't want to come across as too nosy but you know I want you to be happy and united with your family," I say.

“It’s going to be a hard one,” he exhales heavily.

“Just try, be straightforward with her. Otherwise when she dies all this is going to be yours to solve and you are not even enlightened about her past,” I say.

“I know, I know,” he nods.

I hug him.

“Mkhuleko is quiet, what’s going on with him?”

“I don’t know,” he says.

“You’re not kind to him, he’s a child.” I push him aside and get back inside the house.

The only person I’m taking a plate back to the table for is, of course the limping last born.

“Hawu sisi!” Sphakamiso.

“You can stand up and put yours. Make juice while at it. I have Oros, nothing fancy. You can take two bottles of sparkling water that I took from work and pour Oros inside, it’s going to turn into Fanta Orange.”

He laughs as he stands up to put his plate away. Malibongwe is still outside, maybe digesting everything.

“Are you okay?” I ask Mkhuleko.

“Yeah, I’m good,” he says.

He’s the baby of the family but I don’t think he sees himself as one. He’s developed a thick skin more than anyone.

“I see you,” he says.

I don’t know what he sees me for, but I see him too.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 43

MALIBONGWE

MaVilakazi has forgiven him for leaving home, all it took was two pieces of KFC, her all time favorite. She's made tea for the two of them while others are gone. Mkhuleko arrived shortly and went out to his friends. Sphakamiso is in his room, Nombuso went to see the mother of a child who scratched Yoli.

"It's been peaceful these days," MaVilakazi says with a smile. The last few days haven't been bad at all. Nombuso has spared Sphakamiso a few days following his assault.

"I actually wanted to talk to you about something," Malibongwe says after summing up courage with a few breaths.

"You're taking a wife?" she asks.

Malibongwe laughs, "I don't even have cows, how am I going to take a wife?"

"But you have that expensive car and there are rumors that you sold others."

"Now you support crime?" Malibongwe asks.

"No, I don't. But if you've already committed one you must as well do something good with the money. Maybe take Nomfundo and make her your wife instead of being used by girls in the township."

Malibongwe laughs again. Nomfundo happened years ago, before he even grew a beard. His mother just likes her because she's her friend's daughter and attends church, which makes her a good future wife in MaVilakazi's eyes.

"Don't laugh, I'm serious. That girl you've been living with ever since you got money is bad news. What kind of a girl lives with

a man for days while his family is worried sick about him.” She’s serious than Malibongwe thought.

“Miyanda didn’t do anything, I left and went to her willingly,” he says.

“A well-raised girl would’ve advised you to call your family. Not that one, she even lied to Sphakamiso and Nombuso and said she didn’t know where you were,” MaVilakazi says, irked to the core.

“She didn’t know when they went there, I hadn’t called her either. Please Ma, I’m 30, I’m my own responsibility.” He’s getting angry too. Nobody has the right to blame Miyanda.

“Sphakamiso wants to meet his father’s family.” He doesn’t even try to find a kinder way of saying it. They’ve already started on a bad foot.

MaVilakazi frowns, “What?”

“He wants to meet his father’s family. That’s not a responsibility I want to inherit when you’re no longer around. Fix your mess now,” he says.

“Who said I’m dying?” She’s no longer interested in the tea; the cup is turning cold in front of her.

“Must we wait until you die?” Malibongwe asks.

Her eyes widen. Not this child too, he was a good one.

“He wants to go to Joburg, I don’t want him to leave. So next week you will choose a day that suits you the most and we will go to Mandeni to search,” Malibongwe says, ignoring her icy stare.

“This is above you Malibongwe. You’re still just a child even if you drive fancy stolen cars. Your father never carried this matter to his head like you’re doing now.”

“Because my father didn’t care about Sphakamiso, he wasn’t his child. To me he’s my brother and I don’t want to see him struggling with unemployment, fatherhood and identity crisis all at once.”

MaVilakazi shakes her head. Not even Mcineka addressed this critical matter with such disrespect.

“Uthunyelwe kimi Malibongwe! Before that Miyanda girl you never talked to me like this. What did she promise you? That you can disrespect your own mother and move in with her and live happily ever after?”

“Please leave her out of this. This is about ubufebe bakho, your whoring Ma,” he says.

She stands with hands over her head. Other women always complain about children changing character once they get money, but this one is an exceptional case.

“So you will have to see the wife and tell her that you slept with her late husband and got a child. Sphakamiso will only go there once everything has been ironed out. For once he needs to feel like his family is there to fight and protect him. I don’t think he’s felt that one, providing basic needs is not all he wants, just like me.”

“Just like you?” She’s glaring at him.

“I want closure Ma. I want to know why my father was killed.”

Lord intervene! She sits down again, trying to calm down her heavy breaths.

“So this is my day, huh?” she asks.

“Ma, this is not even about you, but your children.”

“How is it not about me while it’s me you’re attacking.”

“I’m not attacking....”

Nombuso walks in shouting from the top of her voice. She's pulling Yoli with her arm behind.

"Telling me about the police, I'm not scared of jail, I live in one!"

Here comes another one...

"I will beat that child again when I see, I want to see what she will do," she's fuming.

She realizes that there's a little meeting and stops. KFC box on the table, these people were eating without her and Yoli. "Who bought KFC?"

"It was just for Ma," Malibongwe says.

"Wow, now people buy exclusively!"

"Don't start Nombuso, I had a long day."

"I was just saying." She never exchanges words with Malibongwe that much. She finds a few fries inside the box and gives to Yoli. Then she sits down.

"Why are you both so tense? Were you gossiping about me?"

"Nobody thinks about you on their spare time," Malibongwe says with a chuckle.

"Yoli's father's sidechick does, I live in her head rent-free." She's been at loggerheads with her ex-husband's girlfriend whom she'll never respect and call anything more than a sidechick.

"Your brother just insulted me," MaVilakazi says. She gets along with jet daughter, she's her one and only girl. Most of the times when she fights with her brothers it's hard for her to intervene and not take her side. The boys have each other, Nombuso doesn't have anyone. At least that's what she expects from them.

"You insulted her?" Nombuso looks at her brother disappointed.

“I asked that we go to the Mhlongos sometime next week. I didn’t know that was an insult,” – Malibongwe.

“No, you called me isfebe. My heart is still tearing apart because I didn’t expect you to say that. You know how hard things were between your father and...”

“Ma, I’m only 3 years older than Sphakamiso, I don’t know anything about what happened. And please don’t twist my words, I didn’t call you names, I said the situation was ubufebe simply because you were married when it happened,” Malibongwe says.

Nombuso clears her throat, “Don’t you think that would be hard for Ma?”

“So what do you suggest? That Sphakamiso goes there on his own and tell the wife that he’s her late husband’s child,” – Malibongwe.

“He can let it go, it’s not like he’s sick.”

“Weren’t you the one who told him to go and look for his father?”

“I just wanted to hurt him,” she says and drops her eyes.

“Mission accomplished, he got hurt and now he needs healing. And he thinks the reason you hate him is because he’s using your father’s surname. He wants your relationship to be better and his son to have a correct identity,” – Malibongwe.

MaVilakazi sighs. “Hhayi cha nawe Nombuso, sometimes I just wish your ex-husband can take you back. You started this whole mess.”

“I started it? You’re the one who brought green pepper in a carrot garden,” Nombuso says.

“Shut up, I’ve seen you through so much to be talking like that with me. Do you know how many women your father slept with

while he was married to me? Do you know that he left after paying lobola to me and promising me marriage? You were two years old, he went to stay with another woman, then when he came back and found out that I had another child with another man he requested his lobola back. My father had already sold the cows, I had no choice but to..."

Malibongwe interrupts, he can't stay quiet any longer. "I'm not a Mcineka too?"

Nombuso grabs his hand and holds it tightly. She's never heard this story before but it sounds like more hearts are about to be shattered.

"You're a Mcineka," MaVilakazi says.

"Then why did you say you had me from another man while Mcineka was away?"

"I'm 5 years older than you, not 2," Nombuso says.

Malibongwe is confused, angry, and hurt.

"What do you mean?" His voice trembles.

Nombuso turns her eyes to their mother, "She will tell us what she means."

MaVilakazi starts sweating. She hates explaining herself to people because they only quote what they want to hear, out of context.

"I made beads for everyone," Mkhuleko says walking in to a very intense meeting. He stops with 5 beaded wristbands in his hand. He was coming to discuss the extra one with his mother.

"And then?" he asks when he notices that something is off.

They take their eyes off him and look at MaVilakazi.

"Malibongwe asked a question," – Nombuso.

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PHUMELELE

I haven't traveled in a while, but this one doesn't even count as one because we are leaving in a few days and we are here to see a sick person. We had a good short flight from OR to Manzini. The accommodation is beautiful, we are just an hour away from the airport and 40 minutes away from the hospital. I have hope because there's been communication between him and his mother. She's recovering from surgery and doing great. But I think he's nervous than excited. We are going to see her in the morning, I can't wait to see a woman who left her child for 32 years and didn't even bother to look back. The old version of Aphelele's mother.

He's resting, I'm outside having a glass of red wine. I don't know why I suddenly like the taste, I've been gravitating towards drinking wine ever since I started having real life problems. I didn't apply for international roaming so I'm only going to be using my phone to take pictures. Not that I care, the only person who'd want to talk to me that's important is Ntombi. My mother and I visited here a few times. And I'd do good with taking a break from calls.

"You're here," he comes out of the balcony door.

I put down my glass, a bit guilty to be having a drink like I'm on vacation while he's stressing out about tomorrow.

"You can have your drink." He sits next to me and sighs heavily.

"I thought you were asleep," I say.

He shakes his head, "I was just lying down, I don't think I will be able to sleep today."

“Feeling nervous?” I ask.

“Yes, I have a strong feeling that I won’t get what I came here for. I don’t know, maybe I’m being influenced by your negativity,” he says.

I haven’t been negative about this trip for at least 24 hours. I’ve been encouraging and nice.

He looks at me, “You look beautiful by the way.”

“Thanks, you look tired.”

“Let’s go inside, I don’t want any Swati man to take you from me.” His jealousy is cute at times. I kiss his cheek and follow him inside with my glass.

“Did you bring any clothes?” he asks, climbing on bed.

I look at myself. If I didn’t bring any clothes then what am I wearing?

“What do you mean?” I’m confused.

“I gave you money to buy clothes as you asked, but I still don’t see any. Only shorts, bikinis and wigs. What happened?” He pulls me to sit on his lap.

“I bought what I wanted to buy. Why do I feel like you’re about to police what I wear? You and Beauty.” I look at him with my eyebrow raised.

He chuckles, “You’re a bully.”

It’s starting to get to me how he always accuses me of bullying.

“You do things to me that you don’t want me to do to you,” he says.

“Like what?” I ask.

“You pick clothes for me to wear every morning but refuse to take my advice on what you should wear. I’m not saying dress up like a Muslim wife, but be presentable, especially tomorrow.”

I roll my eyes, very unintentional. I see his face changing; he's taking offense. But really, so I must dress up to see a mother who abandoned him since he was a baby.

"I will find something presentableee," I sip my wine.

"Can you sit on your own? I want to lie down."

I have my own ass, I didn't ask to sit on his lap in the first place.

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I put our differences aside when we get inside the car heading to the hospital. I'm wearing formal button-down shirt and a solid pencil skirt, and square-toe stilettos. I hope this is 'presentable enough' for his beloved mother.

I kiss his cheek before settling on my seat. We can't be a cold couple in front of the driver.

"We need to come back here again, for vacation," I say.

"Yeah," he says and looks outside the window. He's still not okay because I rolled my eyes while he was speaking and drank half of the night and sang in the room. It wasn't intentional, this is my first time being away from home after two deaths.

"Did you have your breakfast?" I'm trying to have a small talk. 40 minutes drive is too long to be sitting next to someone who doesn't speak to you.

"I will have it when we come back, I was not not hungry," he says.

"Let's hope there are restaurants near the hospitals. Are you not cold?"

He sighs and whispers, "Please leave me alone."

I don't think it's necessary for him to be rude, I came here to support him. But silence is gold, I will listen to the soft music our driver is playing.

As a good wife that I am, I still hold his hand as we enter the hospital. His body has tensed up. We are welcomed by a nurse who leads us to her bed. I cannot imagine what she's going through.

"Your son is here Ncedziwe," the nurse announces and steps aside for us to proceed.

I can feel his palm sweating on my hand. His mother is here, he's seeing her again after a decade.

My eyes meet with hers.

No, I know this woman. My mother knew her, they met a few times.

What the hell is going on here?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 44

MAVILAKAZI

Sphakamiso is the only one not present. These kids are interrogating her and there's one person she truly blames for this. The new girlfriend who's driving Malibongwe crazy. He's never acted like this before; he's never cheered and led his siblings into arguing with their mother.

Mkhuleko is not harsh. "Was it a boy?"

Others look at him, quizzically.

He shrugs, "Just asking."

Then he looks back at MaVilakazi. "It's okay, nobody is judging you Ma, we just want to know the truth."

Nombuso claps her hands twice. She's not a part of the 'nobody' that's not judging. She's a panelist here, it's within her right to judge. "Ungambulala umuntu Ma, you're capable of killing. How can you keep such from us?"

"Which child were you talking about?" Malibongwe asks. The age gap between him and Nombuso makes it impossible for him to be the child that was gotten somewhere else. But still, it doesn't make sense because Sphakamiso is the third-born.

"I had to give up that child," MaVilakazi confesses. She's been cornered, they won't leave her alone until she says something.

"A boy child?" Mkhuleko asks. He's more aware of this than others.

She inhales a deep breath and nods. "Yes, he was a boy."

Malibongwe stands up, "Wait....so I'm a third born and not the second born and not the eldest son?"

"Did he die?" – Nombuso.

"No, he's alive but we cannot have a relationship with him. He's got his own people taking care of him." Her voice is laced with pain as she says this. None of her children look sympathetic towards it.

"So you have a child that you abandoned? Sphakamiso is walking in your steps," Nombuso says, shaking her head in disbelief.

"Don't say that, you're the reason why he sent Aphelele away," Mkhuleko calls her out.

She raises her eyebrows, "Me? The same person who bought that child sweets and carried him on my back."

"Why are you only mentioning the good?" – Mkhuleko.

Malibongwe sighs, “You two, stop. That can be talked about later. Right now I want to know about this brother we have and doesn’t know.”

“You cannot know him, your father and I and his father had a deal,” MaVilakazi says.

Malibongwe shakes his head and sits down again. Now it’s starting to make sense.

“Is that why you hated my father?” he asks.

“I didn’t hate your father, I loved him, I gave him three beautiful sons after that.”

“Two,” – Malibongwe.

She drops her eyes. “Yes, two. But I loved him, I stayed with him until death did us apart.”

“And you were glad when it did, you didn’t even fight for him.”

“Malibongwe! We talked about that, please don’t stress me out.”

“You both talked about what?” Nombuso asks. She’s the eldest, she deserves to know about everything.

MaVilakazi looks at Malibongwe with her breath held up. If Mkhuleko finds out about the real cause of his father’s death he will go crazy. Others are manageable, not him. It will be difficult to call him into order and the last thing she needs is them going after Mpatho.

“Nothing,” Malibongwe says. His jaw is clenched, he hates lying and worse of all for the woman who didn’t care about his father at all.

“What was the deal?” Mkhuleko asks.

MaVilakazi looks at him. Why does he want to know? It happened years ago, before he was even born and both men are dead now, the child is okay where he is.

“I need to give him his beads before I leave,” Mkhuleko says.

They all look at him.

“You’re leaving?” Malibongwe asks.

“No, not now. I don’t know when, you will decide.”

Malibongwe frowns, “Me? I will decide?”

“It’s complicated, you won’t understand it. But you all know that I’m carrying the spirit of Mkhulu Vilakazi, right?”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean you have to leave. I did a ceremony back home and asked that they just protect you since my father chose you as his special grandson,” MaVilakazi says.

“No Ma, mkhulu was also a chosen grandson but he couldn’t carry out his duties. Those duties were then inherited by me. I don’t know what they were yet, I will find out once Malibongwe...”

Malibongwe frowns. Why his name keeping popping out of this child’s mouth?

“You will have a child who will take my place here,” he says.

Nobody gets it. He didn’t expect them to, that’s why most of the times he keeps things to himself.

“And there will be a child coming with that one, I just don’t know from who. But I saw double blood drops.” It’s like he went from speaking Zulu to French. They are more confused than they were before.

“This is not about me. Where were we?” He looks at MaVilakazi.

She's still shocked. There's no reason for her youngest son to be dutied to carry out responsibilities of the Vilakazis. He is a Mcineka and he has his whole future waiting for him. This child is supposed to go and look for work and help his brothers rebuild their father's house. Or maybe just Malibongwe since Sphakamiso wants to go and look for his unknown family.

"We were talking about our other brother," Nombuso says and turns to their mother. "What's his name?"

"I named him Nkosiyazi," MaVilakazi says.

"Wonders never end!" Nombuso claps her hands in shock. So it's her, Nkosiyazi, Malibongwe, Sphakamiso and the other one.

"Why are you staring at me?" she asks.

Mkhuleko clicks his tongue and walks away.

"My beads?"

Mkhuleko throws them to her and walks.

"And now?" Malibongwe asks.

"Ung'jwayela kabi lo, he forgets that he's a child."

"What did he do?" Malibongwe asks.

"Stop asking me questions, you will collect sweets and sour too." She stands up and goes to her room.

Malibongwe shakes his head. Maybe this is how it's like having a sister who is the only girl in every family.

Maybe things will get better the day one of them bring a wife home. It definitely won't be him because there's only 0.5% chance of Miyanda tolerating someone like Nombuso.

He turns to MaVilakazi. "I'd like to meet Nkosiyazi."

"No, Malibongwe you can't. It's not possible."

“Baba is no more. Why don’t you want us to know him? He’s 32, if I’m not mistaken. Maybe he’s married and has his own family now. I just want to know him, that’s all.”

“I’ve told you that you can’t. Let it go,” – MaVilakazi.

“That’s not fair, you’re being a witch right now.”

The nerve! Others have let it go.

“What are you going to do for him? Three siblings, just three, and you’re failing to be a brother to them. What difference would a fourth one make? You will run to your girlfriend when things get heated. Don’t make me angry.” She gets up and walks away, mumbling to herself with displeasure.

There’s something dark hovering over his life. Because it can’t be that he’s the most obedient child, the only one working and contributing solidly towards the household every month, yet MaVilakazi is the harshest towards him. She’s scared of Sphakamiso, Nombuso does no wrong in her eyes, and Mkhuleko is the egg that gets away with everything.

Maybe he’d relate better with the abandoned one, Nkosiyazi.

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PHUMELELE

It’s awkward. Everything. The hug they shared was the coldest thing I’ve ever watched. I’m sitting on a chair, Mpatho is standing next to her bed. The nurse just walked out after briefing us. We were in Mbabane when I first saw this woman, his mother who supposedly doesn’t want anything to do with the Mshazis. They had a little meeting, I thought she was just a potential client then. Again, we were in Pretoria and she

showed up. I didn't sit with her at the table but she was with us in the restaurant for 15 minutes or more.

There's no way she wouldn't recognize me, I don't know why she's pretending like she doesn't know me. The nurse said nothing about memory loss.

"You're grown," she says.

"Yeah, I'm married."

"To her?" she asks.

"Yes,"

She nods and turns her eyes to me. "I left before your mother came, I'm happy she raised my son for him. I wish I had met her and thanked her before she died."

Wonders shall never end! I play into it and nod. I know my mother didn't raise Mpatho.

"Mommy what happened?" he asks the big question.

It feels a bit weird that he calls her what he calls me. Maybe I'm feeling a bit jealous.

"I fell sick after giving birth to you. I had to come this side to get treated traditionally. Your father couldn't wait for me, he married her mother and told me she was going to raise you. My health wasn't good, I thought..."

"You thought it was better for me to grow up without a mother?" His voice carries so much pain.

The doctor asked that we don't stress her out but this can't be postponed.

"I came back for you after 4 months when I was feeling better. But I fell sick again before Christmas and came back," she says.

“It doesn’t make sense. You could’ve brought me with you. Baba said you left when I was 3 years old, I could walk on my own and feed myself then.”

“I didn’t have financial stability,” she says.

“It doesn’t matter, you could’ve loved me.”

“I did love you, I still do.” She’s lying.

I think she’s professional in lying, I don’t like her and I will never welcome her at the Mshazis as long as I’m a wife there.

“But you don’t even send him a card on his birthdays,” I say.

“Financially, I’m not doing well.” Again, she’s lying. She can even write a birthday note if she really cares.

I wish he didn’t pay for her surgery.

“You’re an old lying hag,” I say.

“Phume! Don’t talk like that with my mother.” He’s defending the devil herself.

“She’s been to South Africa,” I say.

“It was September.” Wtf is she saying!

“Exactly, his birth month,” I say.

She gags on her own breath. It doesn’t look like she even know that Mpatho was born in September.

“Do you know when his birthday is?” I ask.

“Of course, I do.” Her face says otherwise.

“When is it?” I demand to know.

“Phume just calm down,” Mpatho. I don’t know why he’s suddenly being so soft on her. This woman doesn’t even know his birthday.

“September 15,” she says.

I give up!

His jaws are on the floor. He was defending her just now.

“You met with my mother twice. Why are you saying you never got a chance to talk to her?” There’s a lot that doesn’t add up about her. Everything that comes out of her mouth is a lie.

“I never met with your mother,” she denies.

“You did. 2016, we were in Mbabane and you showed up. In Pretoria as well, you joined my mother for brunch in a restaurant. This is not my first time seeing you. Why are you lying?”

She starts coughing and faking breathlessness. I stand and block her view, she’s not getting away with this.

“What was your deal?” I ask.

“Nurse!” she coughs again.

“Put a pillow over her mouth,” I tell Mpatho.

He stands still. He looks absent-minded. I snap my fingers, he blinks and looks at me.

“Let’s go,” he says.

My heart breaks. I don’t want to leave this place without closure. I’m not ready for a child, I know that’s his second option if this doesn’t work out.

“Why do you hate him?” I ask.

“I’m sorry,” she says.

“That’s not enough. He’s here to beg his mother to come back into his life. No child deserves to go through this. Even after he’s proved how much he cares about you, you still won’t be honest and open with him. You’re being really cruel right now.”

“I’m sorry boy,” she says.

Mpatho has already turned his back. I can see how tense his muscles are, I know he's locking in a lot of pain.

"I was just your nanny, I'm not your mother."

I almost drop on the floor. Say what now?

Mpatho turns. All I see in his eyes is confusion.

"You're not my mother?" he asks.

I wish she can say she's joking because this doesn't make any sense. His whole life he's known that his mother is Ncedziwe.

"No, I was hired to look after you when you were two weeks old. I never met your mother, she wasn't a part of the family, your father just came with you," she says.

"But you were...your pictures were there...my father said you are my mother."

"I'm not, I wouldn't have left you behind," she says.

"Then why did you lie?" – Mpatho.

"I didn't think you'd look for me. I'm so sorry, and thank you for paying for the surgery."

This is so unfair. I don't even care about the money he lost, but the emotions he invested in this woman. He doesn't deserve this, nobody does.

"I wrote you letters. Where are they?"

She swallows hard and looks away.

"Can I have them back if you're not my mother? They were personal to me." I can't believe he's this calm. If it was me I'd be tearing oxygen masks and drips apart.

"I...I...I lost them," she says with a stutter.

He turns to me. "Please tell her to give me my letters back. I will be in the car."

I don't ask how he expects me to do that, I know he's still mourning his grandfather and doesn't want any blood on his hands.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 45

SPHAKAMISO

He's been in his room, just alone with his thoughts. He knows something happened in that little meeting they had but he's got problems bigger than this family.

"Qo!" someone knocks at the door.

He gets up and puts his T-shirt on. "You can come in."

Nombuso walks in. She's carrying a plate of food. This is strange.

"Hey," she says.

Sphakamiso frowns, "Hey."

"I brought you food. The meat is burned a little, I was busy." She's making it more strange.

"For who?" Sphakamiso asks.

"You. Where do I sit?"

"You can sit on the bed. Why are you bringing me food?"

"It's 3pm and you haven't had lunch."

This is suspicious behavior. Aphelele still needs him, he's not ready to die.

"I'm not hungry," he says.

She picks a piece of meat and tears a little piece and eats it.

“See, no poison,” she says.

Now he can eat. He takes the plate and puts it on his lap. It’s still strange, not even on his birthday Nombuso ever brings him food.

“Thank you,” he says.

Nombuso’s eyebrows are raised. “I can’t believe you think I can kill you. You’re basically calling me a witch.”

Now she’s starting again.

“Are you here to fight?” Sphakamiso asks.

“No, I’m just angry that Mkhuleko said you said the reason you sent Aphelele away was me.”

“Since when you make people lunch when you’re angry? Angry or guilty?”

She releases a deep breath. “I feel partly judged. I’ve done good things for everyone in this family. I was a good aunt and sister at times. But I’m not perfect, I do fall short at times. It doesn’t warrant me to be painted as the evil sister?”

“Nombuso, you do more bad than good. The reason you took Yoli from his father because of the unpleasant environment is the same reason I took Aphelele away.”

“I was the unpleasant environment for him?” – Nombuso.

“Look, I don’t mind you hating me and hurting me. I can take it, it’s not like I know anything other than pain. But I couldn’t fold my arms and watch my son growing up as hard as I did.”

“That’s sad to hear,” she says with a deep sigh.

“It’s fine,” – Sphakamiso.

A long moment of silence passes. He finally picks a spoon and starts eating. If he dies Mkhuleko and Malibongwe will share his assets- speakers and sneakers.

“Ma and baba used to fight a lot about you. I didn’t know why, but I think today the light has been shed. She’d already given up another child, she didn’t want to go through what she went through again.”

“There was another child?”

“Yes, you’ve been demoted to fourth-born. But she refused to tell us where he is. He comes after me,” she says.

“Wow!” that’s all he can say.

“She’d already chosen him over her one child. She couldn’t do it with you. I didn’t understand then, I just got really angry.”

“Why were you angry with me? I didn’t ask to be born.”

“I know, but when he died you and Ma were the less grieving. It felt like he had to die for you to have a place. I was closer to him than I am to anyone. I could talk to him about everything. I know he would’ve understood my divorce reasons better. Maybe it wouldn’t have gotten to the point of divorce if he was still around.”

“I get you but I had no reason to grieve for someone who didn’t like me. To you he was a good father, to me he was just a man who harshly judged me and made my life difficult. I didn’t even know what was going on regarding my paternity.”

She nods. “About that way you found out about it, I’m really sorry.”

“It’s better that I know, I doubt MaVilakazi would’ve said anything. She would’ve taken it to her grave,” he says.

“Ayy naye, she’s got so many secrets. I don’t understand her at times.” She shakes her head. Having a sibling was a huge shock.

“Just like you,” Sphakamiso says.

She snaps her eyebrows. “I have no secrets.”

“Why did you cheat on Yoli’s father?”

She turns mute within a second. She never got over Yoli’s father, that was her first boyfriend, they got married and had a child, they were supposed to have a happily ever after like they had planned.

“I didn’t cheat,” she finally says.

“Are you saying he lied?” – Sphakamiso.

“Things happened, I just can tell you about them because you’re too rural and ignorant.” Yep, a few insults here and there.

He ignores that. “Try me, I might be not as ignorant as you think.”

“I’m not comfortable sharing it,” she says

“Well, before you disowned me I was your brother. I don’t think I’ve ever judged you for any of your decisions. Maybe only a few times when I was angry.”

“Sex...” Oh fuck.

His sister’s sexual problems will be uncomfortable to listen to.

He clears his throat and puts some courage. “Yes?”

“It wasn’t good. I started bleeding everytime we had sex and he assumed that I had cheated on him with someone and gotten ilumbo,” she says.

This is difficult to hear about your sister.

“Was it ilumbo?” he asks.

“I don’t know, he was okay with other women, I was the problem. That’s how the cheating thing started. I really don’t like talking about this because nobody believes me.”

“Does mom know?” Sphakamiso asks.

“She does but there wasn’t anything she could do. It’s water under the bridge, he maintains Yoli, I’m good,” she says.

She’s far from being good.

“Maybe Mkhuleko can understand this better. You know he believes in spirits and ghosts and traditional medicines,” Sphakamiso says.

“Urgh, I doubt Mkhuleko would help me, he doesn’t like me. We fought not an hour ago. But he’s going to collect sweet and sour again when he comes back.” She’s back at the Nombuso they all know. Always looking for small windows to throw a bit of trouble someone’s way.

“Did you download Tinder?” Sphakamiso asks. They could all do with a sbari in their lives. At this point it doesn’t matter even if he has one eye, as long as he keeps their bored sister company. Maybe she will find a better hobby than fighting everyone.

“What is that again?” she asks.

“A dating app.” He laughs.

“I don’t want any stupid online boyfriend.”

“We can find you one, we will interview him and make sure he’s monied.”

“No, I’m not going anywhere.” Her biggest fear is going through what she went through with Yoli’s father. Is that the two-pin plug there she’s been looking for on the table? Oh hell, no!

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PHUMELELE

I've become cruel; everything I think of when I'm faced with a situation is how to cause pain. I'm looking at this woman and I'm wondering how far the nurses are and if they'd hear me if I pressed a pillow over her nose.

"Where are the letters?" I'm not friendly or trying to be considerate of her being on a hospital bed.

"I lost them," she says.

I can see that she's lying. She could've lost one or two, not all of them over the years. I'm sure he was writing her the most confidential things about his life. He's believes in therapy, but only for me. His therapy was writing those letters. If she has any sympathy left in her heart she will just give me the bloody letters and we will go back home and never bother her.

"Ncedziwe don't make this harder than it is," I say.

"I don't know what you want me to say because I've told you that I lost them." She wants to be rude. I can take her there; I'm rude too.

I step closer to her bed...if we weren't here this woman would've gotten these little hands. I would've attended anger classes after I deal with her.

"I know you know this, but let me remind you Ncedziwe. I have money, Mpatho has money, we can pay for you to be killed. You and your whole family. Or we can do it ourselves. I know I can do it, I wouldn't mind to go to hell because of you."

"Your mother liked me," she's a bit shaken.

"Do I look like my mother? I want the letters. Tell me where they are, I'm not leaving without them," I say.

"Why are you bothered by this more than him?"

Because he will want a child from me if he doesn't get closure.

"He's my husband," I say.

“Your marriage is not real; your mother arranged it.”

I don't know why my mother trusted this woman. I'm sure she knew something about the family. There's no way my mother would've cared to have an everlasting relationship with a former nanny.

“You're the last person to talk about realness. Do you know who his mother is?”

“No,” she says.

“Ok, where are the letters?”

“I sent them back everytime I got them.”

We are getting somewhere...

“Sent them back where?” I ask.

“To South Africa,” she says.

“Who received them there?”

“His real mother.”

Okay, breathe Phume!

“You know his real mother?” I'm not even shocked, she knew my mother and mkhulu, those are the people who took the truth to their graves.

“I don't know her,” she says, not looking at me.

She's back to her lies.

“Please, just tell me where she lives,” I beg.

“You're putting me in a very difficult position. This is your family's issue to discuss and solve. I was just a nanny, I didn't ask for this. I've done everything I was told to do.” No, not the tears.

Mpatho paid for her surgery, the least she could do is tell him who his mother is, if she knows.

“I sent the letters back to Phumlani, he knows where they ended up,” she says

Okay, at least I know where to go from here. I don't know why Mpatho has to fight like this to know who gave birth to him. He's not poor, he's not going to ask for anything from her, he just want to know her, that's all.

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He drinks painkillers for the second time, without eating anything first, and then lies in the bed. I'd know how to comfort him if he talked. But he hasn't raised anything about Ncedziwe. I told him that Phumlani took the letters to his real mother, he just said okay and asked that I get him painkillers. I don't know if he still wants to look for his real mother. I wouldn't blame him if he didn't, I mean what if that one denies him too.

I put my laptop aside. “I've booked our flight tickets for tomorrow.”

We booked one-way tickets because we weren't sure how long we were staying here. He thought he'd meet his maternal family and siblings. I hate Ncedziwe for this.

“If you want to talk I'm here,” I say.

“I want to sleep,” he closes his eyes.

I know he's not sleepy.

“Do you want to talk to someone professional? A therapist, maybe.”

“Phume, I said I want to sleep, please!”

“Okay sorry.” Sigh!

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We drive through the gate and hear the noise coming from the house. Loud music is playing, it sounds like there's a party inside. I leave Mpatho sitting inside the car, I don't think he wants to see anyone or discipline an adult. Beauty is what causes air pollution in South Africa.

I walk into Noxolo in the kitchen. It looks like there was a big braai in our absence. I feel like a mother coming home to her teenage daughter.

"Where is Beauty?" I ask.

"Hello to you too Phume. Beauty is in the lounge, her lounge."

I drag my suitcase in and walk to the lounge. It's where the crowd is, they're drinking and dancing.

"Hello!" I yell above the noise.

Beauty sees me and goes to lower the music.

"You're back early," she says.

"What's happening? I thought we are still mourning."

"This is my house Phume, your little thoughts don't matter. Anyway, it's my farewell party."

"Farewell party?" I'm confused.

"I'm going on a holiday. London, until July."

"You're leaving!" I'm shocked, not because she's still mourning, I know she doesn't give a fuck about being a new widow. But she's leaving us alone in the house.

"Yes, smile ke, be happy," she says.

I know she's bad and she hates my guts. But I can't be a woman of the house, not while Mpatho is going through this. I feel like my marriage is yet to hit rock bottom.

"Can we talk in my room, please?" I ask.

She grabs her glass and follows me.

I close the door and dump the suitcase on the floor.

"Where is your husband? Don't tell me you guys broke up already. Not that I would be surprised." She chuckles and sips her drink.

"We met Ncedziwe," I tell her.

"Oh no, not more people to the inheritance please. What did you meet her for?" She's only worried about money.

"She's not his mother, she says she was just a nanny," I tell her.

She puts her glass down. "What?"

"She's not Mpatho's mother," I say.

"Then who was his mother? I know I'm not. Are you?" She's a bit drunk.

"I don't know and that scares. I feel like I need her for him more than he does. Didn't mkhulu tell you anything?" I ask.

"No, he never talked about his mother."

"Not even a hint?"

"No."

"Why didn't you ask him?" I mean, she is the grand wife here, she should've asked to be informed about everything in the family.

"To be honest with you, I was and I'm still only interested in the money, not problems." That's undeniably true.

“I need you to grant me access to his study,” I say.

“It’s my study now.” So petty.

“Fine, grant me access to YOUR study,” I say.

“Okay, I will give you the safe code as well. But you have to help me do shopping and pack for my trip.” Of course there are terms and conditions.

“When are you leaving?” I ask.

“Next week Thursday. I’m taking Noxolo with me, she’s my PA.”

“You have a PA?” I’m shocked. I mean, for what?

“Yes, I need a bodyguard too, and a driver. I’m a madam, I can’t be driving myself around like a poor person.” She takes her a glass and goes back to her party.

I will give that dealership two years. Just two, and we will hearing of it from a past tense.

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He’s drinking painkillers again. I’m worried because his constant headaches, they’re a sign of stress. If he talks I know he will feel better. Even if he doesn’t talk to me, he’s got friends and other people he’s close to.

“Are you going to call Phumlani?” I ask.

“No...tomorrow I will go to work early, please prepare my clothes before you sleep.” He’s not willing to address the matter at hand. I’ve been involved, I don’t know why he’s shutting me out now.

“Where do we go from here?” I want to know.

“Life goes on. I’m going to start my own family, kuzodlula.”

This is exactly what I feared. I'm not ready for a child and I don't think his healing lies on him being a father. The gap in his heart will always be there.

But I won't argue with him while he's in this state. My job is to look for his mother. I will do it alone. First mission is to find this Phumlani driver. Hopefully I will find hints in his grandfather's study room as well.

"Can I go out tonight?"

My eyes widen. "Out where?"

"I will see amajita and cool down my head with a few drinks."

"You said you're going to work early tomorrow." I don't want him to go out. I don't know how other wives do it, but to me it doesn't sit well. If he wants to go out he should be taking me along, he's a married man.

"I won't come home late," he says.

"Okay, do what you want to do." I'm hurt that he wants to go out without me and that he actually trusts 'a few drinks' to cool down his head, not me.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 46

PHUMELELE

He wasn't here when I woke up to pee around 3:30am. He came home in the morning, I don't know why he's wearing pyjamas. One, he never sleeps in pyjamas. Two, they're inside out, he's just wearing them to fool me. I'm not waking up to do shit. If he's going to work, which I highly doubt because he slept

out, then he will get his own clothes and have breakfast with Aunt Nomusa.

I'm feeling sick and irritated. I will go to my room and take a nap before I go and ask Aunt Nomusa to make me something sour to eat. A hand grabs my arm as I attempt to get off bed.

I turn my head and find him wide awake. So he's been pretending to be asleep the whole time I was staring at him and thinking about pouring cold water on his ugly face.

"Ulale kanjani?" He's pulling me back and shifting closer.

If he slept at home he'd know how I slept.

"I lied in bed and closed my eyes, that's how I slept."

"Okay. Ngikukhumbule, I miss you." He's trying to kiss me, God knows where his mouth has been all night.

"Get off me, you stink."

"Wow!" He shifts back and releases a deep breath.

Maybe I'm too harsh with my words, but he smells like a tavern, I don't want him to touch me.

I get off bed and put my sleepers on.

"You can be kind Phume, it won't cost you anything," he says.

I don't think he's in any position to question my kindness. I've been nothing but kind to him.

"Sleeping home with your wife won't cost you anything either. Don't tell me about being kind, be kind to yourself first." I've begged this man to talk to me for two days straight. There's nothing I haven't tried to do since we came back from Swaziland. I also don't have a mother, mine sold me off before she died, the uncle I've hated my whole life is my father, I broke up with my boyfriend of over half a decade and married

someone I thought was my brother for 24 years. But I'm not sleeping out, I'm not drinking all night and possibly doing things I shouldn't be doing away from my partner.

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"Trouble in paradise?" I didn't hear her coming.

It's Beauty with wine in her glass at 7 in the morning. Everyone in this house is a drunk.

"You can cry harder, I will help you put make-up," she says with a grin.

Fuck, I'm crying. I touch my cheeks, they're wet.

"He didn't sleep home, did he?" she asks.

I'm trying to ignore her, I'm not the first woman in the world to wake up crying.

"Someone saw him and his friend, Thami, in Woodford Grove in Morningside. Remember DDR is there and his friend is a regular there," she says.

I swallow my tears and pride and ask, "What is that? DDR."

"Are you a human being? You're in the province and you don't know Durban Dark Rooms."

Never heard of that before but I assume the rooms are dark.

"What do people do there?" I ask.

"Anything. Everything. There's a bar, naked night, porn cinemas, private rooms, glory holes, and lots of horny people, especially other races." My heart drops to my feet.

"Mpatho was there?" My voice breaks, I don't need another cheating scandal.

“What were they doing in Morningside, on the same street as DDR?” She sips her wine and winks at me. “Open your eyes, I’ve always told you this.”

Nothing will ever make me trust her again. But I will address this with Mpatho right now. If that’s the kind of life he wants then we should divorce and go our separate ways. I have access to my money, I’d sell my shares and go start my life somewhere else.

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I walk in and stand next to the bed. “What are you wearing today?”

“Mmmmm, I don’t think I’m going to work.”

“Hang-over?” I ask, my arms are folded, I’m staring at him.

He looks a bit confused, I left the room angry and now I’m back asking him about clothes.

“Just a little bit,” he says.

“Sorry hubby, I will make you something to make it go away.”

He frowns, “Okay, thanks.”

I sit on the edge of the bed.

“Where were you last night?” Now we are getting serious, he’s not going to repeat what Sphakamiso did to me. They’re not brothers, there’s no need for them to act the same way at the expense of my heart.

“I was with the gents,” he says.

“Where? That’s the question Mpatho.”

“Durban,” he says.

“At Moses Mabhida? In the beach?” I mean, Durban is too big for someone to be just in Durban.

“Thami’s place in Morningside,” he says, still wearing a frown on his face.

I need to find his clothes, those he was wearing last night. I make my way to the bathroom, he jumps off the bed and follows me asking what’s going on.

They’re on top of the basket. I grab the trouser and check the pockets. There’s only a receipt inside, I thought I’d find condoms. I look at it before throwing it inside the bin.

“Entrance fee?” I look at him with the receipt in my hand.

“We were in a club, private club.”

“Not DDR?” I ask.

“No, I didn’t go to DDR.” He doesn’t look surprised that there’s a place like that in this country. Maybe I’m the only one who’s been living under the rock. His tone reeks familiarity. He’s been there before, and maybe even yesterday.

“Why are you doing this to me?” My hands are shaking. I’m thinking about all the emotions and feelings I’ve invested in this marriage. All the sacrifices I’ve made, for him to just forget about it because Ncedziwe turned out not to be his mother.

“I didn’t do anything Phume. I got too drunk and dozed off in Thami’s house. You can call him and ask why I didn’t come home last night.” His friend will obviously say anything to protect him.

“People saw you. Why did you leave in the first place? There’s alcohol in this house, if you wanted music you could’ve turned it on. Obviously it’s me you wanted to get away from, and you went to a demonic sex club, or whatever it’s called.”

“But I asked you and you gave me permission.” He’s spitting rubbish.

I throw the trouser at him, it’s the only thing I could throw. “To go out with your friends. That’s what I agreed to, not some bloody club with strippers and porn cinemas.”

“I thought we were past that stage of listening to people’s lies and fighting one another. I just found out that my mother abandoned me before I was even a month old. She didn’t want me straight from birth and...” Yada yada!

“You’re 32 years old! You can live without a mother, you have every fuckin’ thing in the world. Even a wife you got from a bloody will. Take your problems to hell, I’m not interested.”

Someone screams from the bedroom. Beauty, she found the door open and walked in.

“The whole village can hear you two,” she says.

I don’t care about the village because I’m out of here very soon.

“I’m not saying stop fighting, keep it up but with your voices low.” She closes the door after reprimanding us and goes away singing loud.

“She did this, didn’t she?” Stupid question, stupid person.

“You did this Mpatho. You’re doing the same thing Sphakamiso did to me.”

“Don’t mention his name in our bedroom.” He cares about the most useless things in the world.

“Sphakamiso...Sphakamiso...Sphakamiso. I’ve mentioned it three times, now do you worse!”

“Okay, you will hear about it.” He goes back to bed.

I don’t think he will do anything to Sphakamiso, he cares about MaVilakazi. I need to get all my things, I’m packing my bags

and leaving. I don't know where I will go yet, but hopefully it's somewhere peaceful.

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I have everything on the bed, in my former bedroom. I'm starting to think maybe I'm over exaggerating. I don't want to divorce Mpatho. I don't have any tangible proof that he slept with someone. I'm not even sure that he went to DDR because the receipt he had didn't specify anything. For some reasons it just said entrance fee and the amount he paid.

"Phume, are you in here?" Beauty is outside my door.

I throw the empty bags on the other side before telling her to come in.

She walks and looks at the clothes piled on the bed and laughs.

"Is the heat too much already?"

"Not now, please Beauty. What do you want?"

"I was in the study room earlier on, I think I will redesign it and turn it into my home office. Do you know any good interior designers?"

Seriously, I'm fighting with my husband and she wants me to recommend interior designers.

"I don't know anyone," I say.

"I was thinking of bright colors, but my PA said it's going to be distracting. Now I'm thinking more of..." She's driving me crazy!

"I don't care Beauty, do whatever you want."

"Be kind . You need me."

I raise my eyebrows. "I need you?"

“Phumlani’s wife is the former secretary of Mshazi Enterprises. They have two beautiful children, recently had their 10th anniversary. He values his family more than taxis.”

Oh fuck, I need her. She was doing some digging while I was half naked and waiting for my husband all night.

“Do you know them? Phumlani is the driver who’s been connecting Mpatho to Ncedziwe for years,” I say, suddenly interested in having her in my room.

“They were Mvimbo’s people. So what color do you think?” Of course, her home office is more important than finding Mpatho’s mom and oxygen itself.

“White is the famous color. You want to be professional, right?”

“Yes, but white offices are common. I want something rare and beautiful.”

How about you invent your own colors, madam?

“Get a designer, then we will choose from the options she gives,” I say.

“Okay, that’s a good idea.” Phewww, now we can move on from the stupid office.

“Ncedziwe said Phumlani knows where the real mother is,” I say.

“Yeah, probably. But he won’t tell you, obviously because Mpatho will go after him for fooling him almost his whole life. I’d deny too,” she says.

“Everyone has a price,” I say what I always heard my mother saying.

“You can’t go around giving people money. Find another way.”

“I don’t know ke.” I sit on the bed and sigh.

“You’re the so-called Legacy Wife. Your brain can’t stop functioning after one idea, how are you going to move this family forward and grow the legacy?”

“Beauty, not everyone has multiple personalities and spare evil mind. What do you want me to say? That we find dirt on him and use it to blackmail him into telling us the truth. I want to go to heaven.”

“None of your family members is there. Wazi bani ezulwini?”

“Beauty, I’m not evil, okay?”

She laughs. “Phume the sooner you accept that you’re your mother’s daughter, the better.”

“I hate this!” I take out a deep breath.

“Hire me,” she says.

“To do what?” I’m confused.

“Watch this....” She takes out her phone and scrolls down her contacts.

She’s calling someone.

“Hey Sindy, we haven’t talked in a while....you hate me...but you can call me even if you’re no longer working in my late husband’s company....it’s life, I’m learning to live without him....I was actually calling you in regards to my husband’s last wish...yes, he left something for your husband, Phumlani...I have to give him myself and pass the message face to face....don’t worry I will book flight tickets for him and make sure his stay in KZN is good...please say hello to the kids.” She drops the call and looks at me with a smile.

“See, now I just have to book his flight and a hotel room. His wife will pack his bags tonight.”

“Okay, then what?” I don’t get it.

“Then I say my husband wanted me to thank him for the services his family rendered to this family. I will buy a stupid gift and give him. Then one thing will lead into another.” It’s going further than I thought. She’s making sure that she’s in the middle of it with her legs open.

“Beauty are you horny?” I ask.

“Hey, I’m trying to help you here.”

“But we can do this without you actually sleeping with him. You’re still under darkness, your husband just died,” I say.

“Exactly! I need to get rid of the bad luck. So, the plan is in motion?”

I’m getting a bad feeling about this.

“But sleeping with someone is the wrong way of getting rid of it. Complete your mourning period and get cleansed,” I say.

“Phumlani is someone who’s been fooling your so-called husband for years. Why are you having sympathy for him? Men do it all the time. They lose their partners and go to clubs and hook up with strange girls to get rid of that sexual darkness.”

Still, nothing justifies it. This is not a witchcraft competition; it’s people’s lives being gambled with.

“Are we together?” she asks.

“Okay, let’s do it. Mpatho is no longer interested, so it’s better we don’t tell him until we find something,” I say.

She frowns, “If he’s no longer interested in his mother, then why are you bothered? Yours is decomposing and being eaten by ants in the grave outside.”

“Thank you, you’re very kind.” I need to take all these clothes back in the closet.

I'm such a mess. This will take me at least an hour to finish. I should be taking a nap, I'm tired and I'm hungry.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 47

PHUMELELE

Ntombi is the only person I trust with my fears and feelings. She's got her own problems too, which I think need a miracle. Umemulo is in five weeks and she still hasn't been able to bring her virginity back, instead she had a quickie with her boyfriend yesterday as a therapy.

According to her my problems are nice life problems.

"Nawe phela don't be a boring wife. Do you ever initiate sex?"

"No," I say.

"Give him a blowjob?"

This girl, am I a sex expert now?

"No, not yet, I haven't learnt."

"Okay, a hand-job nyana in the shower?"

"God, no Ntombi."

"Do you own at least one lingerie?"

"Ummm, no."

I hear her sigh loudly.

"Then you expect him to be motivated to come home from his friends. Like what's special about being with you at night beside the same old vagina?"

“Don’t pin that on me. If he was a good husband he would’ve come home, I wouldn’t have listened to any rumor because there wouldn’t have been a need for people to speculate.”

“But fighting him is doing exactly what Beauty wants. Try to keep your emotions and insecurities in check. I doubt men cheat everytime they go out with their friends. Try to cheer him up, I don’t think creating marriage problems on top of everything is a good idea.”

“You’re right, but I don’t know what I’m going to do,” I say with a heavy sigh. This marriage thing is such a job.

“Take him out for dinner, you both need to get away from the witch of the north for a couple of hours,” she suggests.

“I like the idea, I will go and tell him to get ready. Thank you friend.”

“You’re welcome, I’m considering relationship therapist as a profession.”

I laugh. Now she’s exaggerating, she’s not that good.

There are good restaurants in town that open until late. Just to be sure, I will make a call and book my table once I’ve talked to him.

Beauty and I are going on a mission to find his mother together. I’m keeping my guards up, I know how Beauty operates, she’s always looking for something to benefit and a small window to destroy someone. Phumlani is flying to Durban tomorrow afternoon, we booked him into a BnB for privacy reasons. Beauty and I will go there first and plant a camera. I won’t be far away from them, I’m booked two streets away and I will be watching everything that’s happening. My only worry right now is what I’m going to tell Mpatho. I can’t just go to Durban for the night without a valid reason.

He's lying in bed, this is where he's been the whole day. I notice the packet of painkillers on the bed pedestal, he's still getting headaches. I took all my stuff from this bedroom and moved them to my old room. But I want to sleep here with him tonight, I need to move back in. Drama should be my middle name.

"Hey," I sit behind him.

Silence...

"Are you hungry?" I ask.

"No," he responds, lying on his stomach with his head facing the other way.

"Okay, but I want us to go out for dinner."

He turns to lie on his side and look at me. "Who is 'us'?"

"Hawu, you and I. I don't want us to neglect our love, that's what makes us irritable. We spend more time dealing with external issues and hardly spend time just for ourselves."

"You spend time with Beauty as well," he says.

"Ummmm..." I'm stuttering. I've fought him for getting along with Beauty but lately it's me who's up in her ass. "We are in the same house," I say.

"Enjoy it while it lasts," he says.

For some reason I feel like this is a threat; there's something he's planning. Even though I don't like Beauty, I don't want him to kill her.

"Are we going to dinner?" I ask.

"Yeah, then we are coming back home to reality. You will sleep in your old bedroom because I cheated on you," he says.

I'm not going to apologize, I will just move back in. He hasn't apologized for not sleeping at home, a good husband would've

recognized his mistake. Listening to Beauty and acting on her word was wrong, but being angry at him was warranted and I'm going to move in and out as long as he thinks it's okay to leave me alone the whole night.

"I will make a reservation," I tell him.

"Okay," he says.

I get up and leave.

I'm hoping we can reconnect and have our spark back. Right now it feels like we are a couple on the verge of divorce who are going to a dinner that was planned by their therapist.

Maybe I should watch porn and take notes of some things Ntombi talked to me about. I'm starting to regret delaying my sexual knowledge. Sex is a crucial part of relationships. I'm thinking back to Sphakamiso and I, and I don't know how we were always so happy and missing each other like crazy because all we did when we were together was to kiss and cuddle. And I wonder if our relationship would've been more better or hot&cold like this marriage if we had a stable sex life.

"Are you okay?" Aunt Nomusa asks behind me.

I exhale loudly and nod.

"These things happen, your mother and father fought too, there's nothing such as a perfect relationship or marriage." She always finds a way to comfort me. And she still calls Mshazi my father.

"Aunty do you think I'm evil?" I ask.

She gathers her eyebrows. "No, who said that?"

"I'm just asking," I lie.

“You’re not evil; you’re a sweet little girl who’s dealing with a lot and handling it very well. I’m actually proud of you,” she says.

I can’t help the smile spreading on my face. She’s the sweetest one.

“I made turkey for dinner,” she says.

“Oh, if you knew you’d have cooked for Beauty only. Mpatho and I are going out for dinner today,” I say.

“It’s okay, there’s a fridge. Enjoy your dinner.”

I hope we do, I really hope so.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Not him being a gumtree at my door again! What happened to calling before you come to someone’s house?

“Qo kwaVezunyawo,” he says, stepping inside the door.

“Come in, I was expecting you,” I return the sarcasm.

He smiles. I’ve missed those dimples. I get up and hug him.

I just got back from work and took a bath. He came just when I was thinking which one is a better option between cooking and buying bread and fries.

“I’m just popping in to check if...” He looks around, stretching his long neck to every corner. “...to check if there’s no beard taking my place here.”

I roll my eyes, he hides his insecurities under banter.

“If you were replaced what would you have done?” I ask.

“Mmmm, I know a few witchdoctors who make things happen.” He leans down towards my face and captures my lips in a smooth kiss. Then he drops his hands to my butt and squeeze them gently.

“Can I check-in?” he asks, rubbing his forehead against mine.

“Where?” I ask.

“At the Mthethwa castle.”

I give him a look; why are we having sex like we are married. He hasn't paid a chicken to my father.

“Sit here,” he puts me on the bed and rushes to close the door.

Then he comes back and pushes me down on my back and kisses me again.

“I just came back from work, I was on my feet all day and you are coming all the way from Nkomazi to have sex with me,” I say when his hands pull down my skirt.

“Relax,” he says.

I'm not relaxing anything. If he wants to have sex everyday he must start that repair store soon and save up for lobola. I'm my father's only daughter, he needs to be rewarded for single-handedly raising me up, I made it to this age without a child. But if I'm not careful I will end up pregnant in this relationship. God make me remember to ask Singh for a day-off during the week so that I will go to the clinic.

He pecks my lips and plants tender kisses down my chest.

“Relax,” he says again.

I'm tense and tired.

“Why did I fall in love with you?” I say with a sigh.

He smiles and continues to drag my panty down to my ankles.

He separates my legs and covers my private area with his hand.

“Are you angry?” he asks.

“Yes,” I say.

“Are you going to hit me if I kiss you here?”

Well....

“No,” I say.

He goes down and shoves his head between my legs. I breathe in and out, then relax. His tongue sweeps between my folds. I feel something rushing through my veins. He’s consistent with his licking. He’s patiently licking every part of my cookie. What’s driving me more horny is how much he enjoys this. The moans and licking sounds, gosh!

He traps my clit between his lips and sucks it like a baby latching on the mother’s nipple. My legs tremble, I scream his name with my breaths cutting short.

I needed this surprise visit. My inner thighs are coated in thick juices. He’s still licking me, with my cum and all. Bonga doesn’t just eat you, he worships the vagina with his tongue. I think I’ve met the top graduate of oral sex.

He picks my panty from the floor and puts it back on me. Then he kisses me. It’s kinda awkward smelling myself from him.

“Find something to wear and be ready in 30 minutes,” he says.

“Where am I going?” I ask.

“Just going out for dinner.” He stands up and takes a face-cloth from his pocket.

“I need to sprinkle some water here.” He turns to the table and takes a cup. He gets water from the bucket and wets his cloth.

“I’m going to the garage, I will be back in 30 minutes,” he says heading to the door, wiping his mouth area with a cloth.

One moment I’m screaming a man’s name, next he’s walking out wiping his mouth. People will add two and two here, I don’t want to be remembered as a girl who was a sex addict.

“Act normal,” I tell him before he steps outside.

He looks back at me smiling, then he points at his erection.

“They will know,” he says.

Can I die here?

No, I’m kidding. Dead people don’t get mouth-delivered orgasms.

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PHUMELELE

He looks relaxed than he was when we left home. I know and respect that he’s dealing with a lot of emotional burdens. There are things I shouldn’t have said, like that ‘take your problems to hell’. I’m hoping we can iron things out. The atmosphere is perfect. We have juicy lamb chops, sautéed mushrooms and potatoes. The owner sent for a bouquet of flower to be given to me when we arrive. We also received a bottle of champagne in the house. This dinner can’t go wrong.

“I wanted us to talk about things in a lighter mood,” I say.

“Okay, as long as I won’t have to argue,” he says.

I’m not always starting fights, that’s what he’s insinuating.

“I’m sorry about the things I said in the morning. I didn’t intend to reduce your pain, I shouldn’t have said what I said. I will work on how I express myself when I’m angry,” I say.

For a minute he doesn’t say anything or lock his eyes with me.

“I’m sorry,” I repeat.

“It’s okay,” he says.

That’s not a genuine apology acceptance, I will let him forgive me on his own time.

“I care about you, maybe more than I show. I want us to work and get to a stage where we no longer fight about petty stuff and communicate properly. No matter how you got me, I’m your wife, any married man would’ve picked the phone and called home to say he can’t drive home and state his reasons. Rather than slipping into the bedroom in the morning and wear pyjamas like he’s been there the whole night. I’m not saying what I did was right, but if you had done that I wouldn’t have been so angry at you.”

“But you didn’t even give me a chance to apologize and explain myself.”

“Mpatho you’ve had the whole day. Even now, you still haven’t showed any remorse.”

“I’m sorry,” he says.

I don’t feel like it’s genuine. If you’re sorry you don’t wait until you’re asked to apologize.

“How do you want to deal with your mother’s issue? With me or away from me?” This is important for me to know. Sometimes we support people who need distance from us, rather than support.

His eyes run to the entrance. What’s more important there? I’m trying to work things out for the better of both of us.

It's Malibongwe walking in with woman with Benny & Betty hairstyle. She's tall in her own world, but with him she looks short. Malibongwe makes everyone look short. He's got a basketball player height. I didn't know that he has a girlfriend. He's holding her hand, she possesses the rural raw beauty.

Malibongwe turns his eyes to us like he's feeling our stares. He's the most handsome, with a gentle face and dimples. But when his eyes meet Mpatho his face changes into something I can't explain.

He leans to the woman and whispers something. Then he makes his way to us. Mpatho has been ignoring his request to meet. I hope he's going to respect the public space and my presence.

I know that as much as Mpatho doesn't fear him, he holds MaVilakazi to a certain standard and he doesn't want to keep bumping heads with her son.

"It's interesting to see that you have time for romantic dinners but you can't make time to see me," Malibongwe says.

This won't end peacefully. His girlfriend is coming here as well.

"Hi Gwazela," Mpatho greets him with his clan name. He's a man seeking for peace, but that's still not enough for Malibongwe.

"Don't do that, I don't have time for acting. When are you seeing me?" His girlfriend has stood next to him and wrapped her arm around his.

"Can we do this some other time?" Mpatho asks. He doesn't want to argue in a restaurant, in front of his wife.

"Set 'the other time'. You're wearing a Rolex, I'm sure it's going to be easier," – Malibongwe.

"Some other time, Gwazela," Mpatho says.

“Eyy wena, fuck this fake attitude. I need answers from you.”
Now he’s cursing and banging the table I paid for.

“Bhut’ Malibongwe you have his number, you know where he works. Why does it have to be here? I was in the middle of something,” I say.

“My father wasn’t waited to finish his dinner. So that’s very bold of you to ask me, Mrs Mshazi.” From MaMshazi to Mrs Mshazi, we’ve had quite a relationship. I can’t believe it’s ending so bad.

“But I booked this table, I brought him here. He’s not in the mood to fight with you. And he’s asking nicely that you have whatever conversation some other time, Mr Mcineka.”

His girlfriend, whom I assumed was humble and knows how to stay out of people’s business, pulls his arm. “You don’t have to argue with slayqueens,” she says.

“Are you calling me a slayqueen?” I’d be damned if she did, I’ve never seen this woman even on a bar of soap.

“Did I call your name, sweetie?”

I can’t tolerate sweetie and being looked at like that.

“It’s better you didn’t because you would’ve climbed the first taxi back to the caves,” I say.

“Would you have made me climb the taxi?” She shakes Malibongwe’s arm and turns back to the table. But he holds her back. “Don’t say I’m from the caves, you don’t know me. Who do you think you are? Brother’s wife.”

“That’s getting old. But I’m glad you know how to google. Next time you get data google real Nike stores because those shoes are illegal.” I pick my glass of champagne and sip.

We should finish our food and leave.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

My hands and ears are itching. In fact, every part of my body. In my whole life I've never been disrespected by a handed-over-through-a-will spoilt-brat of a wife whose last courtship was with Sphakamiso.

"Imagine being insulted by someone whose anniversary will always be the day the lawyer read her parents' will, nxm!

"Calm down," Bonga says.

He's the only reason I'm still sitting on this chair without any blood on my hands.

"Who does she think she is? I will prefer fake clothes anytime, any day, than faking love for money. Trust me, next time I see her I will drag her by hair all the way to her colleagues in Butterworth," I say.

"Babe don't let her ruin our dinner. She's not better than you, we are here, dining in the same restaurant as them. Whether she likes it or not, I will get her husband," he says.

At this point I don't care what he does. I'm the reason why that man is still sitting there with stone-packed arms, shining his teeth with that rude inheritance wife of his.

THE LEGACY WIFE

<<ADDED SCENE>>

PHUMELELE

I thought he wouldn't hear me move from his arms. But he just did, his eyes are open and he's looking at me.

"Where are you going?" he asks.

"It's almost 7am, time to wake up."

"No," he holds me again, pulling me closer and lifting the duvet over both of us.

Malibongwe ruined his mood yesterday, dinner didn't turn out as I wanted it to be. We got home late and took two separate showers and went straight to bed.

"How did you sleep?" I ask.

"Good, I had you in my arms." He buries his face on my neck and plants a few lazy kisses.

Then he looks at me, sexy with his sleepy eyes. "I love you," he says.

I just look at him in the eyes. I've received less love from him since Swaziland. I knew I'd suffer for his mother issues, but not like this.

"What is it?" he asks.

"I feel like you're drifting away from me."

"I'm not, I just don't want you to bear the cross for something you have nothing to do with."

But I'm already bearing the cross.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Yes," he says.

"If you don't meet your mother and I don't give you a child, what's going to happen?"

"Are you trying to tell me that you won't give me a child?"

“Answer the question, please.”

He exhales heavily and takes my hand and links our fingers together. I’m holding my breath, I feel like love is not enough to hold up this marriage.

“I want to be a parent, I’ve wanted it for a while. And I want it to be with you while I’m still in my early thirties,” he says.

This doesn’t answer my question directly, but it loudly answers it. It’s either he has a parent or he’s a parent. The will didn’t say anything about what Phume might want in this marriage.

“Am I enough for you?” I ask.

“Yes, you are,” he says.

“Do I stink?”

I raise my eyebrows, “No, why?”

“Yesterday morning you said I stink when I tried to kiss you.”

“You’d been drinking nje, I was angry.”

“But you hurt me with your words. You always find the harshest things to say and that’s not okay. It’s getting scarier even to be vulnerable with you, my own wife. Because when we fight you bring things up and put me down.”

But we had this conversation yesterday and I apologized.

“I’m sorry, I will watch my tongue now,” I say.

“Speaking of your tongue…” He lowers his hands to my waist and kisses me on the neck again.

“There are tongue things I really like,” he says.

Ntombi’s conversation rings in my head.

I look at him quizzically. “What are those things?”

He chuckles and buries his head on my neck again. I know it’s the blowjob thing. Apparently, it’s liked the most, by everyone. I

will try it, I'm willing, but not this morning. The first thing I'm putting inside mouth is not a penis.

"Deepthroat," he says.

"What?" I'm confused, I thought he was talking about a blowjob-me sucking him.

"Throat," he says touching mine.

"Deep inside it," he adds, pushing his hard rode against me.

A penis, deep inside my throat?

"Are you kidding?" I'm stunned.

"I'm not...I'm sure your throat is tight as you are down here." He grabs my mound and looks at me with a smile curving from his lips. "You're always soft and warm. If we got married back in the years, by now you'd be mothering a soccer team."

This sex toy is bringing out the old, shy Phume.

"I'd never not fuck you for 6 days, let alone 6 years."

Unnecessary shade!

I thought we weren't supposed to talk or think about Sphakamiso in this room.

"But some people abayazi ingquza," he says pushing my legs open.

He gets on top of me. I hate what he's saying but at the same time it's making me wet.

"Mina ngizok'bhebha Phume, I'm going to fuck you." He's pushing himself inside me.

I'm weak like a light object. He's taking my legs to any direction he wants. I'm wet, more than I imagined. And the funniest part is that he didn't do anything to stimulate me, he just threw shade at my previous relationship and then told me he's going to fuck me, in raw Zulu.

He thrusts in and out a couple of times, then stops and looks at me.

“Uyezwa?” he asks.

My cookie craves for no break. I want him inside me, fast and hard.

“Huh?”

I nod, “Yes.”

“What did I say?”

Mpatho knows that I’m shy, why is he doing this?

I keep my eyes away from him and not respond.

He pushes himself in, slowly, keeping his gaze on my face.

I release a sharp breath as he fills my cookie.

“What did I say I’m going to do to you?”

“Baby please don’t stop,” I beg.

He stops...

“Tell me, what did I say?” The more shy I get is the more uncomfortable he makes it to be, and the more I want him in every corner. For some odd reason the shy Phume likes the dick.

“You said you’re going to fuck me,” I say, my eyes closed.

He moves, I release a moan and dig my fingers into his back.

“What is that mommy?” He’s still at it.

My body is fiercely aching for him.

“It’s putting your dick inside me.” My answers are now quicker, I want no delays.

With every correct answer I get stronger strokes.

“Open up, let me get it in,” he says.

I lift my legs against my shoulders. He rests his chest on top of me and starts moving faster. I fall apart within a minute, I flood his dick crying out his name. My legs are trembling, I love this man, God bless him.

He groans loudly and moves faster, hitting deeper.

2023/02/08, 11:23 - TSI: THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 48

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

He made phone calls, several times. Maybe more than three times, and there was no response from the other side. He was completely ignored, just as always. He wore his dimpled smile, had sex with me and slept next to me, with his arm around me all night. But I knew he was angry and I understood why. I should've said something to make him feel better. And I know I could've stopped him, Bonga listens to me, he trusts my judgment. But I didn't, I let him bottle it up until morning.

When he woke up his eyes were bloodshot, as if he hadn't slept a wink. Killing someone's father is one thing, a punishable crime and sin, but to brush it off like you stepped on an ant and there's no one grieving for the soul you took is what blows my mind away.

Weeks! Bonga has been reaching out for weeks. I advised him to; I said it's better they sit down and talk things out instead of escalating the situation. But no, the murderer doesn't want to meet up, doesn't want to return his calls, or sets a simple date of when they could talk. All he wants to do is finish dinner. And his wife had the audacity to ask for space so that they finish their dinner and address 'the unimportant' issues of a fatherless some other time, when they feel like it.

I had no reason to stand up for them. None, whatsoever.

So I woke up and gave him warm water to bath at 6am. His jacket was folded next to the foot of the bed, on the floor. I knew exactly what he had hidden in there but I kept quiet. He dressed up and left R100 on the table and left. I had to let him go and do what he had to do. I wasn't hired by anyone to protect anyone from anything. I have no such duty.

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"Miyanda are you working or not?" Singh is really annoying today.

Why must I stand when there's no one in the store? I'm tired, I want to go home.

"I'm sick," I tell him.

"Yhini? What's wrong?"

"I have sharp pains in my lungs." I know if I say it's a headache or stomachache his wife will give medication for it and ask that I take a few minutes break.

"Too bad?" He's coming down from the counter.

"Yeah," I fake a groan.

"Let me call Cynthia."

Cynthia comes after a few minutes and asks same questions. Yes, I'm sick, having sharp pains in my lungs.

"Do you want to go home?" she asks.

"Yes," I nod.

"Is your boyfriend going to fetch you?"

"I will take a taxi," I say.

“But you know that today won’t count, right? You’ve been here for only 30 minutes.”

“I know.” And I don’t care.

“Okay go, have a rest and don’t drink alcohol. Too much alcohol does this.” She’s lying unnecessarily. Anyway I didn’t drink, I never drink.

I call Bonga when I sit inside the taxi. His phone takes me straight to voicemail. I start panicking thinking what if he got hurt. I didn’t think of this before, I was clouded by anger. My hands are trembling as I scroll down to Sphakamiso’s number.

“Sis’ Miyanda,” he answers.

“Hey Sphakamiso, sorry to bother you so early in the morning. I’m looking for your brother, has he arrived home?” I ask.

“Not yet but he called saying he’s going to start somewhere,” he says.

“Okay, tell him to call me when he arrives. How is the little one?”

“He’s fine,” he says.

“And Mkhuleko. Are you nice to him?”

He laughs...that’s how he answers.

I rest my case with them.

I’m going to start at the clinic, this might be the only free weekday I get from Singh. I have a strange sexual relationship with Bonga. If I had a young sister I wouldn’t advise her to sleep with a new boyfriend without protection. I don’t know his past relationship history, I don’t know where he’s been. Heck, I don’t even know his medical history. I’m one person who wouldn’t deserve sympathy if I contracted anything or had one

of his sperms growing inside me. Okay, fire to that! Fire, fire, fire.

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The queue isn't that long. I bought a few snacks at the gate to keep my buds company. The closer I get to the front, the more scared I become. What I said fire to the spirit of sexual diseases and pregnancy too late?

I have to text him and set new ground rules;

**FROM NOW ON WE ARE NOT GOING TO HAVE SEX
WITHOUT CONDOM!!!**

I send with three exclamation marks at the end so that when he opens the message he understands the importance of the message. I mean it, I'm going to be responsible for myself.

After every three months I will be here to take my Depo-provera injection. I'd rather sleep on a hungry stomach knowing that I was saving money for my clinic visitation. In fact I should know my nurses by their names since I'm going to be their frequent patient.

"Next!" she yells from the HIV consultation room.

I started here, I prefer bad news first.

HIV department always has nicer employees at the clinics. But not this one, she's chewing gum and glaring at me like I'm a walking virus.

"Hi, I'd like to take HIV test," I say sitting down.

"Why are you checking? Unprotected sex?"

I drop my eyes in shame. "Kind of."

“In this country you are still having unprotected sex? When you get pregnant the government is going to take tax from us and give you child support grant.” Okay, this is a normal government-employee rant. I’ve heard it four thousand times in this life, from different people.

She grabs my hand and presses that thing on my finger. Gentleness is foreign in this office. “Do you know what drives me crazy, huh?”

“I don’t know,” I say wincing in pain.

“That you, people, take that child support grant and buy alcohol for your boyfriends instead of taking care of your children. Then you come to Ladies House asking for donations,” she says.

She’s a mnaax this one, it explains the anger.

I shouldn’t be saying this but...

“You’re not forced to donate, right?”

“Vele, that’s why I don’t bother. People should stop having children they can’t maintain.” So profound!

“If that was way of life how many Africans do you think would exist?” I’m not supporting unwanted pregnancies but this is not a black and white issue.

“I’m not saying people mustn’t reproduce, I’m saying it must be done with limit. It’s us who suffer the most,” she says.

“Your limit is not everyone’s limit. How many lines are there?” I’m dying to know.

She reads the tube and looks at me icily.

“You’re negative, for now. Come back after 6 months, the virus could be hiding.”

You’re negative would’ve been enough and empowering.

I leave the room feeling lighter. If I'm HIV negative, definitely I'm not positive in anything. Kudos to my ancestors!

Before they give me my injection I have to take a pregnancy test. Waste of time, I wish they can just inject me and let me go. This is my day-off, I want to go and rest.

I make that walk of shame with a silver pee container back to the room. This one doesn't look interested in her job. She even uses sign language when passing an instruction. She waits two minutes for the result and then points me with her head to the other side.

"Wait for Sister Grace, she will make a card for you, I'm going to lunch."

"What card? I want an injection." I'm confused.

"Maternity card." She drops the pregnancy test tube in front of me.

I just peed two minutes ago but I feel my bladder burning.

"No, that's not mine." It can't be, she's mad.

"Did you take someone's pee?"

"I don't know, maybe."

"Sisi weh, I need to go to lunch."

"Can I take another one? I need a second opinion."

She claps her hands, "Thobile, come and hear this with me!"

I don't care, they can laugh all they want. I'm taking another container and going to pee again.

"Do you think your father supplies these test kits to us?"

I ignore her and walk away. I'm heading back to the bathrooms.

I manage to pee again. I keep my eyes on the container as I return back to the window. I don't want to have someone or a ghost snatching and replacing my pee.

There's two of them now. Both laughing and scolding me for wasting government resources.

"Is she not pregnant now?" the other one asks.

"I'm not a magician Thobile," she says and looks at me. "You're still pregnant. Would you like me to recommend a private doctor for ultrasound scan?"

Breathe Miyanda!

"I haven't known him for that long," I tell them.

"And you're already pregnant for him? I give up on South African girls!"

"I also give up!" – the Thobile one.

"Do you guys think he's going to be happy?"

They look at me, eyes widen.

"How must we know?" They burst into laughter.

"I don't even think I'm a good mother. What about work? I can't stop, I have an Edgars account and 3 unsettled Rage shoe debts."

The Thobile one is still laughing, the other one looks worried now.

"Should I book you into a counseling session?" she asks.

"Book me a bus home," I say.

That's the only place I can find comfort at. Home, with my father and my mother's spirit.

"Tell your babydaddy to do it," says uThobile ongathobekile.

Babydaddy, I can't even stomach this term.

I'm about to have a babydaddy!

Fuck, Bonga is still out there.

I try his phones, they're both off.

I send a text: DON'T DO ANYTHING STUPID. I'M PREGNANT.

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PHUMELELE

We are at it again, this time I'm at fault.

"This is not how it works. You don't tell me on the day that you're going to Durban."

"But it's something that just came up." I hate lying but I have no choice today. Phumlani is landing at 4:20pm, we have to be there at least two hours early to set up everything.

"So Ntombi didn't know that she needs to buy those blankets all this time?"

I lied, saying I'm going with Ntombi to shop for umemulo.

"I'm coming tomorrow morning, why are you making it sound like I'm going somewhere far away?"

"Is Durban not far?"

"Mpatho..."

"Hamba, it's okay."

Honestly, this is not that deep. I'm only leaving for one day, he's got work to catch up with. His phone has been ringing all morning, he has people to reconnect with.

“We’ll video-call,” I say.

“I said it’s okay, you can go.”

“Beauty is going somewhere too. You will have space to catch up with work.”

He gathers his brows. “Oh, so you both have plans on the same day?”

“It wasn’t a plan. Lighten up, I will bring you something nice. What do you want?” I cup his face and look at his irritated face with a smile.

“Leave me alone,” he says.

I brush my lips against his. There it is, the smile he’s been refusing with.

“I’m just not used to the house without you ever since we all lost important elders of this family, it’s been you and I everyday,” he says.

“I know, we’ve relied on each other so much. Even a night seems like a year, that’s why I was crying when you didn’t spend the night at home. So tonight it’s your turn to hug pillows,” I say.

He chuckles, “Okay this is a revenge. Are you going to be back before I go to work?”

“So early!”

“As a husband, I instruct you to be back before I go to work.”

Not going to work!

“This is not 1966, I have the right to say no.”

“This democracy is...” He doesn’t finish his sentence. Two gunshots are fired shortly after one another. When you hear a gun too close your brain freezes for a second.

He shoves me behind the couch and dashes out. Another one is fired, this time I can tell that it's us being attacked. The window breaks somewhere, then someone screams.

"Mpatho!" I scream.

I don't know why he'd run around the house not knowing who is attacking and where they are. There's a car driving off on a high speed, tyres screeching.

I stand up and look around. There he comes, he's pulling Beauty.

"Both of you in the bathroom," he says.

"They're gone," I say, my whole body is trembling.

"In the bathroom Phume," he says.

We say no more, we rush into the bathroom and close the door.

Beauty is shaking, she can't even open her mouth. She's wrapped in a towel, her hair is wet, she was taking a bath.

Shit, Aunt Nomusa had just arrived.

"Where are you going?" – Beauty.

"Aunt Nomusa was in the kitchen." I'm freaking out because I heard someone screaming shortly after the window shattered.

"So what? There's a killer outside and you want to look for Nomusa!"

"She is..."

She gets up and grabs me by arm and shoves me back inside.

"Why do you want to be the first in a death line? Stupid girl."

Okay, I need to calm down. They've left, everyone is okay.

Just as I take exercise breaths, my name is called.

"Phume!" – it's Mpatho.

I try to go to the door but Beauty holds me back.

“Why are you calling her?” she asks.

“Please come,” his voice gives me no hope.

We step out of the bathroom. He has blood all over his chest and hands.

I panic.

“Are you okay? Did you get shot?”

He says only two words; “Aunt Nomusa.”

We run to the kitchen and find her lying in a pool of blood on the floor.

My knees fail me. “Aunty!”

She needs to wake up. Why is she not moving? She can't leave us too. Not like this. She didn't wrong anyone.

“I'm calling the police,” Beauty says, her voice shaking.

Mpatho kneels next to her, he wants to try again. I think she's dead, not out of oxygen.

Her eyes are open but she's not blinking or moving. Someone has killed our aunt, she wasn't just a house helper, she raised us for almost a decade.

I don't think of anyone who'd want her dead. She died because she was in this house.

“Babe,” I pull his arm.

He needs to stop touching her, the police will be here in no time, hopefully.

“Why didn't he ask me to come out?” He's locking back tears.

This is not on him, whoever did this was a coward who was scared to come inside and chose to fire randomly from the gate. I hope they burn on earth before hell.

“The police will find them, we will make sure of it,” I say.

“Malibongwe did this...”

My eyes pop out.

Malibongwe???

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 49

AT THE VILAKAZIS

Mkhuleko walks in like a criminal who’s being chased by the police. Sweat rolling down his face, eyes all out.

“Did you all hear about the shooting?”

Sphakamiso stands up. “Where?”

“At the Mshazis, the main got killed.”

MaVilakazi is the next one to stand. Her heart is pounding, she wants all the details.

“How is that breaking news? I thought you’d say Mpatho is dead,” Nombuso clicks her tongue and continues with what she was doing.

“Are others okay?” MaVilakazi asks.

“I guess,” Mkhuleko says and looks at Sphakamiso.

“Have you heard from Malibongwe?”

“No, Sis’ Miyanda was asking if he’s arrived about two hours ago.”

MaVilakazi loses it hearing that name in her house. Ever since that Miyanda girl came into Malibongwe’s life he’s turned into

something else. Now she needs to go to the Mshazis and see how everyone is. Hopefully only Nomusa was shot.

There's a car driving in, they're all standing in the middle of the kitchen. When someone gets in the village and shoots someone dead, and not just anyone, but the helper of the most feared and respected family in the village, that means nobody is safe.

It's Malibongwe arriving, when he walks in wearing a black beanie and long coat all eyes turn to him. MaVilakazi's heart sinks when their eyes meet. She's not looking at her son, but at the Miyanda-made-barbaric man.

"Where were you?" she demands to know.

"Did I leave with something?" This is not Malibongwe talking. Not her son.

Nombuso needs to be told about this and go deal with that devilish thirst girl.

"Someone attacked the Mshazis, the maid died," Mkhuleko tells him.

"The maid?" He frowns.

"That aunt who works there, she got the bullet through the kitchen window and died right on the spot. The police are there," – Mkhuleko.

He pulls the chair and sinks down on it. His hands over his face.

Sphakamiso looks at him, his eyes widened.

"Bafo where were you?" He's panicking. Malibongwe's reaction is suspicious.

"Did you attack the Mshazis?" MaVilakazi questions in a roar.

“I shot at the walls. Mpatho has been ignoring me, I want answers from him.” He gets a shoe thrown at his head. MaVilakazi charges towards him but Nombuso quickly jumps in the middle. This is her favorite brother, most of the times.

“Can we have breakfast in peace? We have nothing to do with what happened at the Mshazis,” she says.

“Are you deaf? He just said he’s the one who shot Nomusa. The police are coming here to arrest him, everyone will know it’s him. I told him I was going to sort it out. Why can’t he listen? Angithi yilo Miyanda.”

“Miyanda from the tin room? Ayy Ma, how does she connect to this? Let’s all calm down.”

Mkhuleko clears his throat, “Before I calm down, what is it that you both want to sort out with Mpatho?”

MaVilakazi takes a step back. She’s trying to look at Malibongwe calmly, for peace sake.

“He killed baba,” Malibongwe spills the beans.

The gathered circle scatters.

Nombuso is confused. Mkhuleko is angry. Malibongwe smells blood and is thirst for more. Sphakamiso, under normal circumstances he wouldn’t have cared, but his brothers’ pain is his pain.

“Baba was sick nje,” – Nombuso.

“He was physical tortured by Mpatho. He was never sick and he was never at the hospital. He was somewhere captured and tortured by Mpatho. When he was taken to hospital he was already a dead man,” Malibongwe says.

Nombuso turns and leaves all of them in the kitchen. She gets inside her room and shuts the door and cries.

“See what you’ve done? Everyone had healed and moved on,” MaVilakazi scolds Malibongwe. “I need to go and check the situation.”

“Mah! You knew that baba was killed by a Mshazi and you’re going there to give condolences?” – Mkhuleko.

“He was young, he didn’t know what he was doing.” She ties the apron around her waist and switches off the rice she had put on the stove. Then she walks out, leaving them with bleeding hearts.

“Why is she protecting them?” Sphakamiso asks, he’s confused. Mpatho killed Mcineka, took Phume from him and married her because his father left him a conditional inheritance and then went on to physically attack him. Even on that particular event, their mother took his side all because Phume is his wife, he can do whatever he wants.

Malibongwe looks at them. It’s just the three of them left in the kitchen.

“I didn’t mean to kill a woman. I wanted to send a strong message to Mpatho because he blueticks text messages. All I want to know from him is why he killed Mcineka. Surely there was a reason. Why do I have to lick his balls for answers? I’m not Phume.”

Sphakamiso inhales sharply. That was not necessary, but he understands that Malibongwe is angry and justified to say anything.

“What if you shot her?” he asks, looking at his brother.

“I didn’t think about it. I just want to know what my father did to deserve such inhumanity from Mpatho,” Malibongwe says.

Mkhuleko comes back from the window with his hands on the waist.

“Can we go there again?”

They both say, “No!”

“Okay, the police. Later?”

“Madoda, Phume is there, we can’t...”

“She’s married to him,” Malibongwe gives him a reminder.

“Phume doesn’t even think about you. She’s riding his dick and dining with him, the same man who killed your father.”

“My father?” – Sphakamiso.

“You can dismiss yourself if that’s the narrative you want to play on. I, personally, won’t let my father’s death go in vain because Mpatho is married to a girl you love. He owes me answers and I won’t rest, I won’t back down until he gives them to me.”

“I’m with you,” Mkhuleko says.

Sphakamiso releases a heavy sigh.

“I will check on Nombuso. It’s time you give me back my gun.”

He’s going to stand and fight with his brothers, it’s for them, not Mcineka.

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PHUMELELE

The two vans drive off. Everything has cleared. My heart is heavy, hearing her children crying like that knowing very well that Aunt Nomusa took Mpatho’s bullet broke me. Not that I would’ve preferred for him to die instead, I just wish this could’ve been resolved in a better way. I’m even regretting the dinner exchange we had last night with Malibongwe and his girlfriend. I feel like it fueled everything. Maybe his girlfriend advised him to come and attack. I don’t know what to think.

But all that can wait, I have a problem with Mpatho.

“I’m going to pack,” Beauty says and goes to her room.

I’m not sure continuing with our plans is a good idea for now. We can cancel Phumlani’s flight and reschedule. But we will talk about that in a minute.

Right now I need to address Mpatho.

“Why did you say you don’t know anyone who’d want to attack us?” .

“What did you want me to say?” he asks.

This got to be a joke to him!

“Seriously? You know that Malibongwe wants you dead. You could’ve presented his texts and call logs as proof of harassment and threatening. Aunt Nomusa deserves justice,” I say.

“I know but it’s not easy as you say.”

“What’s hard? Malibongwe will kill you at the first chance he gets.”

He grabs a bottle of whisky and pours a shot. I know he’s stressed, but brains need to be used. If he doubted Malibongwe before today, surely now he’s realized how angry he is. Next time he comes here he will kill everything he finds on the yard.

“You need to take action, fast,” I say.

“We’ll get 24/7 security protection.”

“Is that all?” I’m in disbelief.

“Phume, he’s angry at me for a reason. I will meet with his mother and tell her things are getting out of hand. I still think there’s a chance for us to settle it out without blood.”

No ways, this person’s mother dropped him by head at birth.

“What kind of blood? Blood has already been spilled. The security guard during the robbery, now Aunt Nomusa. Do you think Malibongwe is going to stop because you talked to his mother?” I’m angry, I don’t understand why he’s so soft, Malibongwe doesn’t give a damn about him, he will blow out his brains at any chance he gets.

“I don’t want anything bad to happen to him. Does that make me an idiot? Maybe. But I believe there’s a way to heal him.”

I married a healer, just found out now.

“Malibongwe cares only about his family, not you. I want you to sit down and think about Aunt Nomusa’s children, no amount of money is going to compensate them for losing their mother. Two employees have died while working in our property. You know the killer and you keep treating the situation like he’s a harmless child. Business-wise and generally, this doesn’t put us in a good spot.” I walk away, leaving him to his insanity. I hate that I feel like he’s choosing Malibongwe over Aunt Nomusa, someone who contributed so much into this family.

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PHUMELELE

Beauty is going ahead with the plans. She says she can pull it off alone. I’m not comfortable but there’s nothing I can do. I can’t leave Mpatho alone after what happened. He’s stubborn but I need to be here to give him emotional support. He blames himself for Aunt Nomusa’s death and he can’t give her justice. I’m angry but he’s my husband, I have to support his stupid decisions.

I leave Beauty dressing up and go the kitchen. Our neighbor came to clean for us, but I doubt this kitchen will ever look and feel the same. I don't even want to imagine having a new helper. There are lot of things happening in this house, we were comfortable with Aunt Nomusa because she was like a family to us. Now we have to get ready for a complete stranger. Before we get her, Beauty and I have to split the house chores. So far the only thing I know how to do is wash dishes, cook messy Google meals that never taste good, and taking out Mpatho's outfits in the morning. Tomorrow I will have to plug the iron and do the ironing, breakfast and all.

Mpatho is chatting with someone outside. Beauty is leaving her house with broken windows. I think we need to put one house off bookings and move there until everything has been fixed and the house has been cleansed.

I peep out to see who is the guest. And guess what, MaVilakazi!

I'm not sure whether she's here to see the damage her son caused or to cover up for him. I remain in the kitchen, trying to remember all the good memories I had with Aunt Nomusa. All our moments were good, I don't remember her hating on anyone or coming with a bad energy.

Mpatho walks in, followed by MaVilakazi. It looks like he's showing her where the bullets entered.

"Makoti," she says to me.

"Yebo," I say.

I don't know what she's up to, I don't trust her.

I remove myself and leave them talking.

I go back to Beauty. I think she just doesn't want to cancel a dick, not that it's too inconvenient to cancel, for both parts.

"You look beautiful," I compliment. She's all dressed up for someone's man.

"I always look beautiful. Is it your mother-in-law talking?"

I'm the only girl in the world who gets reminded of her ex everytime she breathes.

"It's MaVilakazi," I say.

"What is she here for? Go and make her food, I'm sure she's hungry like her daughter who came here under the anger disguise, only to steal my wines," she says.

"I don't care about them. I just want you to be safe. Also use protection, you don't know how he lives his life," I say.

"What type of protection do you use?" she asks.

"Ummmm, it doesn't matter, I'm married. Please keep me on the loop about everything."

She sighs, "You've told me ten times already."

"I'm just worried. Let me help you with the bags." I just don't want to be anywhere near Mpatho and his favorite village woman.

Beauty doesn't even bother to greet. We go outside to the car and pack her bags inside.

One last time, I have to remind her...

"Please make sure you call me," I say.

"Gosh, what do you think Phumlani, a taxi driver, could possible suspect. Taxi drivers like ass, now imagine mine!"

Nothing special about hers.

“I’m the closest thing he’d ever have to Kim Kardashian. I don’t want to raise any suspicions, so I won’t bring up any Mpatho’s mom issue.”

“Okay, when do we blackmail him with videos then?” I ask.

“Once I’m back home safely and sexually satisfied,” she says.

I roll my eyes. I can’t believe I do this, but I’m hugging her.

“I owe you one,” I say.

“One???”

Lifetime debt this one.

She gets in the car and drives off.

“Makoti,”

My heart almost jump out of my throat.

Why is she standing behind me? For how long?

“I heard you talking about Phumlani and Mpatho’s mother.” She’s saying it with a smile on her face. She was fuckin’ eavesdropping.

“Nothing,” I say.

“Oh, I was just out here looking at the damage. I will go and say goodbye to Mpatho.”

Wait, she needs to shut her mouth.

“Whatever you heard, don’t say it to anyone,” I say.

“About Phumlani?” she asks.

She knows very well that’s what I’m talking about.

“He’s just a guy who is helping us trace Mpatho’s mother. I don’t want him to stress about it, so don’t say anything to him,” I say.

“Oh....okay,” she keeps her eyes on me but she looks lost in her own mind.

Mpatho walks out of the door, staring at his phone.

“MaVilakazi was just coming to say goodbye,” I say.

She blinks rapidly and turns her eyes to him.

“Ma,” he says to her, looking disturbed.

“Your youngest son just texted me. I don’t know what’s going to happen, please talk to them,” he says.

He’s being threatened, now by all of them.

“They’re ganging up on you?” – MaVilakazi.

“We’ll go somewhere for today, then we can have the meeting,” he says.

Fuck no, he’s being so soft on these people.

“Aunt Nomusa is dead,” I remind him with a hot glare.

“We will talk,” he pulls me into a hug.

“Don’t worry, they’re not going to do anything,” MaVilakazi says. I don’t know why she sounds so sure. She made promises the last time she was here but today Aunt Nomusa died.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 50

AT THE MCINEKAS

MaVilakazi gathers all her children at the table. She’s unreasonably angrier than them. Mostly at Malibongwe

because he started this whole thing and even got her youngest son texting and threatening people.

“Do you know that I can personally send you to jail?” She’s glaring at him.

Nombuso seems shocked more than anyone. They’d do anything to each other; insult from Monday to Friday and drag each other with most painful parts of their lives. But they’d never choose an outsider over each other.

“What makes you think I’m scared of jail?” Malibongwe is not bothered.

MaVilakazi claps her hands and mumbles for the intervention of her own ancestors. This here is a trap from the devil. The devil is using this child and that devil has a name.

“You know that Miyanda will not turn into your mother even if I die. You only have one mother and that’s me. She will never be anything other than a girlfriend yasemjondolo. She will never enter these premises while I’m still alive.”

Sphakamiso snaps his eyebrows in confusion. “What did Sis’ Miyanda do now?”

“She didn’t do anything, she’s just being used as a distraction, don’t entertain this.” Mkhuleko says patting Sphakamiso’s shoulder. MaVilakazi gets more angrier. This is a gang-up now.

“Tomorrow we will have a meeting. You, Mpatho and I. I don’t want this to get out of hand,” she says to Malibongwe.

“There’s no exclusive meeting that’s going to happen,” Nombuso says.

All eyes turn to her. As expected, she’s hurt the most about the truth of what happened to their father.

“You’re his messenger, right?”

MaVilakazi inhales a heavy breath.

“Go and tell him that he has 4 hours to come here and explain himself. I don’t care how young he was, if he was strong enough to torture and kill my father, he must be brave enough to come and tell us why,” Nombuso.

She turns to her brothers. “If he disregards this last request, you’re all permitted to go there and kill everything. Dog, cat, legacy wife and slayqueen grandmother.”

“Nombuso what’s wrong with you? You’re old, you’ve been married and divorced, you’re supposed to be mature enough to know what’s going to put your brothers in trouble, not only with the police but the community at large.”

“Community? Between my brothers and that Mpatho of yours who do you think this community will fight for? Does he have friends in this village? Does he hand out with anyone or he only drives that big car of his with tinted windows and only hoots at the villagers from inside?”

MaVilakazi’s chest moves up and down. A thick drop of sweat runs down her spine.

“You can’t gang up on him. He didn’t do it on his own. He was young and forced to do it. His stepmother was evil,” she says in a pleading voice.

“Stop defending him. He must come here and say that to us. Is he your ben10?” Malibongwe asks, irritated.

“I’m starting to think so. Maybe that’s why he killed our father, he wanted to be alone in his sugarmama,” Nombuso says.

“Don’t you dare insult me you two!”

“It’s not like you have a history of being faithful,” Nombuso says.

MaVilakazi blinks rapidly, in disbelief. This one cannot speak on unfaithfulness.

“At least I was never divorced. I’m still in my marital house. You’re here poking your nose into everyone’s business because you failed to keep your legs closed and...”

Sphakamiso bangs his hand on the table. “Don’t go there. This is not about marriages but congratulations for not getting divorced.”

She keeps quiet when it’s him speaking.

Mkhuleko shakes his head in defeat. This family needs a face-to-face conversation with God, prayers ain’t working.

“4 hours. Is that what everyone agrees on?” Sphakamiso looks at his siblings.

“Yeah, 4 hours is enough for him to take a bubble bath and eat his pasta and get in his suit and come here,” Mkhuleko says.

MaVilakazi clears her throat and asks in a shaky voice; “What if he doesn’t come? You’re all angry, he’s left alone in this, anyone would be hesitant.”

“Then you will have a few minutes to kiss your ben10 goodbye,” Malibongwe says.

She feels every part of her body itching. “Stop insulting me wena! He’s not my ben10.”

“He is. You came here blushing the other day,” Nombuso says.

It’s a tense family meeting but...

Mkhuleko fails to hold himself and laughs.

“Why are you laughing? You might be his son, we are a garden of mixed veges here.”

MaVilakazi’s lips tremble, she’s on the verge of tears. They’ve lost all respect in her, even Nombuso.

“That’s your brother,” she says, in a second of high emotions.

Nombuso breaks a loud fake laugh. “Whose brother? Please, run back to his mansion and pass the message.”

“Mpatho is your brother,” MaVilakazi says.

The verbal exchange drops to a dead silence.

They’re looking at her. All of them confused.

“He is Nkosiyazi,” she says and pulls a chair and sits.

They don’t respond. She’s trying to calm down and breathe properly.

“This is complicated than you all think. He’s also a victim in this. They knew I wouldn’t fight back if my son did it, so they made him do it, he didn’t know who I was. He still doesn’t know,” she says.

“Ma you’re not joking?”- Sphakamiso.

“No, I’m not joking. He’s the son I told you all about. I couldn’t have a relationship with him, I wasn’t allowed to. I had to watch him growing from a distance. There was no communication, I was cut off from everything. Stop this for my sake, my heart cannot take any more pain.”

Mkhuleko shakes his head and inhales deeply.

“Why are you only telling us now? I asked you about the umbilical cords and you denied the fifth one. This could’ve been stopped then. How do you expect us now to just accept that he’s our brother and forget that he’s our father’s killer too? You can’t reverse pain.”

“I’m just asking that you all calm down and give him time to emotionally prepare for the meeting,” she says.

Mkhuleko shakes his head again, then he looks at Malibongwe.

“Bhuti, what do you say?” he asks.

Malibongwe pushes back his chair and stands up.

“Don’t leave please,” Mkhuleko begs.

“Why must I sit and listen to her? Nothing is going to change everything that has happened. I’m not even sure if my name is Malibongwe anymore. There’s one thing after another.” He looks at his mother and shakes his head. “Your son killed your husband, our father. Now we want to kill your son, our brother. And in all of that you only care about yourself. ‘Your heart can’t take anymore pain’. How about your own children that you’ve hurt? Sphakamiso, not only did you let his father die without having a relationship with him. Now we have to go and shine teeth with a brother who married his girlfriend. Him too, he’s just a hill away from you and doesn’t know that you’re his mother. What kind of evilness is that?”

“It’s not easy as you think. I never wanted to hurt anyone. I gave him to his family because I had no other choice, he was going to have a better life there and I...” Malibongwe walks out while she’s still talking.

Sphakamiso stands up and walks out too.

“So we have a rich brother?” Nombuso says, talking to herself in disbelief as she dismisses herself as well. Obviously there’s no longer a war, at least not a physical one. But there’s still a long way to go. The emotional damage done is bigger than the situation itself.

Mkhuleko is the last one sitting, he leans his head back on the chair and releases a long sigh.

“Let them digest this, don’t rush any meetings while emotions are still so high. He is not the Nkosiyazi we ordered,” he says.

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PHUMELELE

We left Nkomazi, I thought I'd sleep like a baby here. But I'm awake, I've been up since 2am. I can't get hold of Beauty. She last texted me at 7pm yesterday and said they're together and everything is according to plan. We had an agreement; she was supposed to keep me updated.

Her phone is off, I'm freaking out.

I sneak out of bed, it's almost 5am. I need a drink. We have a juice that we bought on our way here and leftovers. I take two pieces of meat and pour half a glass of juice and sit in the small lounge. I try Beauty again, nothing still.

I don't know this Phumlani person, I have a lot on my mind. I will never forgive myself if anything happened to her. My phone rings.

It's not a number I recognize. I answer quickly thinking it's her.

But it's Sphakamiso's voice I hear. This is what going to cause morning havoc in this house.

"Hello," I'm keeping my voice low.

"I'd like to see you before I leave."

Not this again! He almost died the last time we met up.

"I can't. Where are you going?"

"I don't know, but it's somewhere distant, where I can't see my blood brother living his best life with a woman who was meant to be mine," he says.

"What do you mean?" I'm confused.

"Your brother is my brother too."

I'm more confused. What is he talking about?

"Sphakamiso are you asleep?" Maybe he's dreaming.

“I’m awake, I haven’t slept all night. My mother is your brother’s mother who gave him up after birth to continue with her marriage plans with Mcineka. I can no longer be in this place, there’s nothing for me in it. I would’ve loved to see you before I leave.”

“I’m not around, good luck on everything.” My hand is trembling, I end the call and control my breath. This cannot be true. Mpatho’s mother cannot be one hill away. We’ve been to Swaziland looking for her. He’s written letters instead of taking a short drive to her and having a heart to heart conversation.

“Hey, I’m looking for you,” his voice says coming in.

I look at him, my eyes bulging out.

“Are you okay?” He lowers himself next to me and exhales heavily.

“I know you were close to her. I wish I can do the right thing and get her justice. But I wouldn’t want to see Malibongwe go to jail. He has a girlfriend, they seemed to like each other. I’ve fucked up too in my life, I cannot advocate for justice, not after everything I’ve done to get where I am. I don’t know how old I am to him, but I just see him as a young guy who’s dealt with a lot after his father’s death.” He’s got a soft spot for them and now I know why.

How do I drop this kind of bombshell to him? I think this will be more heartbreaking than finding out that Ncedziwe was not his mother. MaVilakazi knows that we are looking for her. What kind of a person is she?

“If it wasn’t for Beauty none of this would’ve happened. I’m not saying I was right to kill their father but there was no need for her to tell him. Nobody has clean hands in this family. I can return the favor because she’s done things to eliminate girls from mkhulu. But I’m not a pussy, I will deal with her and...”

Oh, snaaaaap!

“We need to find her,” I say.

“Find her for what?” he frowns.

“I can’t get hold of her. I don’t know if Phumlani has caught up on her play or...”

“Phumlani? How does he come into her trip?”

Oh Phume, this is not going to be your day.

I take a deep breath and look at him. God be with me on this one.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 51

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I sent the message yesterday and it ticked delivered in the evening around 9pm. I expected a call after he read it, but none came. I’ve been praying ever as since I saw the news. As heartless as it may sound, I prayed for him not to go to jail. I don’t know what I’d do if he left me while carrying a baby. It still feels surreal to even think that I’m carrying something that’s going to grow into a human being and depend on me for the rest of its life. I’m grown, almost 30, but because I don’t have financial stability to raise a baby alone would be a nightmare. I don’t even have a mother, some girls have it easy with their mother’s support. Mine won’t have a grandmother and a father.

It’s 5am, I’m awake and running a race of thoughts. In an hour I have to get up and ready myself for work. I’m not in the mood, I feel like the only place I need to be at right now is home.

There’s a soft knock at the door.

Who is it so early in the morning?

“Who is it?” I ask in a deep voice.

“Babe,” he says.

He knows that I was about to pick a weapon and charge towards the door if he didn't reveal himself. I'm both relieved and angry at the same time. I get up and open the door. He has this tendency of being in unknown places at night and showing up here looking like a mess. I guess this time he was running away from the police. Even though the online statement said the killer was unknown and being looked for, I know the Mshazis will put two and two together soon.

“Where are you coming from?” I ask, watching him take his boots and coat off.

“I was somewhere safe and legal. I'm sorry for waking you up. Is it safe to come closer?”

“If it's not safe then stand there,” I pull up the duvet and rest down on the pillow.

“I got your message. I didn't do anything stupid,” he says, still standing by the door.

I'm not stupid, I have access to the internet, I saw the news. The Mshazi maid was shot dead yesterday morning by someone who drove past the gate and started firing at their house.

“Didn't you kill a woman yesterday?” I sit up again. I don't think I will shout well while lying down.

I can't even believe I'm doing this. I'm looking at the murderer in the eyes, ready to welcome him to my bed.

“Can we talk?” he asks.

“What is it that I'm doing? Am I not talking?”

“Miyanda, I made a mistake. I feel horrible about it. Getting there my aim wasn’t to shoot and kill anyone. If I did I would’ve waited for Mpatho to come out. I only wanted him to realize that I can do something, I just didn’t want to because I wanted answers from him.”

“Is he going to give them to you now that you’ve killed his maid?”

“It’s up to him and his mother,” he says.

I’m not sure what he means by this.

“I’m disappointed in you. And more than anything I feel horrible because I could’ve stopped you. I’m less of an emotional thinker than you are, but yesterday I allowed my emotions to cloud me. She shouldn’t have died, that’s something I’m going to carry with me for the rest of my life. At least you will go to jail and have free accommodation and food. I will be left here with a baby struggling financially and emotionally. I never thought I’d regret taking that lift from a Tazz so soon.” The last part of my statement is untrue. I hate what he did but...I haven’t fallen out of love.

He’s hurt by it, which was my intention.

“I’m not leaving you, I’m not going anywhere,” he says, he’s so sure of himself.

“Is it because you’re friends with the police?” My question makes me realize how much I don’t know about the person I got pregnant for. I already have a thug in my life, he’s blood, I cannot do anything about it. But choosing another one and sharing a child with is something else. I’m not wise as I think I am.

“No, I’m going to stick around for my child...and you,” he says.

“Are you happy about becoming a father while you’re in the middle of all this?”

“It was supposed to happen. I need a reason to live now more than ever. Sphakamiso said he’s leaving, there’s nothing I can do to stop him. Mkhuleko is going to leave too, we just don’t know when.” He loses himself in his thoughts for a few seconds then looks at me. “If I’m having a boy he’s going to be a brother I never had but lost, his name will be Nkosiyazi.”

Okay, speed kills. Are we naming the baby already?

“That’s not a modern name, I don’t like it,” I say.

“It means something to me. Can I sit?” He’s been on his feet all this while.

“Sit,” I say.

He does more than sit, he pulls the duvet and gets under with me.

“I have a few millions, we need to plan for our future.”

“A few millions of what?” I ask.

“Rands,” he says.

I almost faint. In my life I’ve never said the word ‘million’ next to ‘Rands’ and ‘I have’.

“You have so much money and you’re sitting here?” I mean, I’d be somewhere in an island watching South Africa from TV.

“Where did you get it?” I ask.

“I got illegally, but...”

Oh Jesu! Why bring a premium version of Njabulo to my life? I know I’ve said I’m tired of being poor many times in my prayers, but I was just asking for a Lottery win or an honest-living blesser.

“It was someone else’s plan that went wrong and benefited me. I want to take care of my family, even though that’s not easy. I wanted to start a business with my brothers, my sister would be

a nightmare to work with anywhere, she's okay sitting at home doing nothing. But with Sphakamiso leaving, I feel like I will need you to step in and help me," he says.

"Is my millionaire boyfriend offering me a job?" I ask.

"Yes, help me start a business. We are about to have a baby, things have to change. We need a house, I need to pay for the damages, and make financial plans for the baby. Sphakamiso will need financial support on his journey, Mkhuleko has a secret girlfriend, my sister will behave better if she has better living standards." He loves his siblings, that's something no number of fights can break, he's all about them.

"And your mother?" I ask.

"She has her son," he says.

Owkayyy. It's his mother this time.

Does it ever end in that family? I'm talking about drama.

"I have to plug water, time is flying," I say getting out of bed.

"You don't have to go to work for those Indians again."

He mustn't make me laugh. I haven't seen the millions he's talking about. Why would I quit my job over a hearsay?

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PHUMELELE

I've seen him angry, but not like this. He's been talking to me like a rebellious child while getting dressed. I'm in no position to defend myself, but just like any other woman I can't shut up.

“Blackmailing people with a sextape?” He shakes his head, fastening his belt. He’s more angry at the partner I chose to do this with because he thinks Beauty put ideas in my head. She did, but I had the deciding power, I came up with the whole thing.

“You watch Zee World too much. Phumlani is a taxi driver, he’s not going to be blackmailed by a widow slayqueen and immature princess.” Shots keep getting fired. I’m starting to think he’s saying everything that was on his chest. Like I’m immature, really now?

“We will come back with her if she’s not dead,” he’s not that bothered about Beauty. The only reason he’s going there with me is because I’m crying, I don’t want Beauty to die because of me. I’m simultaneously crying because of the truth I just discovered. He’s going to be hurt, I don’t know how I’m going to tell him.

“You’re quiet now, plotting more stupid plans,” he says.

If I talk, he gets more angrier. Now I’m quiet, he says I’m plotting more stupid plans.

“Just...I beg of you, let go of my mother’s issue. If she wanted me to find her she wouldn’t have allowed Ncedziwe to be in the picture. I’m no longer interested. Stop wasting your time on nothing,” he says.

I wasn’t even thinking about that. I’m not plotting anything at the moment.

“Okay, but that doesn’t mean I will...” No, I probably shouldn’t say this, the timing will be wrong. We will discuss the child matter some other day. I’m not ready, I think he should attend therapy to get over his mother, having a child won’t make the pain go away.

“I’m listening,” he narrows his eye. He’s standing in his fitted jeans and black turtle-neck T-shirt with long sleeves hugging his muscles.

“You look too good for someone who’s going on a mission to rescue his step grandmother,” I say.

“Phume...”

“Turn around, let me see from the back.”

He exhales loudly, then shakes his head with a resisting grin on his face. “I’m serious here, I have bigger things to worry about. I have Malibongwe on my back, I don’t know what he has planned where he is. We are literally in hiding here. Don’t cause more enemies for me, please.”

Malibongwe is your brother, I don’t know what he’s doing where he is, but I know that Sphakamiso is leaving the village because of the news. I’m not sure if any of them still want to kill him or do whatever interrogation they needed him for. The situation has become more complicated.

“Can I ask you a question?” I ask as we head out to the car.

“Ask,” he says.

“I get that you’re no longer interested in finding your mother. But if the information about her is discovered, would you want to know her?”

“No,” he says.

It’s anger talking, not him.

“If she has kids I’d want to have a relationship with them. I’ve never had a sibling in my life, neither did I have a mother. But that one is clear, she never wanted me to know her.”

“You never had a sibling?” I mean, we all know the truth.

“You never were a sibling to me. Sit at the back.”

At the back? This is my husband's car, the front seat is legally for me.

"I don't want to sit at the back," I say.

He gives me a look. "So you want to die with me if Malibongwe appears somewhere and blocks this car with bullets?"

"I don't think he will," I say, stubbornly getting at the front.

Malibongwe loves his siblings, I don't think he will love him but I doubt he will kill him either. He's their big brother, that's what he doesn't know. MaVilakazi and I will have a conversation. I need to ask for her number from Sphakamiso. I need her to clarify some things to me before I talk to Mpatho. She told him not to look for her, that he was better without her. I want to know why she doesn't want him to know that she's his mother. Is it the shame that she got him from another man? If so, why didn't the same apply to Sphakamiso? She raised Sphakamiso with Mcineka. Why was Mpatho the only one given up?

He's driving slower than I'd like him to. He's not treating this urgent situation with any importance. I thought he'd call his people as well, surely he has some people in here who would've gotten here first. Beauty's phone is off....no, it's now on.

My heart almost beats out of my chest, I put the call on loudspeaker.

"It's going through now," I tell Mpatho.

"What? We are already here, I wasted my petrol."

Too soon. She's not answering it.

I have a little hope that she's still alive. I just don't understand why she's not answering the phone.

We have arrived at our destination. I match the building with the pictures on the website.

“I think this is the place. But the gate is locked. How are we going to get in. I don’t even have the contacts of the agent guy.” This is another dilemma. We are here but we can’t get in without the gate keys.

“Try Phumlani’s phone,” I tell him.

He blows out a sigh. “This is making me angry. Even coming here with the possibility of seeing his face, I don’t know if I will be able to control myself. This is a man that’s been making a fool out of me for years. I wanted to let it go.”

“Please make a call,” I beg.

He touches the call button. His rings as well.

I pray he answers, that’s if he hasn’t done anything to Beauty.

“Mshaz’ omncane,” Phumlani answers.

My eyes almost pop out. I’ve never heard his voice, this is my first time. He sounds like a mature man, that ‘mnumzane voice’.

“I’m outside, open the gate,” Mpatho says.

“I’m not following. You’re outside my house? I didn’t know that you’re in Joburg. Why didn’t you...”

“Phumlani you’re in Durban with my grandmother, I’m outside the BnB you are in, I want to get in,” he’s not trying to be nice.

If this man has done something to Beauty he’s definitely not opening the gate.

I look at him as he stares at the screen of his phone.

“He dropped me,” he says and tightens his jaw.

My phone rings, it’s Beauty.

These people are together.

“Hey gogo’tshitshi,” I’m mad at her.

“Don’t call me that. What is Mpatho doing outside?”

“I’m here too. Are you okay? Why was your phone off the whole night?”

“You’re a stupid girl. Go away, both of you. I’m in the middle of something.”

Is she being serious right now?

“Beauty open the gate,” Mpatho says over me.

I hear her cursing before dropping the call.

A few minutes later the gate opens, she stands with fluffy gown and her arms crossed over her chest. She doesn’t look happy at all.

I climb out of the car and walk up to her.

“You had me worried all night. What’s up?” I ask.

“I was going to let you know if anything was happening. What did you tell Mpatho?”

“The truth,” I say.

“That I’m having a recorded sex with a taxi driver?”

“Yes,” I say.

“You’re a stupid girl. This is going to be a big deal now. I had everything under control, you just ruined everything. I was so close to the truth.”

Mpatho walks up to us, looking annoyed, like he’s been all morning.

“Where is he?” he asks.

“Inside. We are busy, you can’t go in.”

Obviously, he's not going to take her instructions. He leaves us standing outside the door and walks in. Beauty looks uncomfortable and freaked out. Now I'm wondering what they were up to.

"I should've known you were going to pull this stunt." She still doesn't get why we are here. How her switching off her phone caused me panic.

"If we knew we were going to pull this whole mission off. It was a waste of time, I already know who his mother is," I say.

She stops with her hand on the door handle and glares back at me.

"What do you mean?" she asks.

"I just found out this morning, I haven't told him, I don't know how to. It's someone we know, she's so close to..."

"I don't care about who she is. You got me fucked for nothing." Hhayi-bo, doesn't she listen when someone talk?

"I found out this morning," I repeat.

She clicks her tongue and walks in, closing the door before I walk in.

I blow out a sigh and open the door myself.

Guess what I walk into? A Valentine's day scenario. Flower petals all over the floor. Half bottle of champagne. Boxes of pizza. Gift bags. Paused porn movie on the screen.

I'm in shock. This Phumlani didn't hesitate to cheat on his wife with a former friend's widow.

I don't see him and Mpatho, but I hear voices coming from the bedroom. I think Mpatho has his anger under control.

"This wasn't part of the plan. How much did you spend on him?" I ask.

“I don’t have financial problems. My problem is you, you’ve embarrassed me. You know how Mpatho is, this might reach to Mvimbo’s ugly cousins who hate me,” she says.

We hear commotion from the bedroom. Their voices were kept low all this time, now curses are loudly exchanged. I thought Mpatho was calm.

We rush there, me to my husband. Beauty to her one-nightstand.

He’s pressed against the wall, Mpatho has his arm pressed against his neck.

“Mpatho please don’t do this,” I pull him away.

He’s heavy, but feeling my hands makes him let go.

“You set me up!” Phumlani says to Beauty.

He’s not big as I thought. He’s short, slim and looks less intimidating than I thought. He’s those type of drivers you make play music of your choice in the taxi.

“I swear I had no idea this was going to happen,” Beauty says, going to him and fixing his T-shirt. Why does it look like she suddenly cares about this man? He’s an enemy. An enemy of your step-grandchild is your enemy.

“Beauty we are leaving,” Mpatho says.

She looks at him, her eyes filled up with anger.

“I didn’t come with you here. Phumlani and I....”

“There’s no Phumlani and you. You’re a widow, my grandfather’s widow, you’re not even cleansed yet but you’re here with people’s husbands splashing his money on them. Trust me, you will mourn twice,” he says.

Mourn twice? I’m not the only one freaked out by that, Phumlani too.

“I want my letters and all the money I paid you,” Mpatho says to him.

He keeps quiet.

“Give me a date,” – Mpatho.

“Give me two weeks, I will get them back and raise the money.”

He doesn't ask who she is and why she doesn't want him. Phumlani has the answers but he's no longer bothered. I'm getting worried, it feels like my own marriage is going to be shaken by this.

Beauty is coming with us. I'm helping her pack, Phumlani will get himself to the airport, luckily his ticket was already booked. Hopefully he has enough to Uber himself out of here.

“You know that nothing was going to happen moving forward, right?” I ask her.

“He's good in bed, do you know how long it's been since I last had a man taking care of me like he did last night. You've ruined my day, in fact my whole month, with your stupidity!”

I ignore her dramatic outburst. Last time she said her boyfriend, Senzo, was good in bed, now it's been a long time since she had good sex. Everytime a different penis enters her it's good sex to her.

“You said you were close to the truth. What did you find?” I ask.

“He said his wife got a job because of the deal he made with Mshazi and complimented that he was a man of his word,” she says.

I don't see how that is being close to the truth, but whatever makes her feel Greekish.

“So who is she?” she asks.

I don't trust Beauty to that extent. If I tell her she will go straight to MaVilakazi and blackmails

her before I get to her.

"You will know soon," I say.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 52

PHUMELELE

Phumlani is hiding in the bathroom now, Beauty says her goodbyes outside the door, Mpatho looks irritated.

"Hey asambe," he snaps, impatiently.

We follow him to out. Beauty will drive alone, hopefully she doesn't make a U-turn along the way and come back.

"Don't tell him before I arrive, I want to know too," she says.

I feel my heart almost sinking down to my feet.

Mpatho is looking at me. "What are you going to tell me?"

"Beauty can you get in the car and drive out," I'm so fed up. Beauty will consistently prove her untrustworthy to me but somehow I always find my way back to her. I need to find a way to tell Mpatho the truth because if she says something to him before I do, it will make me look bad.

"You have secrets now," he says adjusting the rear-view mirror. He's not taking it bad as I thought.

"No, I just...Beauty is the only woman I'm with in the house, I can't talk to you about everything," I say.

"Do you need a sisterwife?" He's asking me bullshit.

I didn't say I'm desperate for a second woman in my marriage but he can go ahead, let's see how that works out for him.

“You can get me one,” I say.

“I’m sure one day would be enough for her to pack her bags and leave. Let alone if Beauty is still around, you two are a headache.”

“We’d be nice to her, don’t worry,” I say.

He chuckles, “No, thank you for your kindness, I will pass.”

Of course I’d make a bad first wife.

We grab breakfast on our way back; we make a stop at Tashas, Getaway Centre. I don’t want anything light, I want something meaty and filling. He’s looking at me as I give my order, he’s only having an omelette and a cup of cappuccino.

My phone rings, I don’t know the number. My first instinct tells me not to answer, it could be Sphakamiso with a different number.

“Is your phone not ringing?” Mpatho asks.

I don’t want to look secretive, he already thinks I’m a mastermind plot-strategist of stupid plans.

I take a deep breath and answer it.

“Hello,” I say, holding a silent prayer that the person who speaks from the other side is not a man.

“Makoti, it’s MaVilakazi.”

Say what now!

“Oh hello,” I’m confused.

Where did she get my number?

Ok, maybe from one of her sons.

But why is she calling me?

“I’d like to see you and talk,” she says.

“I’d like to see you too. We will be home this afternoon, it would be great if you come and see me.” I’m not sure how this is going to go. MaVilakazi didn’t like my mother, now for obvious reasons. Her calling me makoti might not sit well with Sphakamiso. She wasn’t warm to me when I was his girlfriend, I’m not looking forward being her favorite daughter-in-law now that I’m with Mpatho. Phewww, I don’t see this working out at all. Mpatho will have siblings who hate him and they’re the ones he wanted to have a relationship with, not knowing who they are.

“Are you okay?” he asks me.

“Yeah,” I nod with a shallow sigh.

“Who were you talking to?”

“MaVilakazi, she wants to talk to me.”

“She’s trying her best, I hope this passes soon, I don’t want Malibongwe and I to drive her to depression.” He cares about MaVilakazi because he thinks she’s just a village woman who’s nice to him for no reason. I don’t think he will feel the same after he finds out that the reason she didn’t fight for her husband’s death is because he’s her son.

“When am I going to talk to you?” he asks.

“About?” I’m confused.

“You know the conversation you and I need to have,” he says.

The food is here, we can forget about our problems for a minute and just enjoy the food.

Well, I wish we can.

“Where are you with the conversation with your aunt?” he asks.

“I haven’t talked to her in a while. But I will have everything done at my grandmother’s house, with her in charge,” I say.

“I think in 5 months we can be having our wedding ceremony and a little bun in the oven.” He’s really taking the conversation there in the middle of breakfast, in a public restaurant.

“Or in a year, there’s a lot of issues for us to work through,” I say.

“How does having a baby stop people from working through their issues?”

“Can we do this at home?” I don’t want to be that woman who shouts at her husband in restaurants.

“We can do it,” he says, sliding his thumb between his two fingers.

“I’m talking about the conversation, not the...not that,” I say.

The idiot chuckles. “You’re a weird human being. You’re uncomfortable talking about something you enjoy so much and even speak tongues in the middle of it.”

I look around, what if people are hearing him? Married or not, I don’t want people to think about me having sex when they see me. I’d like to keep my reputation pure.

“I love you,” he says.

I look at him, that wasn’t expected.

He smiles, “I love you more when you’re loving.”

“I’m always loving,” I say.

He chuckles, “Eat your burger.”

“As you wish sir!”

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He had to be in a late meeting somewhere but he waited until MaVilakazi arrived so that he can greet her. I'm picking on every little thing, from the way she looks at him, smiles with him and gives words of encouragement. There's something there, maybe it's always been there and I never noticed. I feel so stupid.

Her last words to him before he leaves are; "I will sort this out, don't worry."

I'm staring at her, she's looking at him walking out. It's just me and her, Beauty arrived home and left quickly saying she will spend the night with her sister because she's scared of Aunt Nomusa's ghost. I don't think people become ghosts two days after dying.

"There's no need for him to leave security guards outside, you're safe," MaVilakazi says.

"Am I now?" There's something about me, a rude side I can't control, I have to work on it. Regardless of how I feel, I don't know why she did what she did, so I shouldn't be mean.

"Yes, Malibongwe went to that girlfriend of his, she's going to keep him for a while, poisoning his mind," she says with a low sigh at the end. Her evident dislike of Malibongwe's girlfriend is something we can drink a cup of tea over. Just not today, I don't care about the Benny & Betty girl.

"You said you wanted to talk to me," I say.

"Yes, it's about his mother. You said you were looking for her without him knowing. How far are you with that?" she asks.

Yazi I thought she came here for something interesting, not to be an unskilled actress.

"Sphakamiso called me this morning before he left." This should be enough to tell her that I know.

“Is it right for you to talk to him after what happened?” She’s asking a valid question just that the timing and importance of it is wrong right now.

“Is that the only thing you’re concerned about?” I ask.

“No, I just don’t want Sphakamiso and him to be on bad terms again. I’m still trying to put out the fire between him and Malibongwe,” she says.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m faithful to my husband, I’m all that he has now. His mother abandoned him and read his letters every year without responding. What hurts me the most is that he wanted to have a relationship with his mother’s children but that’s not going to happen anymore.”

“What makes you say that?” She thinks she has this, that she can twist and fool me too.

“Because they already hate him. I know who you are, I haven’t told him because I want to hear your side first,” I say.

She wipes her face with a scarf around her neck. Already sweating up a storm. She knew that Sphakamiso said something to me, maybe she thought she can come and twist me out of it. Sphakamiso had no reason to lie to me, he didn’t even know that Mpatho’s mother was subject is being dealt with in this house.

“A lot happened, that’s why your mother didn’t tell him either.” She’s trying to pin this on my mother as well.

“That wasn’t my mother’s job. You gave birth to him, it was your responsibility to be in his life or at least make sure that he knows who his mother is. For 32 years he’s believed that his nanny was his mother. Do you know how painful that is?”

“That was purposely done by his father, I had no say in anything. When I fell pregnant with him Mcineka wasn’t around, he had abandoned me with Nombuso. But lobola had already

been paid, we were in the process of starting the wedding preparations. My father had already used everything that was paid for my lobola, the Mcinekas wanted either their bride or lobola back. I had to give birth and give him to his father and go back to my marriage. Women didn't have the rights you all have nowadays."

"I get that, but how long has it been since your husband died? Couldn't you come and see your son for once?" I ask.

"No, a lot of damage had already been done. She was better off without me. He still is, I don't think him knowing about me after everything he's been through will help the situation for the better," she says.

I share the same sentiments, nothing good will come out of this. But everyone has to own up to their shit.

"So you couldn't be in his life because it was either him or your marriage. I understand that, times were hard and all that. You can't turn back time and undo the past, but you can do one thing for him in life. Take him out of the mystery," I say.

"Makoti you don't understand this. Him and I are good, I don't want to ruin his life, once he knows the truth he will never allow me in this house or talk to me again." This is about her, she wants to have access him knowing very well that he will never be at peace without knowing why she gave birth to him and abandoned him.

"But he will know that he has a mother and there was a story behind him being raised by his father and lied to his whole life. It's about him finding inner peace, this is not about you. You have four other children that you're raising and loving, he doesn't have other mothers to turn to."

"You're his wife, give him a family and love him. I failed to do that for him," she says. I can't believe she came here to ask this from me.

“I can only be a wife to him and I don’t want extra responsibilities of filling the gaps I never created.” Own up to your shit mfazi! I’m not playing mommy while you’re still alive.

“If you don’t tell him, I will tell him,” I say.

She can have palpitations and sweat down a storm, I stand by my words.

“iNkos’ iyazi ukuthi I never wanted to give him up and not be in his life. Men had power, Mshazi had money to write me off. I was a nobody.”

Oh, so that’s what the name implies. I guess she gave it to him when she was giving him to his father.

“Nami iNkos’ iyazi ukuthi I can’t play mommy to someone else’s child,” I say and look away from her teary face. I’m not the kindest person on earth, I won’t be moved by tears alone, maybe if she starts fainting I will feel sorry for her.

“Must I call him?” I ask.

She exhales heavily. “I can’t do it alone. Give me a day to inform my family, the Vilakazis. We will tell him what happened. I will leave it all to God.”

God is a better option than me, I cannot have it all left to me.

“A day is 24 hours, we will wait and hear from you,” I say.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 53

PHUMELELE

I have no clue what I’m doing, it doesn’t help that I’m already stressed about the future; I don’t know what it holds. Meatballs aren’t supposed to be hard like this, these are like fried stones. I don’t think he’s going to enjoy them. The salad is also

somehow but I think it's eatable. The mash is the mash, I don't think it's supposed to outstand on a plate. This woman of the house thing is not for me. I miss Aunt Nomusa and it's been only 2 days since she's been gone. Life is yet to get hard. Beauty is everywhere but home.

I hear the car driving in, that's him. At least now those men outside are going to leave and stop peeping through the windows. I don't mind them, they're here to protect me but they're weird. They're just carrying guns and moving around the yard, not talking.

The door opens, I'm no where near being ready with dinner. Oh, he's carrying take-aways.

I'm offended. He has no trust in me.

"Hey," he looks surprised to find me in the middle of a messy kitchen.

"Hi," I give him a hug and stand next to my mess. I have to dish, if he can't eat then he will have this food he came with.

"I didn't think you'd cook," he says guiltily.

"Because I'm a bad wife?" I ask.

"Nooo! You had your nails done and you're tired."

Who said I'm tired? I'm already annoyed by these meatballs, now him underestimating my cooking skills.

"Let me jump in the shower real quick," he says and kisses my cheek.

"Okay, I will set the table," I say.

He walks away. I try to cut one meatball with a fork and it almost breaks- the fork. This is not it, his jaws are going to be

broken here. I will warm the meat he bought and keep it on standby.

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The setting almost makes it look like I knew what I was doing. I have a bottle of red wine, I do wines now, and two plates laid out with cutlery, and food respectively dished in bowls. I pray God sends down his miracle to soften the meatballs because they embarrass me.

He's coming. "I can get used to this," he says.

I cannot get used to it, unfortunately. I feel like I need a massage and post-cooking counseling because I failed dismally.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

I nod, "I'm good."

"Well, I spoke to Aunt Nomusa's family and they have set the funeral for next week Saturday. I told them I will handle all the expenses and you will go over a day before the funeral to lend a hand," he says.

I need a few sips. Look, I loved Aunt Nomusa like she was my biological aunt. I loved her more than Brandi. But I didn't need him making promises on my behalf.

"I will be there too, helping with the grave since they said they want everything to be handled physically, it's their family tradition. You won't need to do hard labor, maybe chopping in the kitchen and making sure they have everything they want." He's my spokesperson now, I had no idea I needed one.

"So what do you say?" He's only asking for my opinion now.

I don't answer, the last thing I want to do is fight over Aunt Nomusa's funeral. I will go and do whatever I need to do. I just want her to rest in peace.

"Okay, you don't look very pleaded with me tonight. What's for dinner?" He takes off the lid and pulls the bowl closer to him and dishes a few spoons of mash. This is just tasting for him, I can see a person who believes in the food and he's not one.

"Are these meatballs?"

The fact that he's asking offends me. What does it look like? Hairballs?

The fork can't get through; they're drier and even more hard now.

"Put more pressure on the fork," I advise him.

He looks at me and stifles a laugh and applies more pressure.

I'm mad at the meatballs, not him actually. I just take it out on him because there's no one to blame.

"I will fetch your meat and rolls," I say pushing back my chair.

"You don't have to, they just require time but I can chew them," he says.

So modest, ha ha ha! Mxm.

I roll my eyes and walk away. He's been waiting for this moment, he's laughing his black ass off behind me. I think I need to take a few cooking classes, I try but clearly I don't practice enough.

I'm more lighter when we eat the purchased food because even if it sucks, I'm not responsible for it, I'm waiting for no feedback.

"Is that your second glass of wine?"

I stop pouring and look at him. "Hhayi-bo you're counting?"

“Yes, I don’t want to sleep next to a drunk woman,” he says.

Only if he knew how much stress I’m under. I deserve one or two glasses of wine.

“So far did your conversation with MaVilakazi go?” he asks.

I almost choke and spill my wine. I didn’t think about what I’m going to tell him. The only thing that’s been on my mind is what is better between accompanying him all the way to the Vilakazis like I don’t know anything and let them drop the bombshell on him, and briefing him about it and leaving the explanations to be done by the right people.

“Phumelele!”

Full name, really.

“I’m trying to think. Can I refill?”

He frowns.

I refill; I’m drinking wine like it’s water.

“What is there to think about? I’m asking how far your conversation with MaVilakazi go?”

“It went well, she convinced me that I was safe, nothing is going to happen because Malibongwe is with his girlfriend that she doesn’t like,” I say.

He chuckles, “She’s got a mouth, that’s the reason.”

“Yeah, maybe she’s right about that girl poisoning Malibongwe’s mind. Did you see how she pulled him away when she said he mustn’t argue with slayqueens?”

“No, I didn’t see,” he says.

I will refresh his memory, let me show him.

He looks at me walking around the table to grab his arm the way that girl did.

“Baby you don’t have to argue with slayqueens,” I imitate her.

He laughs, “Did she say ‘baby’?”

“Of course she did, I heard her. I’m so glad I will never be forced to have a relationship with her.” Whoah, where am I going with this?

I look at him, he’s just staring at his drunk of a wife.

“Take this away from me,” I say pointing at the wine. If I tell him I want it to be in the most sensitive manner, I can’t just slip it out of nowhere.

“Oh usushayile?” He’s laughing and taking the wine off the table.

Damn, last refill.

“Can I have one last refill?” I ask.

He shakes his head and puts it back on the table.

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I wake up with a pounding headache and heavy bladder. I’m in bed, I have no idea how I got here, I’m in my pyjamas. I rush to the bathroom and check outside the window. It’s still dawn, I need to get back in bed, even though I don’t believe in ghosts but I’m not comfortable being the only one awake.

If I don’t get my sleep back I will wake Mpatho up.

I walk back in the room and find him sitting up.

“You’re awake too?”

“I heard you leaving the bed.”

Could be a cute love storyline.

“You’re sweet, let’s cuddle,” I say.

“Okay, I guess if it’s you who slept drunk you don’t stink.”

Am I ever going to be forgiven for that? Besides, I just brushed and rinsed with mouthwash in the bathroom because my tongue felt funny.

“Vele I don’t stink. Wrap your arms around me and whisper in my ears.”

He obeys with a smile. “You woke up in a good mood, unlike me.”

“Did you have a bad night because of me?” I ask.

“No, a dream. Remember you once had a baby dream? I also had a baby related dream. But mine had two babies, they looked the same age, like twins but they weren’t really twins. Then someone gave me beads, I didn’t see him but he felt familiar,” he says.

Anything with babies scare me. Be it the baby from a dream or TV, I just get uncomfortable.

“You’ve been thinking about babies, maybe that’s the reason,” I say.

“I also think about my mother but I don’t dream about her, so I don’t think so.”

Hearing him say he thinks about her breaks my heart. He’s been acting like he’s over it and ready to move on. That’s one of the reasons why I won’t take out my implanon, falling pregnant is not going to fix his life.

“I think it’s a sign,” he says, suddenly cuddling me too tight.

“Can we not talk about babies?”

“Will there ever be the right time?”

“Yes, there will be, just not now. You and I are not even that good as a couple, imagine us as parents. For us to be good as a couple we have to be healthy individuals, mentally. After we’ve worked on us, separately and together, we can start talking about babies.”

“Phume, I need something to hold onto. You’re here and you’re supportive. But I need something that’s meaningful in a different way. I don’t know how to explain it. I want to be a father.”

I feel tears burning my eyes. Doesn’t he see how soon it is? Yes, we have our good times, but the truth is we still have a lot of work to do. This isn’t the best marriage or relationship. We are together because we love and believe in each other, mostly we have mutual agreements and understanding of what it is that we are doing.

“Why are you doing this? Don’t you think I’ve gone through a lot these last 5 months? I’m only asking that you let me have a break. Let me have you as a husband before you take on other responsibilities. Even if I’m not that important, give me my time too.” I don’t tear up easily but he’s riling up my emotions.

“I’m not saying you’re not important,” he says.

“Then what do you mean you want something meaningful? You’re not a good individual, you’re not that great of a husband, what makes you think you will make a good father?”

“Because I know how it’s like not to have a good father,” he says.

I’m not winning, even with tears on my face.

I wipe them off. Useless salty water, ineffective!

“I have to tell you something,” I say.

I’ve made up my mind, I’m letting him know.

“Sphakamiso called me...”

He removes his arms from me.

“He left the village, he wanted to say goodbye. Obviously I refused to see him, but I asked why he was leaving and he told me something.”

No response. Just the name, Sphakamiso, can ruin the mood for weeks in this house.

“They were coming here, all of them, to attack you. MaVilakazi revealed something to them, that’s why he left, Malibongwe too. And that’s why MaVilakazi wanted to talk to me.”

“I don’t care about all of that. I gave you back your phone because you promised that you were never going to communicate with him again,” he says.

“Can I say this without us arguing about Sphakamiso? He’s the least of our concerns and he’s not even around anymore.” I understand why he freaks out whenever Sphakamiso is concerned, but he has a past too and I never sit on his neck about who he communicates with and whatnot.

“It’s about MaVilakazi,” I say and raise my eyes to him. I don’t know how he’s going to react and that scares me because I know he might push me away like he did after Swaziland.

“We have to go to the Vilakazis. It’s about your mother,” I tell him.

“My mother? I thought I told you to let go of that issue,” he says.

I exercise a few breaths...in and out.

“Mpatho...you know your mother,” I say.

He’s confused, anyone would be.

“It’s MaVilakazi,” I tell him.

“That’s not possible. I’ve known her since I was a little boy, she’s not related to me. Why are you saying this? Did she say it?”

“She asked for 24 hours to gather her family, the Vilakazis. Then we’ll go there, you will get an explanation and answers to all your questions,” I say.

“Phumelele are you still drunk?” He’s looking at me weirdly, his brows snapped, a twinge of fear striking in his eyes.

“We can call Sphakamiso,” I say.

“Call him,” he says.

Who could’ve ever thought that I’d ever get permission to call Sphakamiso!

His phone rings, I pray he doesn’t call me any pet name.

“Hello,” he answers.

I breathe out in relief.

“Hey, I’m with Mpatho, you’re on the speaker.”

“I don’t have time.” He’s the one getting pissed today.

“Please don’t drop, just confirm what you said to me for him.”

“I said I love you,” he says.

The sharp breath next to me!

“I’m talking about what your mother said about him,” I say.

“Well, he’s the Nkosiyazi we were told about and wanted to know so badly.” He’s bitter about it, something tells me they will never accept Mpatho as the Nkosiyazi brother.

“Do you know about the meeting tomorrow?” I ask.

“I don’t have anything to do with anything that concerns that situation. Ask Mkhuleko, he has his umbilical cord and beads,” he says.

Then he drops my call.

Sphakamiso drops my calls now?!

“He dropped the call. Do you believe me now?”

No response.

I turn to look at him.

He’s getting off bed, dressing up.

“Where are you going?”

“MaVilakazi,” he says.

I didn’t expect him to go there. I’m scared because I don’t know what’s on his mind. Is he going there to just ask and confirm? Or to destroy?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 54

Strangely Nombuso’s anger about her least favorite brother and her favourite brother leaving the house is taken out on Mkhuleko, rather than their mother who is the root of it all. She’s been snapping at Mkhuleko at every chance she gets. Yoli receives some of it, but not as much.

“Is this plate going to wash itself?” she asks.

Then she looks at the plate carefully, it’s hers, she’s the one who left it here.

“How can one not lose their mind in this family? Everything is a mess.” She blames it on the current unresolved issues in the family. Mkhuleko is listening to music on his phone while watching the sport channel.

Electricity, electricity, electricity! It’s not for free.

Mkhuleko just looks at her and doesn't say anything when she pulls down the main switch. Everything switches off immediately.

MaVilakazi comes out of her room looking furious.

"See this habit of sleeping with the lights on, electricity doesn't last us even a week now." She still believes that light bulbs finish electricity more than her sewing machine.

"It didn't run out, Nombuso pulled down the main switch," Mkhuleko says.

She looks at Nombuso. "What is your problem? You haven't bought electricity in months, your SASSA card is with the loanshark. What gives you the right to pull down the switch?"

"Malibongwe bought the electricity, it's my responsibility to save it," – Nombuso.

"Okay, now watch this!" Mkhuleko gets off the couch and goes to the kitchen and lifts the main switch.

Nombuso pulls it down and stands by the wall, blocking the way. Mkhuleko pushes her aside and lifts the switch up again. Nombuso starts wailing saying he hit her.

It's another day in the Mcinekas house.

MaVilakazi is trying to calm down the situation by getting Mkhuleko to apologize to his sister. But Mkhuleko being Mkhuleko is not bothered, if anything he's telling her to cry blood. They don't hear anyone walking in, until he opens his mouth and calls their mother.

"MaVilakazi!" his voice is stern and fierce. He stands tall by the door, bottom of his pants wet and covered with grass. He's a head shorter than Malibongwe, two shades darker than Sphakamiso, and he's wearing a bitter look than that of a normal Nombuso. His face says this is not a general morning visit. He's never been here before, not even after Malibongwe

killed Aunt Nomusa. Maybe he last walked by foot across the village when he was a teenager.

Nombuso stops crying instantly, like she just pressed the silent button somewhere.

Mkhuleko senses the war coming and grabs his phone and disappears. He takes Yoli playing on the veranda and goes to his out-built room. Nombuso can catch stray bullets, it won't be much of a big deal to anyone.

MaVilakazi is standing like she's glued where she is. She talked to Phume, they had an agreement. She can't do this without any support from her family.

"Come in and sit," Nombuso says.

Mpatho remains on his feet, his eyes are on one person, that's the woman he's respected his whole life and even referred to as Mah.

"Who am I?" he asks.

MaVilakazi swallows nothingness.

"You're Nkosiyazi," she says.

He takes one step closer and asks, "What are you to me?"

She can't look at him in the eyes, she's stuttering.

"MaVilakazi...Mah, as I always call you, what are you to me?"

He asks for the second time, his veins visibly pulsating, his jaws tightened.

MaVilakazi's tongue got caught by a rat or cat, whatever.

"She's your mother," Nombuso comes to the rescue.

He's looking at her, his Adam's apple bobbling up and down. His eyes are intense with resistance of pain and disappointment.

She doesn't argue, this is not a lie. It's not a bad dream he's going to wake up from.

"Is it true?" he asks even though he knows chances of it being a lie are now slim. He just wants to hear it coming from her lips.

"Yes, I'm your mother," she says with drops of tears running down.

She shouldn't be the one crying because none of this is a surprise to her. She's known her whole life that she has a child she abandoned and where he lives.

"What did I do to you that was so bad?" He's trying hard not to burst into a flame of anger. He's done a lot of work; self-healing and growing up. When he went to Ncedziwe he was ready to forgive and start a new journey with her. Everything that happened and didn't happen in the past didn't matter anymore. But this takes him back to that angry and easily intimidated little boy.

"You didn't do anything wrong, I can explain if we just sit down and have...", - MaVilakazi.

"Did Phumlani give you my letters?" he asks, cutting her short. He doesn't want to sit down, he just wants to know why. His ears are burning, there's a tight knot in his chest, his breaths are uncontrollably heavy.

"Yes, he did, your father introduced him to me and instructed that I shouldn't reply."

"Even to the personal things I penned down only for your eyes and heart to know? I was just a hill away and none of it bothered you. 32 years, you never felt the need to reach out, knowing how much I needed you, I expressed that in all my letters."

"I confronted MaShandu about the things you wrote to me about. I really tried, I even got Mcineka involved but

unfortunately he also had his personal agendas on the matter and he was using some confidential things that I shared with him to benefit. It ended bloody, you know what happened. I will never forgive myself for not doing enough to protect you up to that point because after that I knew that there was no other chance. I had to let you be there as an heir to your father, I didn't want to strip you out of that title and bring you here to the devil's den."

Nombuso clears her throat and gives her mother a side glance. Now her father's house is a den?

"Is that all you have to say?" His voice almost doesn't come out, there's a lump blocking his throat. It hurts even more that she thinks she tried her best whereas she's never done anything.

"You let me go to Swaziland to my nanny whom I was made to believe was my mother. You let me spend money on her health expenses, which I didn't mind that much because at some point she took care of me. But you let me invest my emotions and raise my hopes for nothing. You let me travel miles to have my heart crushed."

"I didn't know how to tell you," MaVilakazi pours a rain of tears. "I had to watch you grow from a distance. Your father and his wife were cruel, you have no idea. I went to sell at the gate of your school just so I can see you, they moved you to a boarding school in another side of the country. Then they made you kill my husband and sent you to the army."

Nombuso clears her throat, "Ma please, you're not the victim, stop crying and say you're sorry. Those people you're blaming have been dead for years, one for months. You even hide the truth from me, your confidant."

"I couldn't show up after he got the inheritance. That would've made me look bad," MaVilakazi.

Nombuso grunts angrily. “Lord, you already look bad, nothing can make you look less bad, you gave birth to a child and gave him away to continue with marriage.”

MaVilakazi won't stop crying, Mpatho looks like a bomb waiting to explode. He's justified to cry and break chairs and scream to the sky. Him only.

“This is a mess but we'd have to go to the Vilakazis and hear from the elders. They're the ones who collected your damages and lobola and exchanged goats with your father. Ma could've stood up for herself and maybe ask your father, he was her boyfriend then, to pay back Mcineka's lobola because he was already rich then. It's not like she loved my father that much. I would've been the only child at the Mcinekas. There would've been no Malibongwe, Sphakamiso and Mkhuleko,” Nombuso says.

Heavy silence has fallen into the room. There's nothing but hate and disgust in Mpatho's eyes, MaVilakazi is wiping her tears, trying to control herself.

“You could've just killed me after birth and saved your marriage than to make me go through this,” he says, his voice low and breaking.

“Don't talk like that Nkosiyazi,” MaVilakazi says and starts tearing again. “I thought your father was going to give you a better life.”

“He didn't, I told you all about it in the letters and you didn't respond. I wish you long miserable life, mommy!” He turns and walks out, leaving MaVilakazi wailing inside the house.

Nombuso sighs, “Even the one you didn't raise had it hard. Yazi I thought with all the money they have in that family happiness is something they just snap their fingers and get.”

MaVilakazi is crying like a widow. No scratch that, she never cried as a widow. She only cries when Sphakamiso shows her flames...another one she got from the streets.

“Where are the letters? I want to know what they did to him so that Beauty can receive sweets and sour on behalf of her dead in-laws?” Nombuso asks. She just wants some juicy news, something to shock her on this not so beautiful morning.

“Nombuso if you dare enter my room and go through my personal belongings, I swear you see hell,” MaVilakazi says behind her between sobs.

Nombuso turns with a frown. What other hell is there to see? They’re living in one already.

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PHUMELELE

Maybe I made a wrong decision, I should’ve waited for a day and let MaVilakazi sort it out herself. He left the car and walked by foot all the way to the Mcinekas. It’s a short distance, but his safety is still a debatable subject in this village. I can’t fully trust that Malibongwe will forgive and forget just because he’s his mother’s child now.

I almost sigh in relief when I see him walking through the gate with his pants drenched in dew. At this moment I wish I furthered my education and took counseling studies. Maybe I would’ve known what to say or give him at a moment like this.

He doesn’t look at me in the eyes when he reaches the door.

I hug him. He coldly puts his one around my waist and lets go in a second.

“How did it go?” I ask.

He shrugs, “I don’t know, but she confirmed that it’s her I’ve been looking for my whole life.”

“I’m so sorry,” I try to hug him again but he moves.

Phewww, this is going to be hard.

I follow him to the bedroom, he’s taking his clothes off to go to the shower.

“I won’t wear formal today,” he says.

“You’re going to work?” I’m confused, he’s not in a good space to go and run a business.

“Yes, I have work to do,” he says.

I’m against this but I cannot tell a grown-up how to handle his business. I have to pick a casual outfit and iron it. Thank God I know how to do it properly now. Then I will warm up the meat leftovers from last night for his lunch and make him a bowl of cornflakes. I’m getting there with the basic duties. It’s the emotional duties I continue to struggle with. I have no idea how I’m going to help him heal from finding out who his mother is. I feel so useless.

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I’m talking to a few boutique owners, doing my research. I know a few places that are up for sale, getting one won’t be a problem, I just need to know everything about the kind of business I’m venturing into before putting money on it.

This week is emotionally heavy, Mpatho needs my support more than ever, but I also wish I had someone checking up on me constantly. Ntombi is there but she has a life of her own and

can't baby me everyday. I miss my mother, yes the master of all devils. I wish I had a time machine, just for her and Bab' Mshazi and Aunt Nomusa. With Aunt Nomusa I'd just tell her how sorry I am, if I knew I would've given her a day-off that day. I should've been more caring, she shouldn't have been in that kitchen alone while Beauty and I hid in the bathroom.

There's a knock at the door, I wipe tears on my face and open. I'm crying everyday, I don't know when I turned this weak, I've always been strong like a rock. It's a security guard, I have three in total, they stay outside until Mpatho comes home.

"There's a woman at the gate, she wants to come in," he says.

"What's her name?" I ask.

"Nombuso Mcineka," he says.

What does Sphakamiso's sister want?

Oh, it's Mpatho's as well.

"You can let her in," I say and go back to the kitchen chair. I'm trying YouTube cooking this time, it's a lot better than simple Google instructions. I pause everything, I will continue after Nombuso leaves, the last thing I want is a Nkomazi food expert criticizing me.

"Qo ekhaya!" she's at the door.

"Come in," I take it she's here to talk to Mpatho. Maybe she's sent by her mother.

She stands in the middle of the kitchen and blows out a sigh. She's big-boned, a simple ten minute walk has her sweating and breathing like a sick sheep.

"Turn up whatever is blowing air," she says.

“The lounge is better, come and sit there.” I’m nice because I can see what the heat has done to her outside. I lead her to the lounge and leave her sitting with her T-shirt pulled up, her saggy belly sitting on her thighs, and legs widely open. I guess her coochie needs some fresh air too. Look, Nombuso doesn’t need to say anything for you to know that she’s an ambassador of havoc. I don’t know why she’s here but Lord knows that I don’t want to deal with it. Mpatho must come back and attend her.

I give her cold-drink and ice cubes, I predicted that she’s a Coke person.

“Hawu makoti, ayisaphelezelwa nje noma amagwinya amabili. Isifika nje iyintandane?” (you’re not accompanying it even with two fatcakes)

“I’m sorry, usually I don’t eat anything if I’ve been in the sun for too long,” I say.

She takes a little sip and chuckles, “The sun is there, up in the sky. It has nothing to do with food.”

“Okay, I will bring some cookies.” I’m not going back and forth with a guest who feels entitled on what she gets and doesn’t get in people’s houses.

“Please call Nkosiyazi for me, I’m actually here to see him,” she says.

“Who?” I ask, my memory can be shorter than her feet at times.

“Your husband,” she says.

“Oh, he went to work, but he’s probably on his way back now.”

I need to call him, he needs to get home ASAP.

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She's watching wrestling and participating from the couch. She's such a weird person.

Mpatho walks in wearing a frown on his face. The volume is high, I've been sitting on the kitchen chair counting seconds and minutes.

"Finally you're home!" I say with relief.

He looks no different from how he was when he left.

"You have a guest, Nombuso Mcineka," I tell him.

"Okay," he comes and pecks my cheek. His lips are dry, I'd be surprised if he hate anything today.

"I need to drink painkillers," he says dumping his bag on the counter.

The headache is back, pharmacies will run out of painkillers.

"You have to eat first," I advise.

"Eat what? I can't eat from a YouTube video," he says looking at the paused cooking video on my phone.

I'm trying here, he knows that I'm neither the best nor the fastest cooker. He can grab a fruit or warm a pie, there are many other options. But no, he wants to throw jabs like I've been hiding his mother from him.

I watch him take two painblocks without eating anything. I don't want to be irritating, he's old, older than me. When he goes through something he shuts me out and I have no idea what is it that I lack for him not to trust me with his feelings. I start every journey with him, holding his hand and encouraging, but he never hold onto me for long. He's dropped my hand again, he's going to deal with this alone.

He leaves the bag on the counter and proceeds to the lounge. I know he won't be mean to Nombuso, he's never mean to anyone, not even Beauty. But me, I see flames.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 55

PHUMELELE

When he said he was going to 'see the gents' I knew chances of him coming back home were slim. But he surprised me and came back, just after 11pm. I wasn't asleep, I kept turning and tossing, hearing imaginary gunshots outside. I don't think a caring husband would leave his wife alone in a house that was bored by bullets three days ago. The security guards stayed, I believe. I didn't hear them leaving, one drives a car, I didn't hear it leaving until I went to bed. I was scared regardless of them being here. Beauty's fears about Aunt Nomusa's ghost started rattling my nerves. When he came home I was relieved more than angry. I immediately fell asleep after he came out of the shower and got in bed. Sadly I lost the only opportunity to confront him about his attitude towards my 'YouTube food' and coming back home late. He was gone when I woke up, he took out his clothes and ironed them himself. I found a bowl he ate his cereal with inside the sink. He didn't leave any note, didn't send any text, he just woke up and left. I didn't sign up for this kind of marriage. My body is getting affected, as well as my mental state. I feel weak, physically. I have moments where I find myself struggling to breathe. Google makes suspect anxiety, which means I'm stressed more than I think.

I'm cooking maize porridge to gain energy. It's easy to make, I'm letting it cook longer, I want to eat it with lemon, lots of it. There's someone driving in, the security didn't ask me for permission, obviously it's either Mpatho or Beauty. I'm hoping Mpatho, I have things that I want to talk to him about.

I hoped wrong...

"Hello, sweet home!"

It's the owner of the house strutting in, wearing her black stilettos and blonde wig. She's the only one living her life and enjoying in this house. Thanks to mkhulu's death.

"You finally remembered where home is," I'm a bit relieved that someone is now here with me

"Oh, you missed me? Who could've ever thought!" She laughs and dumps her bag on the counter.

I don't think I missed her physically, I just needed company.

"How have you been? I see you're gaining a bit of complexion." She's going over her wine rack and pulling a bottle. Then she stops and raises her eyebrow, "Wait, don't tell me you're bleaching because I said Mpatha loves yellowbones!"

Now this is absurd!

"Pleasing Mpatho is not all that I think of," I say and realize how untruthful my statement is. I actually do, half of this marriage has been about Mpatho and what I can do to become a better wife for him.

"Where is he by the way?" she asks.

"Work, he had an early meeting." I can't believe I'm already one of those wives- unhappy and faking for the image.

"Oh honeymoon is already over, he doesn't even wait to have breakfast with his wife anymore." Beauty will put her claws in my business and act like she had a perfect marriage.

“Shouldn’t you be preparing for your vacation?” I can’t believe she’s only been home for two minutes but I already want her gone.

“I have postponed it, I will leave after Aunt Nomusa’s funeral,” she says.

I’m shocked, like the whole Beauty postponed her vacation for a funeral. She’s growing pakithi.

“That’s nice, I was worried because I’m not good with speeches, they’ll want someone to narrate how she died and how far the investigations are,” I say.

“You’re married, you should learn how to comfort mourners and making funeral speeches. If something happens next door and I’m not home you will have to take a blanket and go there.”

“I’m 24 years old,” I remind her. It seems like she forgets, in fact a lot people do, my peers are clubbing every weekend, smoking hubblies and sleeping with DJs.

“You had a choice to be a normal 24 year old, but you chose to secretly marry a 32 year old who leaves you in bed and rush to work for office quickies,” she says.

I feel a sharp pain in my stomach, I’ve been trying not to think about what he gets up to when he’s not home. I don’t want to have a victim mindset, I will give him the benefit of a doubt.

“His mother is MaVilakazi,” I tell her, just to change the subject and avoid her finding out from other sources.

She almost drops the glass, “The fat one?”

“Yeap, Malibongwe’s mother. You missed out on the drama, Nombuso was here yesterday after Mpatho went there to confront her mother. Malibongwe and Sphakamiso left after finding out. You’re to blame for that because you told Malibongwe that Mpatho killed their father.”

“Yeah that, my bad!” she says.

I’m not surprised, it’s just like her to say ‘my bad’ after turning the village upside down and causing Aunt Nomusa’s death.

“If you didn’t that whole shit Aunt Nomusa would be still alive,” I tell her.

“Hold up, your husband refused to meet and settle with Malibongwe, how is it my fault that he then decided to come here and attack?”

Her brains are upside down, how come she doesn’t recognize the part she played?

“Aunt Nomusa didn’t deserve to die, that’s it. Now you have to think what you’re going to say at the funeral because linking it to the robbery is off cards,” I say.

“How so? Neither Mpatho nor Malibongwe going to jail to serve time for their crimes will stop my world,” she says.

“We are family Beauty. It’s okay not to like each other and quarrel indoors, but out there we have to show united front and have each other’s back. Mpatho knows things about you too, you’re not innocent, nobody in this family is.”

She keeps quiet. This is a reminder she needs constantly. I need to get some dirt on her, Beauty sleeps on one side and wake up from the other, you cannot trust her to have your back.

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We didn’t go to the Vilakazi meeting, he hasn’t expressed anything to me but I guess he’s going to cut off MaVilakazi as his mother. He doesn’t know that I’m sick because he hasn’t been home. I wouldn’t call coming home from work at 6pm and attending ‘late meetings’ until 9pm and coming straight to bed

after, to wake up before everyone and leave, being home. Ntombi says men don't open up easily, I'm giving him time as she advised, when he's ready I will be here to listen. I'm more mature and understanding than I'd be with anyone. I'm trying to keep a positive mindset, I don't want to go to the doctor and find out that I'm depressed.

Tomorrow is Aunt Nomusa's funeral, I'm expected to be there today to help with the preparations. I'm not good in domestic activities, I hate that I'm going there to be that one girl who will be sitting on the chair and likely only contributing with cash and driving people around. Beauty is not going, she says it's unnecessary.

There's a car driving in, Beauty appears in a transparent top and tight jeans. I'm not insecure, Beauty is not someone that can threaten me, but her walking around with her cleavage showing doesn't sit well with me. She's someone who is supposed to be an elder here, and not just an elder but a mourning grandmother figure.

"That's your husband," she says.

I'm ready to go, I don't know if I wanted to ruin my mood with Mpatho first, I'm going to a sad family, I don't want to go there with a long face.

"I will be outside with Maps," Beauty says.

"Who is Maps?" I ask.

"The tall security guard," she says.

I've known them longer than her, yet I don't even know their names. I don't know if we are allowed to get too friendly with them given that they're actually at work.

Mpatho walks in after she walks out. He did some shopping, he puts grocery bags on the counter and comes to me. I'm eating yogurt, he takes my unoccupied hand and kisses it

"Hey," he says.

I don't respond.

"I thought you'd need me to drive you to Aunt Nomusa's house," he says.

I can actually drive myself, that's what I've been doing the last week, I don't need a savior.

"Are you okay? Come here." He turns me around and hugs me.

"I'm okay," I lie, hugging him back.

I don't want to get upset, we can do it after Aunt Nomusa's funeral.

"I know how much you loved her. I know we haven't had time to sit and talk, and you're not going to be comfortable with other people because of how she died, so I just wanted to come home and be with you before you leave."

If he did this last week or early this week, trust me I would've grabbed the opportunity and cried on his shoulder. Right now I'm just pissed, he disgusts me.

"I don't need you, I have someone that I trust and talk to when I need to talk." That's Ntombi, not him, I cannot trust someone who's in and out of my life.

"Okay," he looks like I dropped a bombshell on him.

"I don't need a superhero. I can handle my own shit too, alone" I tell him. Now I see why him and I were never close in childhood, he's the kind of person I wouldn't get close to on a normal day. I don't fuck with friends and partners who always want to be the ones rescuing and never sharing their problems with you.

“You can drop the attitude, I didn’t put a gun on your head. Are you going to take the snacks I bought or I must return them back to Pick’n Pay?”

“Do whatever you want,” I’m not crazy about snacks, there will be food in Aunt Nomusa’s house. I also don’t want to be a stuck-up bitch who brings her own snacks and avoids eating where everyone is eating. He can shove them up in his ass.

I go to the bedroom to take my bag. He follows me, I don’t know what for. Maybe I should move back to my old bedroom, the reason he comes home late and leaves early is probably because he doesn’t want to see my complexion-changing face.

“Phume can we talk, please?”

“About what?”

He pulls the bag out of my hand and forces me to look at him.

“I know why you’re upset,” he says.

“I’m upset?” I’m a second away from blowing up.

“Yes, you’re upset. Look at how red your face has become.”

I must be really light to have my skin turning red when I’m upset. Ghosts must be bleaching me at night.

“I don’t want to talk about what you want me to talk about. I’m not ready, I also don’t want you to keep feeling sorry for me and carry my pain with you,” he says.

“Okay, so what do you want me to do? Go away so that you can have space?”

He holds me to his chest, “I know I haven’t been the best husband, I’m sorry.”

I push him away. I don’t want him to just wrap this up with a sorry, he’s hurt me a lot since this past week.

“I’m asking you again, what do you want to see happening between us? To me it looks like you need space, just say it.”

“I don’t want space,” he says.

“What do you want? You want me to make efforts and cook food that you never eat and go to bed without you and wake up to the smell of your cologne and empty side of the bed. Is that the life you want me to live?”

“I want you to accommodate how I want to deal with things,” he says.

I need a second to just breathe.

“Mpatho, the moment you found out who your mother is you built walls around you, maybe only for me. How did you know I wasn’t going to accommodate how you decided to deal with the news?”

“I don’t know.”

Gosh, he doesn’t know! How do you run from something you don’t know? He’s not 7, he’s not 16, he’s 32 years old.

“Do you blame my mother?” I ask.

He blows out a sigh and takes a step towards the window.

“Answer me!” I demand following him.

The least he can do is clarify why he treats me this way.

“No, I blame MaVilakazi,” he says.

“You blame MaVilakazi but you’re nice to her daughter, Nombuso. You don’t blame my mother for the part she played but you are horrible to her daughter. Make it make sense, please.”

“I don’t want to talk about that situation, I’ve made it clear to you but you’re still pushing, that’s why I delay coming home,” he says.

“You can’t...” Fuck it, I’m done.

I have the right to ask for clarifications on things that affect our marriage. But if he thinks what he’s doing is okay, he can continue. I don’t have to beg for good treatment from my husband. Nobody has to do that.

“Do you want me to drive you?” he asks.

“Yes, come and drop me off so that I look like a wife who is loved and taken care of.” I turn and walk away from him.

“Power couple, just like our parents.”

“So much for trying!” he says with a loud exhalation.

What exactly did he try? Bringing me Pick’n Pay snacks and wanting to play counselor on me after he’s been MIA for 9 days. No, that’s not trying, it’s a superhero syndrome and I don’t fuck with that. Aunt Nomusa’s death broke me but the same way I’m the last person he can open up to, I’m also not going to cry on his shoulder.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 56

MIYANDA

I just woke up, he’s not in bed with me. I don’t panic because Bonga operates creepy, I’d even say darkly. I don’t know why I trust him so much, but doesn’t give my cousin, Njabulo, the same privilege. I think they’re both thugs. Yeap, I’m having a baby with someone I know very well is involved in some criminal activities. Maybe that’s why they say love is blind.

I wake up and take a bath. It’s already 9am, the shop is now open, I will go and buy bread. I want to go home, I miss my father and I want to know what exactly is happening with his

love life. I'm grown, I feel like it's safe for him to introduce whoever he's seeing to me, just so I know who to fight with if he ever get his old heart broken. But I'm scared because even though I'm independent and grown, having a child out of wedlock is still a shame in our culture. I don't want him to think he didn't raise me well. As a single father he did his best.

The door opens just as I start dressing up. He was actually close, he's wearing his slippers and a short. Shorts don't look good on tall people.

"Where were you? I thought you went to rob somewhere," I ask.

He doesn't answer. I guess he missed the joke, sometimes I make stupid ones.

"What is that?" I ask, looking at the bag in his hands.

"I went to rob the shop some fruits and magwinya and hot fries. I don't know if you like street meat, but I got you some wings as well. I forgot the sweets." He's really blowing this out of proportion.

"Ummm, I don't have cravings yet," I tell him.

He frowns, "But you're pregnant."

"Yeah, but it doesn't mean I want to eat everything. I will let you know if it happens, for now just relax and save for the nappies," I say.

He chuckles and leaves everything on the table and sits on the bed. I love him, I'm grateful that he's here, even though I'm pretty sure they're missing him at home. But this is my first pregnancy, I'm glad I have someone to share every moment with. He's been supportive and extra since last week.

"Come and sit next to me," he says.

I should add clingy on the list.

I sit next to him, he takes my hand and holds it.

“I heard you dreaming last night. Were you dreaming about our wedding?”

Wedding? I laugh.

“I don’t know, I didn’t hear myself,” I say.

“You should start dreaming about it. I knew that I was going to have something with you from the day you tried to give me a wrong number after I gave you a free lift. Ungrateful child! But you doing this for me has created a whole new world for me. I will do life with you.”

“You’re just excited about being a father. Have you told anyone?” I ask.

He takes a deep sigh first. I don’t think he will have any problems, he’s a man, his gender has it easy when it comes to babymaking and how it’s perceived.

“I will tell my siblings. I think they will be happy, especially Sphakamiso because he loves you. My mother, I’m not sure,” he says.

“Why are you not sure? Doesn’t she like grandkids?” I ask.

“You,” he says.

I’m confused. “Me?”

Another sigh!

“She thinks you tell me what to do.”

I’m more confused.

“How so?”

“Like you badly influence me. She doesn’t want to account to anything that’s going wrong at home,” he says.

Maybe I’m slow, how am I influencing Bonga against his mother? The woman who raised him for 30 years.

“If she thinks a random girl can come into your life for three months and manage to badly influence you that means she’s not a good mother, you don’t have any moral grounding.”

“Miyanda don’t say that, I know that you are innocent, I always tell her. I don’t want you to give back the same energy,” he says.

“No, I stand with my words. If she thinks I make you do things, then she’s a bad mother who didn’t raise you properly.” Hhayibo, his mother mustn’t try me. I’ve been telling her son to go home and call her when he didn’t even want, now she wants to make her problems mine!

“Okay, let’s talk about our baby. How are you going to tell his grandfather?” he asks.

“Yoh that one!” I don’t even want to know why he’s already assumed that we are having a boy.

“Are you going to come with your stepmother to report the pregnancy?”

Fuck, there’s that as well! Now it’s going to be uncomfortable for me because I know that his mother doesn’t like me.

“Can’t I skip that part?” I ask.

“We will do things culturally.” He turns my face to his and kisses my lips. “We are not skipping anything, mamakhe.”

A smile creeps out of my face. He’s excited more than me.

“Did you get me pregnant on purpose?” I ask.

“No, kwazwana igazi. I couldn’t have you any other way on that day, I wanted to feel you...and you felt so amazing. I felt something that was strong and different inside you.”

“Which day is that?” My memory is not good as his. I don’t keep sex records.

“The day you almost killed me, you gave me the best sex of my life and I gave you this.” He touches my belly, which is still flat BTW.

“Please don’t run away from what you gave me, even if you and I don’t work out,” I say. In South Africa men run faster than Caster Semenya after getting someone pregnant.

“You and I are going work out. If my ancestors really love me they won’t let you go.”

Okay, my cheeks hurt now, I’ve blushed enough.

“You’re beautiful and I love you.” He kisses me again.

“I love you too Bonga. Now let me eat my fries. Did you ask for Tomato sauce?” I’m getting off his embrace and taking fries from the table.

“I thought you said you didn’t like anything because you have no cravings,” he says.

I don’t remember saying that I don’t like fries. I’ve always loved them, with wings and one gwinya at the side. He’s not getting any of it.

He’s watching me with a smile. My millionaire boyfriend.

“Where are your millions?” I ask.

He starts laughing. “You have so much faith in me, thank you.”

I’m not mocking him. I know he bought that building cash, he’s driving that expensive car as well, but where are the millions?

“Everything is coming together perfectly, you will be surprised when I come to fetch you from your Indian bosses and giving you a better job,” he says.

He’s still laughing, that’s why I don’t take him seriously.

He’s handsome, I cannot say this enough about him. When he laughs the room brightens. His eyes, perfect set of teeth and

dimples. His smooth bright skin. But he's not the type of person you can say wear his heart because today the woman he killed is being buried. It's news everyone is talking about.

"Bonga," I say.

He looks at me, "Babe?"

"Have you killed before?"

"Why are you asking me something like this?"

"I'm just wondering. It doesn't look like the mistake you did was your first mistake of that kind." I don't know much but I think first time killers would look depressed and remorseful

"No, I've never done anything like that," he says.

"Are you sorry?" I ask.

"Yeah, I'm sorry. Why wouldn't I be? It was a mistake and I hate killing by mistake because that one stays in your conscience more than when you kill with intent."

My eyes are widening out of their sockets. He just said it was his first time!

"Babe no, not like that." It's too late for him to change his statement.

I'm so disappointed in the man I fell in love with. I'm also disappointed in this gwinya because it doesn't have enough sugar.

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PHUMELELE

We didn't sleep, cooking started after midnight, as well as grave digging. I heard that 'my husband' arrived, but I was in the kitchen with other women the whole time. I became a stuck-up bitch in the morning and drove home to take a bath. There was too much crowd and warm water issues, I didn't want to add to the stress.

I'm inside the tent fighting my eyes to stay open. I don't want Beauty to mess her speech and say things she shouldn't be saying. She's dressed decently, not like a widow, I think she broke the mourning with Phumlani, all that is left now is the official ceremony.

She's singing, I didn't know she has a beautiful voice and she actually knows church songs. I'm seated at the back, I don't want to directly face Aunt Nomusa's coffin. Her kids should cry, I don't want to add to the number of people who need to be comforted. I'm wearing dark shades to hide my emotions, because mine are always in my eyes.

The male relatives who speak speak at the front spit nothing but threats. Malibongwe has created enemies, if they ever find out his name hell will break loose. Her daughters have been crying from the beginning of the service, it's a sad funeral...not that there's ever a happy one.

Beauty stands up to talk on behalf of the employers, people Aunt Nomusa spent her last moments with. Before she starts talking she sheds a few tears, I don't think they're real but they're necessary.

"I remember her arriving for work that day, she came to greet me in my bedroom, the biggest one in the house, I'm currently looking for an interior designer who will change it. Everything about it reminds me of her, she used to clean it everyday and compliment my exquisite taste and style. I can say that her and I had a close relationship from the get-go. She was like an older

sister to me, I treated her like a sister-in-law.” She’s lying, pure unnecessary lies.

“When I heard gunshots the first person I thought of was her because Phume was with Mpatho and I believed he was going to protect her. It was me and Aunt Nomusa against the killer. I don’t know how the other bullet missed me.”

Which bullet though? This is about Aunt Nomusa, not her fake survival stories.

“One thing we vowed to do as a family is to do whatever it takes, pay whatever needs to be paid, to make sure that the killer is found and brought to justice.”

Now this is what I’m talking about! She didn’t disappoint as much as I thought she would.

At the cemetery there’s a man who’s wearing animal skins and big feather pinned on his head. This looks like live witchcraft. Before they take down the coffin, the man sprinkle smelly liquids all around the grave and request for the coffin to be open. I guess the family hired him, they’re obeying and allowing him to perform witchcraft with Aunt Nomusa’s body.

“Good, Nomusa must fight for herself,” one person says behind me.

Another one agrees with her. “The justice always fails the poorer, this is the only way. I trust this man, he’s done this before, the killer will follow Nomusa very soon.”

Now I understand what’s happening. My mother wanted to do it when Mshazi died but the family said no to witchcraft. They want Aunt Nomusa to haunt her killer after this funeral. I think this is the best way to fight, it’s in our favor. We are not involved, the police are not involved, Malibongwe will face whatever and has nobody to blame but himself.

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Aunt Nomusa was peacefully laid in her final place. Now we are back to our chaotic lives. Beauty is leaving soon, I have to get a helper to replace Aunt Nomusa. I don't see any woman in the village taking the offer, not when we are famous for dying. I need to make a poster on social media and have someone from afar.

We pull up at the gate, I'm surprised to see Nombuso waiting for us. How did she know we are coming back? And mostly, why would she be here? Mpatho and her are not friends, they have not even accepted each other as siblings. Well, that is according to what I know. Obviously, I don't know that much anymore.

"Please drive in, I will come shortly," he says to me.

We had a silent drive, I'm tired, so is he.

"You guys are friends now?" I ask bitterly.

I don't want him to be close to Nombuso because I feel like she will bring nothing but trouble. I have enough problems as it is, I don't need a sister-in-law popping out of nowhere.

"No, she wants to talk about something," he says.

I have to change seats, he's climbing out and going to her. I'm happy they're having their conversation outside the gate because I'm not in the mood to serve the entitled Nombuso.

I take a quick shower, I want to get in bed and sleep. It's been almost 24 hours since I last had a good sleep. When I come out he's back from the meeting with his sister. I don't know, maybe I dislike Nombuso for this sudden friendship. Mpatho doesn't

have that with me, someone who's been there for him for months.

"What were you guys talking about?" I ask out of curiosity.

"Do you want me to lotion your back?"

Really?!

"Is it a sibling secret?" I ask.

"No, I was telling her about the funeral. There's no sibling thing, come here."

I'm not going anywhere. I stand up straight and look at him questioningly.

"Did you tell her about the man who was helping the family at least get justice through traditional routes?" I will be shocked if he did.

"Phume, can you come here?"

I'm not going to him! I'm standing here in my panty and bra, I want to stand.

"Why did you tell her? Aunt Nomusa deserves some justice. You know she will run and tell Malibongwe to go and block whatever was being done. Why would you betray Aunt Nomusa like that, in her death?"

"You're blowing this out of proportion because you have issues with me. Can you come closer?"

I can't believe this. He's a spy, an ass-licker.

"Malibongwe hates you, he wanted to kill you that day. Why would you call Nombuso and tell her what the family did? Aunt Nomusa loved you and treated you like a son. You have no loyalty, first you lie to the police, which I understood. But this, hhayi uyixoki shame. Yazi I married a backstabber, iphixiphixi." I'm fuming. Aunt Nomusa deserves justice, we both know it. But

his hands were tied, so he said. Now there are other alternatives but he's still getting in the way. I hate what he's doing. Zero loyalty to people who love him.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 57

PHUMELELE

I wake up to a smell of eggs. I open my eyes and look around, there's a plate of breakfast put next to me. I don't know what he made with the eggs but I have no appetite for it at all. He's sitting on the chair working on the laptop, still in his shorts and sleeping T-shirt. I'm surprised he didn't leave by dawn today.

"Morning," he says, pushing back the chair and coming to me.

We fought before coming to bed. I slept on the east and him on the west of the bed.

"Ulale kahle?" He's wrapping his arm around me.

"Yes, I slept well, thanks."

"I will go to work after midday. We haven't had time together, I miss you."

Being nice won't make existing issues go away. We had a lot to say to each other last night, we won't be automatically okay because he canceled work and made breakfast.

He needs to take responsibility for his actions and tell me what he wants from me. Space or support?

"I made you breakfast. I don't know if you would've preferred your maize porridge instead, I've noticed that your food preferences have changed," he says.

“I will eat it, just not now.” I have to use the bathroom and freshen up. My body feels heavy, I need to get some fresh air, away from pretenders.

“Must I take it back to the kitchen and keep it in the microwave?”

“Yeah, do whatever,” I say with lack of enthusiasm.

I don't know what exactly offends him, maybe he thought I will jump and kiss him because he made breakfast. I feel him grabbing my arm and saying what I'm doing is wrong because he didn't go to work for me.

“We are not okay, can we make up instead of furtherly pushing each other away?” he asks.

“Why do you care all of a sudden?” I push his hands away.

“I've always cared. I shouldn't have moved the way I did, I'm sorry. Can we move to a better place?” He's turning this around, now I'm the hard one.

“Where is the better place for dear Mpatho? Club? DDR? Your friends? Where are we moving?” I ask.

“Can you stop already? You've dragged this too much. Make your point and move on. How long are you going to act like this?” He's the one losing his cool and yelling over my head, yet it's me who was abandoned.

“You acted like a vagabond for almost two weeks and you're tired of me for being angry at you for two days? Get serious, please.”

Someone claps hands at the door. This fool left the door half open, now I have Beauty in my business.

“Everyone can hear you two,” she says.

Mpatho releases a sharp breath, “Beauty please, just a minute.”

A minute for who? She walks in, still in her sleepwear, for once she doesn't look too indecent.

"What exactly is the problem?" she asks.

No sane person would tell Beauty what their problem is. I mean, that would be the day she starts strategizing how she can use everything against you, for pure bliss of fun.

"Nothing, we are fine," I say.

She turns her eyes to me, with a mockery smile.

"Fine? Look at your red face." She looks back at Mpatho, "I can be a good judge...no, not a judge, I mean therapist."

Judge is exactly what she meant.

"We are fine Beauty, thank you very much," I say again.

If I want to share something with her I do. I don't want her all over my business

"We are actually not fine," Mpatho says.

I turn my eyes to him, I'm furious. Is he crazy?

He doesn't even look at me, he just runs his mouth. "We are hardly ever okay aside from the issues that you constantly perpetrate between us. Phumelele doesn't love me."

Say what now?!

"Excuse you?"

"I'm talking to Beauty, you haven't been interested in talking to me, so please." He goes and drags the chair he was working on and gives Beauty to sit. He's really doing this, knowing how much Beauty wants us to separate.

"MaVilakazi is my biological mother," he tells her.

Beauty exclaims like she didn't know this already. "Oh, no. What? MaVilakazi is your mother!"

“I’m sure you already knew, she told you. I also heard it from her and her boyfriend.”

Okay, here it goes!

“Ex-boyfriend?” Beauty asks.

“I don’t know if he’s an ex. But I heard it from them. On the same day that I found out my mother has been next to me all this time is the same day I found out my wife still talks to her boyfriend,” he says.

I’m not surprised, I’m just disappointed. Finding his mother was supposed to be a bigger picture, I told him why Sphakamiso called me. He wanted to say goodbye and tell me the reason why he was leaving.

“Were you not aware that they were still communicating?” – Beauty, the therapist.

They’re talking as if I’m not in the room. Grandson and his slayqueen step-grandmother bonding over lies and manipulation.

“He triggers me, I don’t have to say it for my partner to know that. How Phume and I got together is not how they got together. Ours was never natural, we worked on it, we are still working on it. She did something that hurt me, I took her phone away and bought her a new one. She cried and said the old phone had memories of her mother, I brought the phone back. When people set boundaries I respect them.”

Beauty is nodding like she understands and feels sorry for him. All I know is that she’s recording this information for future use.

“I cannot eat food cooked by anyone. There are people she straight up told me I can’t be close with.” Now he wants to tell her about what I said regarding her female family members. Yes, I don’t want him next to them.

“If you’re my partner and you love me you’d try not to step on my sensitive spots. If you know that a certain person makes me uncomfortable, why would you keep that person in your life?”

Beauty looks at me and shakes her head. Disappointed therapist!

“Phume and I got married, at first it was a ‘help me, I help you’ situation. I never pointed a gun on her head, she also never squeezed me by balls. We both fell in love with each other, or so did I think. When things started going south it was because of Sphakamiso. I told her she can go and be with him. I gave her my blessing, I told her I’d rather not have her than to have her if she’s going to put constant reminders that I was never her first option; she didn’t choose me. She refused, she said she wants us to stay married. But to this day they’re still communicating. Who is fooling who?”

Beauty doesn’t hesitate to throw me under the bus. “She’s fooling you,” she says.

Now it’s my turn, I have to defend myself because beside kissing Sphakamiso, what else have I done in the last couple of weeks other than supporting Mpatho?

“First of all, Sphakamiso and I haven’t talked ever since that incident. When he called me he wasn’t using his number, I answered because...”

Beauty interrupts me; “What’s hard about changing cellphone number? You know he’s never going to leave you alone.”

“My phone has so many things I don’t want to lose,” I say.

“You’re 24, you know how to transfer files from one phone to another. You can change your number and share it with people your husband is comfortable with. Marriage is about making each other feel safe and comfortable,” she says.

I hate Beauty right now, she's licking Mpatho's ass, I don't know what she's trying to gain. She did things behind mkhulu's back, where was all this safe and comfortable talk then?

"She wants to keep that window open, she's got one foot inside and one outside," Mpatho says.

"Is this a gang-up?" I'm confused. All of a sudden they're sharing similar views and teaming up against me.

"I'm telling Beauty what's happening. I don't have any issue with anyone in your life. I don't even know who your friends are beside Ntombi. Maybe you have male friends, I don't know, I never check. There's only one person I don't want you to be close to and communicating with because you end up behind containers kissing him."

Beauty nods in agreement. "I totally get you. If there's something that makes you insecure your partner's duty is not to stomp her foot on that weakness but to uplift you and make you feel comfortable."

"Okay, if me calling Sphakamiso to confirm what he'd told me hurt Mpatho's feelings, why didn't he address it with me? Did avoiding me for almost two weeks help the situation?"

Now the therapist is quiet. Where are her quotes about communication and husbands coming home to their wives regardless of what they're going through?

"Are you telling me that you don't know how staying in touch with him makes me feel? Have we never discussed it before?" Mpatho asks me.

Beauty takes the plate with my breakfast and bites on the toast while forking the egg. That's my food, I was going to eat later.

"We did, but I feel like the reason him and I communicated last week was different, it wasn't about us, it was about you," I say to Mpatho.

“He said he was telling you that he loves you. Was I supposed to come back from MaVilakazi and discuss my feelings with you so that you can go back to him with a report?”

I don't know what he wants me to say. It happened one week ago, he didn't see the need to confront me and get to the bottom of it. I can show him my call logs, which is sad because no healthy relationship is like that.

“I have your back through and through. Why would you hold on to one stupid phone call and make me feel like a widow for almost two weeks? You could've shouted at me or did whatever, not ignore me and go to clubs everyday.”

“I wasn't at the clubs, I'm not a party animal, I wouldn't party from Monday to Sunday. I worked late, that was it,” he says.

“So that's what I deserved after everything I went through trying to find your mother so that you can have closure?” I can't believe I'm crying, I'm not a baby.

“Phume you can't cry to make a point. It's called emotional blackmailing. You did this when I asked you to change your number. Crying doesn't make you right. So because I don't cry I'm less hurt and more wrong?”

Beauty slurps the juice, my juice, and heavily clears her throat. “I think you're wrong Mpatho. She has a good point, plus she's crying. All she wanted was to find your mother so that you stop asking her for a baby.”

Now this I didn't need said, she's not helping the situation at all.

“Yeah, after all the baby will make it hard for her to go back to who she really loves,” – Mpatho.

Beauty turns her eyes to me, she's chewing. “Ummm, Phume you're actually wrong.”

I've lost counts of how many times she's changed her observation. She's in this for entertainment, not to help us resolve our problems.

"You're taking out your frustrations on me. When I told you I was going to call Sphakamiso you didn't contest. Now that you need an excuse for how you've been treating me you're bringing that up," I say to Mpatho.

"That's men for you! They will bring up shit from 2001 to save their arses," Beauty says, shoving a chunk of toast in her mouth.

At this point I no longer care about her presence and opinion.

"Okay, you can continue with him. Call each other, be happy," Mpatho says. I see the pain in his eyes but I know it's not me. It's MaVilakazi, he's just lashing out on me because I'm his easy target.

"I chose you, your mother didn't. I support you, your mother has never. I cook, I iron, I listen to you, I make sure that your bed is warm. Mind you most of these things I had to learn within two months. So if you want to talk about people not choosing you, that's your mother. Jump the road and climb the hill, go and ask her why she chose a ring over you, don't take it out on me, I wasn't there, I have no child." Maybe I'm harsh or too blunt. But nobody is perfect, he can't expect me not to make mistakes...even though this time around my communication with Sphakamiso was innocent from my side.

"It's okay, you're a good wife, I'm a horrible husband." He sits on the bed and takes out his phone and focuses on it.

"Ah but these eggs! At least you're not horrible in the kitchen," Beauty. I did say she's not really invested in this, Mpatho is wiping a tear that just dropped to the screen of his phone, my heart is breaking because I've never seen him shed a tear. And

I don't think he'd choose to do it in front of Beauty, maybe I went too far.

"You can check my phone," I say and call out the password for him.

He doesn't take the phone, he's looking down at his mutely.

I sit next to him and try to hold his hand. He refuses and doesn't lift his face.

"I love you, I'm trying my best to support you...."

"Try more," Beauty says. She's not even looking at what's going on now. She's eating, she doesn't care.

"I can use the phone you bought me. But I know that's not going to solve your problems and make you the happiest husband one can ever have. I have communicated the baby subject with you, we are not ready Mpatho, look at us."

"I want to be alone," he says, his voice is barely above whisper. He doesn't want to show any vulnerability in front of women, but I'm not going to leave him alone.

I look at Beauty, she's finishing the last drop of juice.

"Can you give us a moment?" I ask.

She turns and looks at us. She doesn't look affected by how we are sitting; Mpatho with his dropped and constant sniffs, and me with my hand on his knee with grief and regret on my face.

"When he speaks I feel like you're wrong and when you speak I also feel like he's wrong. So both of you are wrong. Two wrongs equal to right, just like two negatives equals to positive in Maths," she says, looking rather pleased than sorry. I don't know how this situation relates to Maths. We are having real life challenges, not Math calculations.

"Can you give us a moment?" I ask again.

“Yeah sure, this was thereupic,” she stands up and leaves the empty plate and glass behind. I’m not sure if it’s food that was thereupic or the fact that we are having problems.

I follow her and close the door.

Then I come back and sit next to him. I think one wall has been broken, I will give Beauty one star out of ten for the session. Now we can have this conversation...

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 58

PHUMELELE

“I know I made a statement that you’re 32 years old and shouldn’t be crying over your mother and whatnot. I didn’t mean it, I know there’s a boy in you that has been yearning and looking for a mother’s love. And I can only imagine how it felt when you found out that she hasn’t been wanting you to know her. I’m younger than you, I don’t know what you went through and experienced without her in your life. I had my mother and your father in my life. After I lost them I had you. I cannot sit here and say I know you feel or know the best way for you to deal with it. All I’m asking is communication, even if you don’t feel like talking just tell me, I won’t make you talk.”

“I don’t need her,” he says and pulls the chest of his T-shirt over his face and lies down on his back.

I wish he can trust me, I’m not going to judge him if he cries. In fact I want him to cry and release those emotions. I should be his safe place.

“You needed her at some point Mpatho and she wasn’t there,” I say.

“Not anymore.” It’s hard hearing him talking beneath the T-shirt. But I want us to talk, I will soldier on.

“What about a relationship with your siblings?” I ask.

“They hate me so I’m good.” He’s not good, not with his voice so shaky.

“You guys will be alright in time. They will understand, you’re not perfect, you didn’t have a mother to stand up for you and you made mistakes. They’ve also done mistakes.”

He blows out a sigh and sits up. “I don’t think anyone understands. When you lashed out on me because I told Nombuso that she needs to tell Malibongwe to get help, I knew that you don’t understand the position I’m in. When I killed Mcineka I was young, I had never killed before, I had no experience, no mental preparation for it. Malibongwe was 20, I put a lot of responsibilities on his shoulders. I don’t blame him for being angry, his life must’ve been the hardest. They didn’t have the privileges that you and I had growing up.”

“Okay, I get it. But I still don’t feel like he has to get away with things because he’s had a hard life. We’ve all had our shares, and his father wasn’t perfect, I know how he treated...” Oops, can’t say the name. “I just don’t think you letting him get away with everything will help him. What he needs is you going over and telling him that you’re sorry and explaining yourself.”

“He’s an emotional guy, I don’t think the situation will play out nicely. Yes, he’s street-smart, he can pull a move or two. But I can strike and I can defend myself, which can end up messy. I don’t want to hurt him, for his own sake. I know if we meet and he pulls a move I won’t sit back and watch. Fighting with him is what I don’t want to do.”

“Fine, take aboMaps with you, you both need to have that conversation. He also needs to know and understand that he also killed an innocent soul,” I say.

“Okay...why are you calling Mapholoba Maps?” Insecurities at play.

“I don’t even know which one he is, I just heard Beauty saying she’s going to chill with Maps,” I say.

He chuckles and shakes his head.

“Thank you,” he says.

“For Maps?” I ask.

He pulls his eyebrows. “Kwaduma uMapholoba manje kuwe? I’m thanking you for helping me. It wasn’t the best outcome, I didn’t receive it the best way, but I’m still grateful because now I know who gave birth to me.”

He’s ready to talk about MaVilakazi...

“Are you going to have another conversation with her or it’s done?”

“I think it’s done,” he says.

I take his hand and hold it. I’m on his side, if he doesn’t talk to MaVilakazi I won’t talk to her either.

“And the letters?” I know he wants them back for confidential reasons.

“I want them back,” he says.

I wonder what’s written in there, seems like deep stuff.

“What hurts me the most is that she knew everything I was going through but she never came and fought for me. I would’ve preferred to stay with her and eat whatever crumbs she was eating. I didn’t enjoy my childhood.”

“Why?” I ask. Nothing he’s saying is new, I know my mother was the main reason, he’s hinted on it a number of times. But he’s never really told me what made him consider her an evil stepmother beside ordering him to kill Mcineka.

“It was only good because I got the best bikes, expensive clothes, had the best room with everything a boy child would want, monthly allowance that could take care of families. But there are things that I can’t talk about to you as my wife, I needed to talk to my own mother about because I tried yours and she didn’t help me.”

“Maybe I can help,” I say.

“I’m okay now, we grow pair of balls and move on. I just feel disappointed that she was so close and even a situation like that didn’t move her. She must’ve really loved her husband. Or she took it how your mother took it; lightly.”

“Why didn’t you tell Mshazi?” I ask.

“My way to them was through your mother, I’m still living under your mother’s rules.” He breaks a chuckle out of nowhere. “I really don’t know what she did but they worshiped her like they owed their lives to her. There was something nje, your mother was that bitch.”

“She’s your mother-in-law now,” I say.

“Yeah, in hell, I’m glad she’s not around because this marriage would’ve happened how she wanted it to happen, on her terms and conditions. I’m happy she’s dead.”

Oh wow! No matter how badly she treated him, I’m still her child and I need my husband to support me through grief.

“I’m sorry,” he says when he sees that I’m offended.

If it was me who said this he would’ve gone MIA for two weeks.

“Must I go and make you breakfast again?” he asks.

I remember that I had breakfast that was eaten by a self-made therapist.

“Are you going to eat with me?” I ask.

He smiles, "If you ask and promise not to be cold towards me."

"I promise," I look at him and realize how much I've missed us. Our moments, the up ones, not the downs.

"You told Beauty that I don't love you," I say with a questioning look. I feel like that was unnecessary for him to say because he knows that I love him.

"I know you do and you have my back. And just so you know, I'm committed to my marriage, I haven't done anything that can break your trust. I know you think I have cheated on you, but the truth is I haven't even thought about it. I love myself, I don't go around dropping my pants."

"So what do you do in the clubs?"

"You should come with me and see for yourself."

Me in a club with him? It doesn't sound like a bad idea. He leaves to make another breakfast, I feel light, like something has been shed off my shoulders. I heard his concerns about Sphakamiso, I'm going to try and be mindful. But at this point I don't even think Sphakamiso and I are still compatible. I'm no longer that girl he fell in love with. Things are no longer the same, he will find his love somewhere else and I pray it will be something genuine.

I've been making breakfast for ages, it feels good to be spoiled for once. When he comes in I'm expecting eggs and mushrooms and toast; just like he did before Beauty. But I'm seeing two bowls.

"What's that?" I ask.

"Breakfast. I made you porridge."

Let me stand for this one. Porridge cooked in five minutes? I might need the recipe from him.

He gives me my bowl and takes his weetbix.

“This doesn’t look like maize porridge,” I say looking up from the bowl.

“It is, I found it in the cupboard, it said I can cook it for three minute.”

“Instant porridge?” I don’t understand how I went from eggs and mushrooms to instant porridge.

I think Beauty’s sister bought it the last time they were here.

“It tastes like porridge,” he says.

“Yeah but it’s for babies.” SMH.

But I will eat because it’s still porridge, I prefer it over eggs.

“There’s something I’ve been thinking about in the kitchen. Marriage counseling, I think we should go for it,” he says.

I’m surprised because last time I brought up anything that had to do with getting professional help he said he doesn’t want it.

“For both of us, right?” I ask.

“Yeah, I think Beauty’s intervention helped us getting some things off our chests. I really missed you but I didn’t know how to come back and act like things were fine. Professional help might even be better,” he says.

“Well, I’m in if you’re in. It’s something we should’ve done long time ago. We needed it before we even started. This is only second relationship I’ve been in but I don’t think there’s a couple that fight like us, the transition from siblinghood to partners wasn’t easy. I didn’t know you that well before, I had to learn you while unlearning what I had known as my identity and life.”

He nods then stares at me for a minute and smiles.

“What is it?” I ask.

“I hate admitting that people were right and I was wrong. We are not ready for a child,” he says.

I put down the spoon, I need to hear this well. Is he saying I was right?

“Please repeat,” I say with my hand behind my earlobe.

“You were right Phumelele, we need some growth and time before we start a family. You’re officially the brain of this marriage,” he says.

I’m relieved and happy. Now we are on the same page, he’s found his mother and agreed for us to go to counseling. I think this is going to be a great start.

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He wanted me to come with him to work. Now I’m a furniture in his office while he’s in a board meeting. I didn’t want to go there and look clueless next to him. I don’t think there will ever be time when I’d want to be involved in the company. I’m only interested in the money coming in and my boutique. I’m ready to start financial planning and getting Mpatho involved, I think he knows how to make things happen more than me. I have to buy property, it’s not a loaf of bread that I can just pay for and get. He’s experienced in the property business, he will know everything that needs to be done, checked and confirmed. I plan to hire Ntombi to run the boutique with me, whether she qualifies or not, I will give her the job.

“What did Ntombi do?”

I look up startled. “Heyyy!”

“You’re daydreaming about Ntombi,” he says putting his laptop bag on the desk and sitting on the guest couch since I’m on his chair.

“Was I thinking out loud?” I’m embarrassed.

He chuckles, “Yeah, I think you’re aging faster.”

“Damn, I was thinking about my boutique. Come and sit on your chair.” I get off and move to the couch. I love watching him occupying his leather chair, looking like a professional hard-to-get boss.

Before I sit down I feel like my head is spinning around and clutch on the couch for balance. I nearly go down on my face. He rushes to me and helps me sit down.

“What’s wrong?” he asks.

“I don’t know, maybe it’s the grapes.” I feel like throwing up but I don’t want to worry him, I can hold it in.

“Grapes don’t cause dizziness.”

My stomach is turning, I’m getting sick within a minute.

“Water please.”

He grabs the bottle on a desk and opens it for me. I gulp it down and get nausea out of the way.

“I will cancel the day, we are going to the doctor,” he says going to the telephone.

“Don’t, I feel better now,” I say.

“No Phume, you almost fell down in front of me. We are going to see the doctor.” He punches the telephone and calls the reception. Talk about dramatizing a situation, it was just a little dizziness and nausea.

I'm feeling even more better once we are in the doctor's room. This was unnecessary, waste of time and money. But for his sake I will cooperate and take whatever medication I'm given.

"Have you felt any dizziness before today?" the doctor asks.

"Yes, but it because of anxiety," I say.

"You were diagnosed with anxiety?"

"Google diagnosed me," I say.

"It's important to get professional diagnosis before making assumptions. Were you stressed when you had dizziness?" she asks.

"Yes, I was," I nod.

"Did you experience anything abnormal aside from dizziness?"

"Yes, change of appetite and sleeping patterns. I also googled it and saw that anxiety does that as well," I say.

"She was nauseous too, today," Mpatho chirps in.

"Oh yes, I also felt nauseous a couple of times before but it was a reaction to certain food that I don't like," I say.

She clears her throat, "How long have you had your implanon?"

"Five or six months," I can't remember correctly.

"I'd like to check it, please," she says.

"Okay," I'm confused and scared.

She walks out, I turn to Mpatho with my eyes wide.

"She's just checking, there's nothing, we are safe," he says and takes a deep breath. His right hand is balled into a fist, the other hand is wrapped on it. With that body language he's trying to tell me that we are safe.

The doctor comes back to inspect my implanon. I'm nervous as hell, I don't know what are the chances of something going wrong with it and if it did, what should I expect.

I hold my arm straight, she looks at it from the side view and shakes her head. Obviously something is not right.

"Did you feel any itching after the insertion?"

"Just a little bit," I say.

"Where did you have your insertion?"

"At my local clinic," I say.

Mpatho looks embarrassed, as he should. It was because of him and his grandfather that I had to walk by foot to the clinic, now I might be facing complications.

"It's too shallow. I don't think whoever did the insertion measured the site properly. It's way below your sulcus and too close to the skin," she says.

"What does that mean?" My heart is pounding.

"Don't worry, it can be easily removed, there's no damage. I will insert a new one, if that's what you want. But first I'd have to check if there's no unintended pregnancy, then prescribe something for nausea," she says.

She asks me to take a pregnancy test, I feel like I'm in a wild dream. Mpatho looks as shaken, we are scared of the outcome. This can't be happening a few hours after we took a step towards a positive future and agreed to work on us and our marriage with no disturbances.

"Doesn't it work if it was incorrectly inserted? Not even a bit?" He's stressed.

"It can work but not as effective," the doctor says.

"Okay," he says and releases a deep sigh.

Now we are united in fear waiting for the results. If it comes positive I don't know what I'd do, I really don't. I can't imagine a baby being raised by us; we are bad partners, I think we'd even fight on what the child wears and almost kill each other.

"I don't know if I should say congratulations or apologize; you're pregnant. I think this is my second experience of such case. I can refer both of you to someone who will talk to you, you can also take legal actions against the clinic," she says.

"I need water," I say, my head is spinning again.

I don't know who gives me water, I gulp it down and then find strength to curse at everyone who's responsible. The nurse, and my mom who left her brain on earth now she can't do one thing for me as an ancestor, and the minister of health and the president who nominated him.

And lastly but not least, Mpatho.

"I told you that we should wait for a year at least."

"Phume you know that I..." I raise my eyebrow before he says it. I know he didn't do it on purpose, but whyyyy?

He looks at the doctor, "Did you say we can sue the clinic?"

Oh Lord, we are bad parents right from the start. Imagine this baby growing up and finding out we sued the government after finding out that he or she was coming on earth.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 59

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I'm going home and I'm no longer alone. I'm carrying someone, in less than eight months my father will be a grandfather. I'm

not sure how he's going to take it. Heck, I don't even know how I'm going to break the news to him.

Bonga took me to Unified Auto and Repair. I helped him name the store, they've done some work, now you can see this building is being turned into something. There's a lot of space at the back, I think they're building a shelter for vehicles.

"I think we will be up and running in two months," he says.

"And I will be hired, huh?" I'm still on the fence about it, I just don't see what kind of job I will get here.

"Yeah babe, you will handle the books," he says and pulls me to another side. They're setting up for an office. It's small, but for someone who's never had an office it's enough.

"I don't know if I'm that good with Maths," I tell him.

"You will learn, I will be here with Mkhuleko, we will all figure it out."

"And Sphakamiso too," I say.

He turns and looks at me. I don't know if he gave up or made peace with Sphakamiso being gone. But I know he made an emotional decision, he needs to be here, not only for the money, but emotional support from his siblings as well.

"We will go and bring him back," I say.

"He's in Durban, living with some guys in hostel. I don't think he even considers coming back, not after finding out that Mpatho is actually our older brother."

"We will try, it's not safe for him there, he already has a bad name with the police. I think if we bring him here he will see how much work you've done and consider it. Since you're a millionaire you will help him get a room to rent, vele you are all too old to be staying at home fighting for food with your sister, except the baby boy."

“If my mother hears you say that she will hate you,” he says laughing.

“She already hates me, I don’t care.” Yes, I’m still holding on to that, I’m not happy about it. So he must expect some confrontation whenever I see his mother I will definitely ask her a few questions.

“I want us to be positive with everything. My mother easily misunderstands things, maybe I shouldn’t told you because now you’re making it a thing. She’s old, she’s 57 years old, there are things she just misinterprets and run with them. Once she gets to know you...” Bla bla bla! I’m not buying that shit.

“I will come to report the pregnancy,” I tell him.

He looks at me with his forehead creased. “Okay, when?”

“I don’t know, I will talk to my father first. I don’t even know who he’s going to ask to accompany me, my aunt is late, his cousins don’t live close to home. There’s only him and Njabulo at home.”

“Do you think he’s going to be angry?” He looks worried.

Of course he’s going to be angry, which father has ever rejoiced over the pregnancy of his unmarried daughter?

“If you do things accordingly he won’t be angry,” I say. Growing up I always heard people saying damages shouldn’t be requested, it must be a man who takes responsibility without being told. But not me, I need that cow and goat.

“You’re going to pay inhlawulo soon, right?” I ask.

It doesn’t look like he expected that question. But he nods.

“Yes, I will pay, it’s my child,” he says.

“You’re going to send one cow because I wasn’t a virgin?”

“No, you don’t have a child, you’re a first time mother and it’s my doing. I won’t send one cow, that’s not how my family’s tradition works.”

Talk about relief! I can imagine what my village would’ve said if inhlawulo came as one lonely depressed cow accompanied by a goat. Embarrassment!

“Yoh, the questions you ask!” he says pulling me for a hug.

Maybe I talk more than I should. But if I don’t ask then how would I know?

I wonder how much he’s going to give me. But this one I won’t ask, I will just pray for it.

We say goodbye to the guys and head to the rank. He can’t drive me home because of some commitments he has today. I won’t do groceries today, I will go home first and make a list of everything that’s short then go to the supermarket tomorrow. Today I will just buy umngenandlini; breakfast items, some snacks just in case there’s a child coming to visit Sis’ Miyanda, my father’s ox liver and his Boxer tobacco. God forgive, I will buy a six pack of Castle Lite and a packet of cigarettes for Njabulo. If I don’t he will hate me until I come back.

We start at Spur, I’m pregnant, he thinks I have to eat after every two hours. I don’t know how many things I left in my freezer; he keeps buying things that he guesses might be my pregnancy craving. I don’t know of any woman who’s ever been forced to have cravings. Is it not supposed to come natural?

From Spur we go to the butchery to buy my father’s ox liver. He’s paying with his card, I scan one for R200 and then add some goodies in my trolley. From here we are going to the Bottle Store for Njabulo’s alcohol.

“How do I know this is for your cousin though?”

I turn to him with a confused look.

“So you think I will drink it myself?”

“No, but I don’t know if you left some skhotheni back home.”

Really now? I know he jokes a lot but WTF.

“Do I look like a blesser? Don’t worry I will for it myself.” I make my way to the counters and put the pack down and fish for my purse from the bag.

I was hoping he was going to stop me. How come he understands and likes pregnancy cravings but not moods? I didn’t mean it.

The cashier scans it, when I took it I didn’t check the price, the thing costs over R100.

“My sister you don’t have any specials?” I mean come on, it’s month-end.

“No, not for Castle Lite. Cash or card?”

Jesus Christ! I turn and look at the babydaddy. He’s standing behind me with his hands tucked inside his pocket. He shows no sympathy.

I have to represent strong black women and soldier on. I pay with a broken heart, no woman deserves this.

“So you’re really mad at me?” I ask once we exit the store.

“No, I thought you were the one angry at me and ‘doing your own shit’.” This obviously amuses him. Being angry over the comment he made doesn’t mean I should pay for things with my own money while he claims to be a millionaire.

“Where to from here?” he asks.

“Let’s go and buy some ice-cream,” I say.

“Do you like ice-cream?” His voice rises in excitement.

If I say I do he will be buying it until I’m diagnosed with pneumonia.

“I like it today,” I say.

He takes me to KFC, he’s back to paying for my things. He doesn’t eat ice-cream, he watches me with fascination.

“For once you’re eating something nice with my baby without complaining,” he says.

“But the baby isn’t eating,” I tell him.

“Oh!” he looks disturbed by this discovery.

He’s so silly, he thinks when I eat ice-cream the baby- not even a baby yet- licks ice-cream from the womb too.

“The baby only gets nutrients from what I eat, I’m the only one who savor the taste,” I say.

“That’s sad, but I will spoil him once he’s born. I don’t want my baby to grow up in poverty, that generation ends with us. Sphakamiso will be able to spoil Aphelele once the business starts running. Nombuso too.”

His fighting spirit and resilience is what I’m attracted to the most.

“I love you,” I say.

“Oh, that’s nice. Do you want another ice-cream?”

I laugh, he never takes me seriously when I need him to. I wasn’t saying that because of ice-cream.

He takes me to the rank, we spend a moment inside the car kissing like we won’t see each other in two days. The big moment finally comes; he’s taking his wallet.

I avoid looking directly at him as he counts the notes. But you know how uncontrollable the eye is, I keep glancing through the corners. Why is he even counting it though?

“This will get you home,” he says handing me a stack of R100s.

It will get me home, buy my groceries tomorrow and do more.

“Thank you,” I kiss his cheek.

He pulls me for a proper lip kiss.

“I will come and fetch you on Sunday. Take care of yourself.”

“You too, I will call you when I get home,” I say.

“No, call me when the taxi leaves and when it drops you off, then when you get home. You have enough airtime on your phone,” he says.

That’s an overload of communication. But whatever makes him smile, I will do it.

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I was happy about the money throughout my trip. After I sat safely at the backseat I started counting it and realized that I was rich enough to buy a few dresses and go to the salon to relax my hair and still do everything I planned to do at home.

But now the taxi has dropped me, I’m five minutes away from the Mthethwa homestead. I still haven’t thought of how I’m going to tell my father that I’m pregnant. If I don’t tell him someone will see me and tell him, I don’t want that, him and I are too close. Even though he hide his relationship from, but that’s the story for tomorrow morning.

I call his phone, I know I will get Njabulo because he’s the new owner of it.

“Mimi,” he answers.

“Hey are you home?”

“Where else would I be? I have chores.”

He just doesn’t have anywhere to go for the day.

“I’m here on the road, please come and fetch me.”

I don’t have much luggage, just my small bag and three shopping bags. But I have his alcohol, he needs to come and see how he hides it from my father. He drinks, my father knows, but he still can’t just do it in front of him.

The moment he appears and sees the Tops bag next to me he forgets that I’m even a human being he hasn’t seen in a while.

“Uyindoda gazi!” he says in ecstasy. Apparently it’s a compliment when a woman shows strength and gets accolades of being a man. In this case my strength is being able to buy alcohol.

“Sawubona nawe gazi,” I say.

He laughs and bumps my fist. “Sorry gazi, I forgot to greet when I saw izinyembezi zikaQueen. Look at you, awusemuhle!”

Of course I’m beautiful, how can I not be after buying him his favorite?

“Is dad home?” I ask.

“Yeah, but he’s expecting you tomorrow, he said you get paid late today.”

“I had some money, my salary is yet to report,” I say.

“Is there a sbari who looks after you?” The way he reads situations easily shocks me.

“No, not really. But what would you say if there was?”

“Nothing, you’re grown, sbari is needed,” he says.

Something in me doesn’t like the Malibongwe and Njabulo combo. I don’t wish for them to ever meet, even if they do I don’t want them to get close.

My father is my everything. I love Nyambose, he’s an extraordinary father, I don’t know if any father who’s loving like him in this village. There wasn’t anything he didn’t do because he’s a male parent. When I had my first periods he was there with me, doing his best figuring out how we were going to handle the next stage of my life. He dealt with me in my teenage years, I wasn’t easy to handle but he soldiered. I’m in my last twenties now, he’s still my first love.

He’s sitting on the bench under the shade of the rondavel, watching us as we make our way through the yard.

Njabulo takes left and goes to the rondavel he sleeps in. I have to go and greet before going to my room to put away bag.

“Nyambose,” I put everything down and shake his hand.

“Hhayi wena, not even a hug? You haven’t been seen your father in months. I thought you were planning to only come for my funeral.” Nothing bores me like death talk.

“I just got home baba and you already want me to be sad. How are you?”

“Sengiyaphila now that I’ve seen my daughter. Let’s go and inform your mother that you’re home.”

I no longer get sad over it. I remember most of my life talking to my mother through impepho, I hardly remember how it was like having her as a physical being.

I put my bag away and follow him inside the rondavel. He takes the lid of impepho and burns it, then he tells my mother that I've come home from work. He loved my mother, I think he still does even now, nobody can fill that void in his heart. That's why I'm curious to know what's the deal with Mam' Zonke.

"What's the latest?" I ask as we walk out.

"Kufe inkomo kaKhuzwayo," he says. (Khuzwayo's cow died) This is the best update my father can give me. I don't know why I still bother, things could be happening, people falling pregnant for other people's husbands, and my father would only tell me about dead cows.

"I heard that his wife fought with MaZondi from Nkwalini," I'm trying to fish for real news.

"Abafazi balwela ubala, women fight over nothing. What we are really concerned about as the village is that kunamasela ezimbuzi, two of Manqina's goats were stolen last night."

I'm going to fall asleep if this type of update keeps coming up. When Njabulo's mother was still alive she collected the juiciest gossip and brought it home. I guess the talent is not genetic.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 60

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I prepare dinner, Njabulo is supposed to act sober, him showing drunkenness will not only put him in hot waters, but me as the provider as well. Nyambose is eating his liver with pap. Njabulo and I will have rice and chicken, that's if he eats tonight.

I have to use this opportunity to break the news. If I had a mother I would've told her, then she would've passed it to him.

"Nyambose I have a question," I say.

He's already eating; sprinkling salt on his juicy liver and eating it with a bowl of pap.

"I wonder...go ahead and ask," he says.

"Remember when Zama fell pregnant and her father told her to pack her bags and leave? Most people said he did the right thing because she disrespected him. But I think that was cruel, Zama was grown, mistakes happen."

"Okay, and your question is?"

"What did you think of the situation?"

"I think her father did the right thing."

I almost drop the spoon inside the pot.

"Hawu baba, such cruelty! I don't think a good father would do that to his child, especially because boy children get girls pregnant and suffer no consequences from their fathers. It's the double standards for me," I say.

"I still stand with him," he says eating my liver.

I don't know if he really would cut me off or he's just saying for me to stay on the safe side.

"Is that what you'd do if it's me who get pregnant?" I ask.

"Yes," he says.

"Baba!" I can't stop tears from rolling down.

That's so unnecessary. I'm 29, Malibongwe said he will come and pay for the damages.

“Hawu MaNyambose, now you’re crying for Zama?” He’s laughing at me. Sometimes he’s cold, I thought it was the salt, but now he has someone in his life but he’s still like this.

“No, I’m crying for me,” I say.

“Maybe you can stop being umatetema and tell me what’s going on.”

Tears always work magic with fathers. They can’t handle their daughters crying. Miracle salty water!

“I’m Zama,” I say.

He raises his thick eyebrow, “You’re no longer my Miyanda?”

“Baba I met a guy, his name is Malibongwe Mcineka, I got too excited about the relationship and ended up disappointing you,” I say.

“In what way? Are you pregnant?”

I drop my eyes, “Yes.”

“Oh, so you were doing a research. This Mcineka boy, does he work?”

“Yes, he works at a hardware.” I don’t want to say a lot of things.

“Can that job maintain a child?” he asks.

“Yes, he said he will maintain and pay for the damages.”

“And marry you, right?”

“Yes,” I nod.

He laughs until he chokes on the liver. I don’t know what’s so funny.

“Even Njabulo self has promised people’s daughters marriage. But because they were raised well and they respected their

fathers they told him to go to their homes and prove himself first,” he says.

“But I know Bonga will keep his promises,” I say.

“Ngizwa ngawe.” He has no hope at all. I don’t blame him though, it’s what happens nowadays, men hardly keep their promises.

Njabulo walks in, he’s taken off his T-shirt. I cringe when I see how many tattoos he’s got now, almost his whole chest is inked.

“Uyabukhetha utshwala, you buy the best alcohol, jealous down!” he says.

Nyambose looks up, it’s obvious that Njabulo is now drunk. A drunk Njabulo is destructive and crazy. This puts me in a bad position, I’m already in the bad books.

“Who bought alcohol?” he asks.

I look at Njabulo, if he calls my name nje I will never...

“Mimi is a shining star,” he looks at me. “Don’t worry gazi, I made sure he doesn’t see it, yikhehla eligugile leli.”

I don’t want to see my father’s face right now.

Njabulo opens the fridge and takes a knife out of his pocket and slices it. Then he stops and shakes his head, “Yazi Mwelase takes me for granted, I don’t know why I didn’t hit him yesterday.”

Here we go again! Unfortunately it’s all on me this time around.

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AT THE MCINEKAS

Malibongwe drives in and parks in front of his rondavel. They haven't seen him in a while. When he's away he doesn't bother communicating, they know that he's still alive because he talks to Mkhuleko on Whatsapp. MaVilakazi's dislike of Miyanda is growing. She's completely taken her son away from him. But a smile covers her face when she sees him offloading grocery from the car.

"Nombuso come out and help your brother," she yells.

Nombuso emerges from the house dragging her sleepers, the apron she's wearing exposing her right thigh. It's hot, she's walking around without any bra.

"Ma why are you saying it like someone is here?" she asks.

MaVilakazi turns to her, "Don't you see your brother?"

"It's just Malibongwe, he was probably kicked out by his girlfriend." She drags herself to the car and takes a few shopping bags from the ground.

"Ya," she says to Malibongwe.

"Sure bafo," Malibongwe says, not paying attention to the attitude she's trying to give him. Obviously she's angry at him because he's not home often anymore to listen to her daily rants.

"Why did you come back?" she asks.

"This is my home too. I can come back anytime I want," – Malibongwe.

"Even if you're going to find people you hate?" she asks.

"Who said I hate anyone? I hate the company, not people, you're all still my family." He looks at her and smiles. "You're my sister, the one and only princess on the throne."

“Mxm, you don’t even call me when you’re with your girlfriend. I’m sure she’s heard only bad things about me,” she says, turning away.

“She actually sent her regards,” he says behind her.

She looks back, “Really?”

“Yes, she can’t wait to meet you again.” Lies just pour out of his mouth unprovoked. Miyanda hasn’t even hinted on getting to know Nombuso. They had that moment after Mkhuleko was hospitalized, they’re likely to never get along.

“I thought you both hate me. You even ignored my call when I wanted to tell you something serious,” she says.

“Was it about someone pissing you off?”

“No, we will talk about it after you’ve talked to your mother.”

They put everything on the table. Malibongwe goes to MaVilakazi; she’s still his mother regardless of the decisions she took that none of them liked.

“Uphunyukile namhlanje kunoxhaka?” MaVilakazi asks.

He takes a deep breath, he can do this without getting emotional.

“Sawubona Ma,” he says.

“Yebo. It’s good to see that you finally remembered who raised you and graced us with your presence,” she says.

“Is Mkhuleko home?”

“He went to his friends. My one and only son. I gave birth to four but I only have one left. Maybe I’m suffering for my sins,” she says.

“I bought some groceries, Mkhuleko told me you are running out of food,” he says.

“Okay,” – MaVilakazi.

He shakes his head and takes two steps and turns around.

“I’m having a baby, things will have to change,” he says.

MaVilakazi’s mouth drops open. She’s shocked beyond words.

“A baby with that Miyanda girl?” she asks.

“Ma, she’s just Miyanda, you don’t have to call her with an undermining tone. Yes, we are having a baby, she will come and report the pregnancy in no time.”

“She must come, I’m waiting for her. I know her type, now that you are having a breakthrough she wants to trap you with a baby. I’m not that old, I will take that baby and raise it, she will continue living in her shack alone.”

This is not a reaction Malibongwe expected. A baby is the big deal. It’s an innocent soul that’s coming, his first born. His mother should be happy for him, at last he’s found love, he’s no longer on their faces yet he still takes care of them. What more can he give? He’s only with Miyanda because she gives him one thing this family can’t give; peace.

“Unoxhaka ngempela le ntombazane,” MaVilakazi says clapping her hands in disbelief.

Malibongwe saves his breath and walks back inside the house.

“What have you done?” Nombuso asks. She’s dishing food for him. They get along easily. Unlike others, Malibongwe is just easy to sister.

“I told her I’m having a baby with Miyanda, she’s angry,” he says.

Nombuso’s eyes widen. “A baby? How long have you known this girl?”

“Does it matter? We love each other and I will protect her from what I experienced in this family. I’m not putting her and my child through any of this,” he says.

Nombuso clears her throat. “But I’m the aunt, there’s no child that grows up without an aunt.”

“There is, and if you’re going to be nasty towards Miyanda I will strip you off those aunt rights without any hesitation,” he says.

This has never happened. Even Sphakamiso never told her she’s no longer Aphelele’s aunt regardless of their differences. This Miyanda girl is coming with changes they’re not comfortable with.

“Congratulations ke!” Nombuso says. It doesn’t come from a sincere place.

“Anyway I wanted to tell you that I went to see Nkosiyazi after the funeral of his helper. He gave me the number of a traditional healer who was there doing things to avenge the death,” she says.

“I’m good, I can take care of myself,” he says. It wasn’t his first killing experience, he knew how to protect himself from such. It’s a common practice, he saw it coming.

“But that’s good of him, isn’t it?” Nombuso asks.

“Good of who?” He frowns.

“Nkosiyazi. If it was someone else he wouldn’t have warned you. He’s really sorry about what happened, he’s sweet just like you once you get to know him.”

He takes the food, “Thanks.”

“So do you think there’s any chance you guys can sit down and talk?”

“Mpatho will always be Mpatho to me. I didn’t think you’d replace me within two weeks.”

“I didn’t replace you, I just felt like he was done wrong by our mother, by the way he’s our brother whether we like it or not. I didn’t want him to think we don’t want him just like our mother didn’t want him.”

“Okay, good for you,” he says.

Nombuso’s phone rings. She looks at Malibongwe with her eyes widened.

“I swear I didn’t send him anything,” she says in a low whisper.

Malibongwe looks at her confused. “Who?”

“Nkosiyazi, he’s calling me,” she says.

“I’m sure it’s not the first time, answer him, he’s your brother.”
He focuses on his food.

Nombuso getting along with Mpatho won’t last. She only likes him because he’s not in their lives and she just found out about him.

“Hey how are you...I’m happy to hear from you...yes...it’s sorted, don’t worry about it...say you’re joking, she’s pregnant?” She covers her mouth and looks at Malibongwe.

He stops eating and listens to the conversation.

“I’m becoming a double aunt,” Nombuso says and looks at him again.

He puts on a face, nope, not his business!

“Story for another day. But I’m so happy for you, I can’t wait to spoil that baby.”

Malibongwe slips into laughter. It doesn’t even sound right hearing the word ‘spoil the baby’ coming from Nombuso. Even Yoli gets spoiled once a month.

MaVilakazi walks in just as Nombuso gets off the call.

“You won’t believe this Ma, both Malibongwe and Nkosiyaazi are expecting babies.”

MaVilakazi is confused. “What do you mean?”

“Makoti is pregnant, he just called to tell me, they’re having a baby.”

MaVilakazi puts her hands together in a praying gesture.

“That’s a blessing. That’s what he’s been wanting, having his own family. God has answered his prayers. My prayers too.”

“You can hear how happy he is over the phone. He says it was a surprise but they’ve both accepted the news and they’re ready. I hope it’s a girl, Yoli is bored.”

“Do you think he will ever allow his child to play with Yoli?”

“Yes, it’s only you he hates because you abandoned him.”
She’s not that sensitive when it comes to people’s feelings.

MaVilakazi’s smile disappears quickly.

Malibongwe is watching them celebrate. The first pregnancy news didn’t excite them this much. Whatever they say about animals in a farm, some are better than others.

A text message beeps on his phone;

CAN WE MEET AND TALK?

MPATHO.

He loses his appetite.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 61

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Bonga is finally going to talk to Mpatho. I can hear the worry in his voice. I give him the assurance that everything is going to be okay. He's learning and growing everyday. What I like the most is that he's prioritized being a father before the baby even arrives. I know he won't do anything stupid. I believe in him.

"What time should I come to pick you up?" he asks.

"4pm, I want to spend more time with my family. I'm also meeting with Nyambose's girlfriend tomorrow," I say.

"I thought you said you don't like her?"

"My father likes her, I don't have a say, I will meet her and be a child that I am. After all I cannot act up, I'm still guilty in this family."

"Don't worry, I will make things right. I love you, okay?"

"I love you too, call me later," I say.

He promises and ends the call.

I'm in my room, I hear a car driving in. It sounds like a big vehicle, maybe a truck. I walk out to check, indeed it's a truck. A truck delivering a set of black leather couches. I'm the only one working in this family, I didn't purchase any couch, what is this?

The driver reverses and stops right on our yard. The neighbors come out of their houses and clean their yards. It's just a strategy, they want to see what's happening.

Before I go to the truck, the driver and Njabulo climb out of it. Now I'm worried, at first I thought the guys got a wrong address.

"Gazi where are these couches coming from?" I ask.

"I won them," he says.

I'm not stupid.

“What competition?” I’m worried. I don’t see Njabulo winning any competition, unless if he bribed someone.

“Go & Win A Couch,” he says.

This competition name doesn’t even make sense. Go where?

“Bhuti is this true?” I ask the driver.

“Yes, he won them.” What else was he going to say?

They offload them from the truck, Njabulo tells me to clear the sitting area and throw away our old brown couch.

I won’t lie the house now looks good. I just pray we won’t be sitting on anyone’s tears.

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MALIBONGWE

He called Miyanda first, he needed to hear her thoughts. If she’d said no to the meeting he wouldn’t have gone. Maybe that’s what MaVilakazi is scared and jealous of, for once there’s a woman given him what she failed to give him. The hatred comes from a place of envy and insecurity. Miyanda is coming back tomorrow, she advised him to go because this meeting is what he’s been wanting. However, things are different now, he’s going to be a father and that changes his whole life approach. With everything he does he needs to make sure that nothing comes between him and being present for his baby once he’s born. Miyanda grew up with one parent, the last thing he’d ever want to do is make their baby experience the same thing.

The next approval had to come from Sphakamiso. As much as he's away, claiming to start his life over, Mpatho being a part of their family affects his emotional state more than anyone's. He already found out that he's not a Mcineka by blood.

Malibongwe cannot choose Mpatho over him, they've been brothers from birth. If he said he didn't want Malibongwe to have a sit-down with Mpatho it wasn't going to happen. But he said it's okay, personally he doesn't need any closure regarding Mcineka's death, he's cool with it, but for Malibongwe's peace he told him to go ahead.

Mkhuleko was coming with him but he changed on last minute and said he has other commitments. Mkhuleko and Nombuso have accepted Mpatho, they did the very first day they found out he was Nkosiyazi. He didn't surprise Malibongwe that much, he's the youngest and oddly the one who understands life more than anyone. Nombuso was a surprise, she's usually a hard nut to crack and team-Malibongwe whenever shit hits the fan.

He chose to come in a Tazz, Unified seemed like a good place to meet up, it's outside of town, half done inside and excluded from the noise. He's waited for over ten minutes, he's not still, he's pacing up and down down with his breaths steady and deep. All he wants to know is why his father had to be killed by a 22 year old. The reason must've been valid, whatever his father did to Mpatho and his family must've been horrible.

Finally there's a car pulling up outside. He stands behind the entrance and eagerly waits. The first two men that enter are wearing dark green clothes and they have guns. Bloody bodyguards!

He should've known this is the kind of disrespect Mpatho would show. When he enters Malibongwe's emotions are already high.

“Labo bhova bafunani la?” he asks.

Mpatho looks at one of them, “You can wait outside Mapholoba, thank you.”

They sternly look at him before doing so.

“Why are you coming with security?” Malibongwe is fired up.

“Why wouldn’t I? I just buried my aunt because of you.”

“That’s on you,” Malibongwe says.

Mpatho looks around for a place to sit. There’s no furniture in this place, they’re just going to be standing. He takes a deep breath and raises his eyes to Malibongwe. He’s taller, two shades lighter than him and looks more like Nombuso than any other sibling. There’s nothing but anger and hate in his eyes.

“I want to know what he did,” he says.

Mpatho takes a shallow breath and looks around again. Only if there was something to sit on.

“Can I ask Mapholoba to get me something to sit on?”

“No, akukhona ekhaya konyoko la, stand.”

“Fair enough,” he says. He promised Phume that he was going to take whatever Malibongwe gives to him. He came here to apologize and explain himself.

“Nothing justifies what happened. I’m not going to point fingers, I’m just going to tell you what happened,” he says.

“Go ahead,” – Malibongwe.

“Your father had a disagreement with my father. Your mother too with my stepmother. I didn’t know what it was about but now I can guess that it was about me. Something happened to me when I was 13 and it affected most of my teenagehood and early twenties. One day my father called me to a meeting with my stepmother and told me I had to do something to prove that

I wasn't weak, I was going to lead and protect my wife and the legacy."

Malibongwe's jaw tightens, this crossed his mind a few times; Mpatho killed his father for a show-off. It was a game of power.

"They said your father knew something about me, which I assumed was what happened to me when I was young, and he was going to expose me to the whole world for it. My reputation was at stake, so was my manhood. Without those two qualities I wasn't going to qualify as a future leader of the family. I had to do what I was told I needed to do."

"So you killed my father based on suspicion that he knew something that had happened to you in your father's mansion?" Malibongwe asks.

"Yes, I was 22 years old. What was I going to refuse for? I didn't have anyone to turn to, I didn't know any other parent than my father, I didn't have anywhere to go. I wasn't trying to be an orphan and let go of everything I had and was promised to be given over a man who kept cursing my life even when it was just me and him. Your father never showed any remorse or begged for his life," Mpatho says.

If Miyanda wasn't pregnant today he would've chosen between death and jail. On a normal day he wasn't going to listen and take this bullshit.

"Was he supposed to beg?" He's shaking with anger.

"If I'm tied on a chair, starved for days, getting accused of something I didn't do, I would've told the person exactly what I knew and pleaded my case. But your father never did, I took it what my parents told me was right," Mpatho says.

"Are you proud of yourself?" Malibongwe asks.

This is when he should say he's sorry and be remorseful. But no, he's not going to lie.

“I was sorry for the last ten years of my life. Even yesterday I was sorry. I killed a man for a reason I didn’t even know. I made his children grow up without him. I made his wife a widow. It’s been a burden I carried with me for a decade. My heart would break everytime I thought of it. Sometimes I’d give out food and blanket donations and pray that his wife shows up. I’d feel relieved everytime I saw her name among the receivers.” He shakes his head like he’s disappointed in himself. Then he looks at Malibongwe, his eyes reciprocating the anger and hatred.

“But today I don’t feel sorry at all,” he says.

Malibongwe’s nose flares up, his jaw tightens again. The only thing stopping him from giving up either his freedom or life is the thought of Miyanda and his unborn baby.

“By God’s grace, I was just returning a favor. The same way he forced my mother to give me up and cut ties with me from the moment the nurses cut the umbilical cord because of the stupid lobola he’d paid for her, is the same way I separated him from his family, FOR GOOD.” He’s daring, he says it on Malibongwe’s face, for the last ten years of his life he’s never felt this good about killing Mcineka.

“I didn’t have the best life. My father wasn’t loving, I was told my nanny was my mother and she’d abandoned me, I was told I couldn’t bond with my step-sister because we had to marry later in life and continue the legacy. All that wasn’t going to happen if your father had accepted me the same way he accepted Sphakamiso. I don’t care if I was going to starve and sleep on the floor, at least I was going to experience what it felt like to have a mother, just like the rest of you. But no, he had power to cut me off my mother’s life because he paid lobola, nami-ke I had power to kill him because I was a son of soul-less millionaire. You can now do your worse!” He unzips his jacket and throws it on the floor. Mapholoba, or should he says

Maps like his wife, is outside but he's not going to call them to intervene. This is between him and the son of Mcineka.

"Mother's eldest son of choice!" he says lifting his face to Malibongwe.

Malibongwe takes a deep breath and keeps quiet. His anger has subsided, he didn't expect an explosion from Mpatho's side, a justified one at that.

"But I will apologize because that's what you need to move on. I don't want to keep coming here, I don't want to talk to you, I know how much you hate me. I know how it's like to lose a parent, I lost a mother at three weeks old. So I'm sorry for what you went through, you and Sis' Nombuso and Mkhuleko." He doesn't count them all.

Malibongwe keeps a straight face, he's no longer angry.

Mpatho breaks a chuckle, "And Sphakamiso, if he cared."

Right, Sphakamiso did not care.

Malibongwe inhales sharply.

"That's it from me, I hope you find peace. And congratulations, I heard that you're going to have a baby," Mpatho says.

Another sharp breath from Malibongwe.

"It's yours they're excited about, so congratulations to you," he says and takes out his phone. This meeting is done.

Mpatho heads out, leaving his jacket on the floor.

"You're leaving something behind," Malibongwe says.

He doesn't turn back, he's leaving it behind. Mapholoba sees him coming out in one piece and lowers his gun. They go to their respective cars and leave.

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PHUMELELE

It didn't go well, I can see it on his face when he walks in. I leave Beauty on the kitchen chair and follow him to the bedroom. He's no longer wearing the jacket he left with. Did he fight?

"Please tell me nobody got hurt," I say.

"Nobody got hurt," he says taking off his T-shirt and unfastening his belt.

I need to close the door, privacy is scarce in this house.

"Why are you angry pho?" I ask.

"I'm not angry. We met and talked, we didn't fight."

I sit down on the bed, he stands in front of me and puts his hands on my shoulders.

My face is turned up; I'm trying to read his. Even though he's denying it I can see that he's angry.

"Give me a kiss," he says.

I hold his neck as he leans down and kisses my lips. I can trace a smell of alcohol as he kisses me. I hope he didn't drink before going to Malibongwe, that would've been disrespectful. He doesn't want to let go, he's needy and twirling his tongue in my mouth, sucking my lips and pushing me down on my back.

"Babe!" I push his chest, I need to breathe.

"You still don't want to try?"

"Try what?" I ask.

"You know what I asked for. Please give it a try, we won't go all the way in."

“All the way in?” I’m confused.

“I will pull out before I cum. I just want to be inside your mouth.”

I can feel everything I ate turning inside my stomach. I know people love exporing and all that, but really, I have a vagina that he says is soft and warm, why is it not enough?

“I’m not ready,” I say.

I hear him taking a deep sigh, Sphakamiso can relate to this moment. I’m not going to change my mind, I’m really not having a dick ice-cream at this time of the day.

“Please, I’m horny.” He lies next to me and puts his hand inside his pants.

“We can have sex, normal sex,” I say.

“I don’t want it,” he says.

I’m offering myself, he’s giving me attitude.

“Oh hho, sort your yourself,” I say sitting up.

He gives me a sulky face. “I don’t see why you don’t want to have any new experience with me. We are married, if not with you, then who must do it with?”

That’s not going to work with me. I stand in front of the mirror and check if my waist still moves. It’s hot for crying out loud, who’d want to burp sperms on this weather?

“Ntombi and I have a signature dance. Do you want to see it?” I can’t give him what he wants, the least I could do is entertain him. In the next few months I might not be able to dance because of Baby Implant.

He doesn’t answer, I turn to look at him.

“Mpatho, do you want to see the signature dance?”

“Mxm!” he turns and sleeps on the other side, facing away from me.

I tried, I gave him two options; normal sex and a signature dance. He refused both, I'm not the cause of his problems. I will be my own audience; I will dance and watch myself.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 62

PHUMELELE

Mpatho is used to me babysitting him. That's what I've been doing for the last couple of weeks. I didn't let him be, I always followed him and begged. But those days are over, I've never been a too-kind type, I was just soft because he was dealing with some heavy stuff. Now that it's over I need him to understand that I'm the youngest in this marriage. The tantrums should be vice-versa, they are not going to move me anymore.

"Where is Mpatho?" Beauty asks, walking into the kitchen. She's changed into another dress, I don't know who she's trying to charm because Maps has left.

"He's in the bedroom taking a nap," I say.

"Is he pregnant?" She doesn't know yet.

I will tell her once she's abroad and unable to pull any trick. She never mourned her baby, she doesn't even talk about it.

"I'm leaving on Wednesday, I need you to keep an eyes on my business," she says.

"Hhayi-bo Beauty, I have other things that I'm doing. Why don't you ask your sister, slash PA, to stay behind and keep an eye?" I ask.

“No, she’s coming with me, she’s never been out of the country. Remember you owe me, I’ve done a lot of favors for you,” she says.

“A lot? Count them for me, please.”

“I slept with Phumlani to milk information. I sacrificed my mental health listening to your marital problems. You’re part of the reasons why I’m going on a vacation; you’ve been too much. I need time out.”

I should’ve known those were favors, not family coming through for family.

“So what do you want me to do exactly?” I ask.

“Just check with Shaun and get updates of how the sales are going. If they’re dropping call a meeting with the marketing team and come up with strategies. I need at least 30 cars bought in a week.” She’s crazy. That has never happened with her present, why would it start when she’s away? 30 car sales in 7 days in this South Africa?

“By the way he fancies you,” she says with a giggle.

“Who?” I ask.

“Shaun,” she says.

“I’m married, I don’t entertain crushes. How long will you be gone?”

“One month and four weeks.” Beauty thinks she’s a Maths genius and I’m just a fool who can be easily confused.

“That’s two months, it’s a very long time, I have a wedding to plan, a boutique to start and I’m...” Grip, Phume! But yes, I’m pregnant, I can’t be working two jobs.

“Your lobola hasn’t even been sent, that wedding will happen after a decade, if it ever happens. I know that Mpatho doesn’t like weddings.” She has started with the mind games. If this

was a month ago I would've went to Mpatho all fired up. But now I can say I know how Beauty twist things and work on people's nerves and insecurities.

"Yours was ugly. Didn't you plan properly?" I ask.

That strikes right on the nerves. She's looking at me, eyebrows snapped.

"No, say you don't remember well. My wedding was featured on two magazines."

"But it was a low-budget wedding. I remember how dull the décor was, people were laughing," I say.

"Who were those people?" She's fired up.

"I didn't take names but I remember the whispers. I will make sure I don't hire your wedding planner, she clearly learnt it from her grandmother," I say.

"Bonnie planned it, she's the best in town. In fact the best in everything, Mpatho can testify on this. That girl was wild!" She grabs a cucumber and takes a knife and leaves.

"Why are you taking the cucumber to your room?" I'm not comfortable, we eat cucumbers, why are they going to private rooms?

"I'm going to eat it," she says.

I don't believe her. That cucumber is going somewhere else. I'm grossed out!

Beauty is still better at mind-games than me. I'm sure in her bedroom she's not affected by what I said about her wedding being of a low standard. I'm bothered about what she said about Bonnie being wild. Mpatho told me about his bedroom desires, I don't have any because I'm less sexually experienced. I don't want to be a boring wife who creates a

room for external sexual fantasies in her marriage. There are things I can compromise on.

I walk in and find him lying on the bed with a laptop on his lap.

“Hey there,” I say.

He looks up, “Hey.”

I take off my slip-ons and sit on the bed.

“Are you busy?” I ask.

He drops his eyes back on the laptop. “Why are you acting nice?”

“I’m always nice. Do you still want a blowjob?”

He looks up again, this time he’s wearing a frown.

“Two hours later? No, thank you.”

“Why do things need to always happen on Mpatho’s time?”

“Oh hell, the spirit of meanness and fighting is back! You told me no and danced in the mirror for ten minutes while singing shady songs, then walked out. Two hours later you’re coming back and finding me on my own, very peaceful, and you want to fight?”

Now that he puts it like that I feel a bit guilty.

“I don’t want to fight, I want to cuddle,” I say.

He gives me a look. “Hhayi wena, I’m busy nje.”

“It’s Saturday, why are you working on the laptop instead of your wife.”

He sighs and puts the laptop away. “Woza-ke...I’m so glad I got married. This life is so nice.”

For that two-shades statement I will lie on top of him, my whole weight is going to be on his chest. And I dare him to say I’m heavy!

I peck his lips a few times then rest my head on his chest.

“Your natural hair is beautiful,” he says running his hands on my head.

“I know, thank you,” I say.

He chuckles and plants a peck on my forehead.

“I feel free yazi. Leaving here I didn’t think I’d say the things I said to him.”

“Kanti what did you say?” I ask.

“I told him that I’m not sorry. His father was the reason why I grew up without a mother.”

Thixo ngenelela!

“But you went there to apologize hubby,” I’m shocked, to say the least.

“If I apologized and didn’t express myself the way I did I wasn’t going to make sense to him. I played on the emotional level, that’s his language. I think he understood, I don’t see him forgiving me, but I don’t see him harassing me again after today.”

I don’t know what to make of it. It’s both good and bad. They’re siblings at the end of the day. Before there was a Malibongwe, Mpatho had lied across the womb of MaVilakazi.

“I don’t like her but I think Nombuso doesn’t have any ill feelings towards you. This is going to be hard on her,” I say.

“She doesn’t have to choose me,” he says.

“Come on, I know you’ve been calling her and sharing things with her.”

“Yeah, but if she chooses Malibongwe and cut me off I will understand. There are many issues at play. There’s also a case

of your ex-boyfriend.” At least today he prefixed it with an ex. He’s right, it’s a tricky situation.

“Who do you not see yourself having a relationship with the most?” I ask.

“Him. I think from both sides, it won’t be easy. At least Malibongwe wanted to have a conversation, that one packed his bags and left the village. I don’t even see him wanting my child to call him an uncle.” He’s concluded about Sphakamiso. A lot of people misjudge Sphakamiso, I don’t know what is it with him.

“He’s not cruel, I’ve known him for 6 years. He only becomes emotionally unavailable where he’s getting hurt. I think you and him have so much in common, you won’t believe it.”

“Because Mcineka wasn’t our father and we love you? That’s not a lot in common. He’s got a thing about him, dark thing.”

“How can you expect him to appear light in spirit when you’ve sent the police to harass him for no reason, when MaVilakazi allowed her husband to mistreat him and had to give up his son because of how Nombuso sidelined and made the poor child sad? He lost his job over unverified criminal charges, unemployment is the worst thing any man can survive, especially if they don’t have a supportive family.” I’m surprised that he’s still holding me and letting me lie on his chest after all this Sphakamiso talk. This is his trigger, he said it in his own words.

“You know me inside and out. You know my dark side, vulnerability and even tears. I have no reason to lie to you about him losing his job. I didn’t do it,” he says.

“But you sent the police the other day, I know you did. That was wrong Mpatho, both him and I didn’t know of the arrangements that were made by my mother. Blame it on her that you were

told to prepare to be my husband but the same responsibility wasn't given to me."

"I know," he says and lifts my face.

I look at him, his eyes are locked on mine. For us to have this conversation means we've moved to a better place. I needed to hear his thoughts, he needed to hear mine.

"Let's not worry about the unknown, it won't change our fate," he says.

I nod.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I always wish I wasn't employed and forced to leave home when it's time to go. But today the feeling is not that heavy, obviously because I have someone I'm looking forward to be with. Two days away from him feels like a lot. He's already here, parked down at the roadside. He found the place easier than I thought.

I'm ready to go, I'm just saying goodbye to Nyambose.

"I don't know how I'm going to deal with this pregnancy of yours. If you had traditionally introduced yourself to the boy's family it wouldn't be too complicated. Now I can't take you there, I'm a man," he says.

We were supposed to have this conversation this morning but Mam' Zonke came over. I already knew her but not on a personal level. I don't have much to say about their relationship, I will just wait and see where it goes.

“Bonga knows that I don’t have a mother, he will understand,” I say.

“No, his elders need to know that he’s done some damages. When you come home next month I will have a plan, don’t worry about it.” He’s stressed, this is what I didn’t want to do to him.

“Okay baba, I will call you,” I say.

“Ndlelanhle, take care of yourself. If you can’t work anymore come back home, alikho ithuna lendlala, nobody has ever died because of hunger.” He’s never put any responsibility on me, I just knew that I needed to take care of him when I’m grown. He took care of me too, I’m not going to come back home, I will hustle no matter what happens.

Njabulo walks in. “Hey hey, kukhona umshini opake la ezansi. I’ve never seen that car around.”

My heart almost jumps out of my throat.

“You didn’t hijack him, right?” I ask.

Two pairs of eyes sternly on me.

“Who is it?” Njabulo asks.

Yooooooh!

“It’s Bonga,” I say, not looking at my father’s direction.

“Yeses! This is a loss, yazi I was ready to be rich,” Njabulo. He looks at my father and clears his throat. “I was going to help him if he was lost, I’m sure he would’ve made me rich, that’s what I meant ankela.”

This one thinks my father is too old.

“Call him in,” he says.

My eyes widen out of their sockets.

“Angizwanga baba?”

“I said call him in, I want to see him.”

Father God, why have you abandoned me?!

My father is a traditional Zulu man, I don't know why he'd call a boy who impregnated his daughter to come in his house. I don't even know how to prepare Bonga for Njabulo and my father. He will figure this out on his own. I don't know why Nyambose wants to see him.

I lead him through the door, I can feel his discomfort and fear.

Both Njabulo and Nyambose are seated on one couch. Njabulo has already put on a prison gangster face, I don't know why he's scaring him.

“Sanibona,” he greets squatting on the floor with his head dropped.

“You're Malibongwe?” – Nyambose.

He steals a glance at my father. “Yebo baba, I'm Malibongwe.”

“Sit on the couch, wena Miyanda go and check if my goats are not in Sibiya's garden.”

Never! I love and respect my father very much, but I'm not leaving Malibongwe alone with them.

“They're not, I saw them, they're over the road,” I say.

He gives me a stern look, I drop my eyes. I'm really not going anywhere. Njabulo is already looking at him like he's planning a murder on his mind.

Nyambose shifts his attention back to Bonga. “My daughter said you promised to marry her and made her pregnant. How many cows do you have?”

“Cows? Ummmh, I’m in the process of buying them.” Gosh, he’s stuttering, even a 3 year old child would not believe this.

“Good. When can I expect them?” Nyambose though, he can see that he’s lying.

“Ngizocela uNyambose engiphe nje two months to sort things out with my business.”

“You have a business?” Nyambose looks at me. “I thought he was working at a hardware. What kind of a business is it?”

“She was right about that, the business is not running yet,” Bonga says.

Njabulo crosses his legs. “Cosu Cosu yaphela, imnandi inganekwane yakho. Now folktales aside, what gives you the right to come inside my uncle’s house?”

Hhayi-bo these people!

“But Nyambose asked me to call him in,” I say.

“Did I?” Nyambose.

“Baba!” What the heck are they doing?

“And he really came knowing very well that he’s done some damages here. Hhayi mfana weRover I applaud you! Isbindi onaso!” Njabulo says standing up and rolling his sleeves.

I stand up too. “What is this?”

I don’t know why Bonga is still sitting down, Njabulo is a hardcore criminal.

“I’m sorry, I made a mistake,” he says.

I look at him. What mistake? They called him.

“Leave him mshana, he’s apologized,” Nyambose says.

Njabulo returns to his seat. My chest is pounding. They’re both laughing.

“Get him something to drink,” Nyambose says.

I’d be damned if I leave Bonga alone with them.

“She’s his security guard ankela, don’t worry I will go and get it,” Njabulo says standing up.

I stand up too. There’s no way I’m allowing Njabulo to make a drink for my boyfriend without anyone watching. He laughs when he realizes that I’m following him.

“You really love this guy. You were even ready to take punches for him.”

“I hate your game, futhi nje that’s harassment,” I say.

“No, he must be shaken a bit, he’s too comfortable. Give me a glass of whatever you’re giving him, I’m also thirsty. Tell him to buy me two beers.”

Wow, after almost punching him now he wants beers from him!

“To thank me for not hitting him,” he adds.

Life is wild, I tell you. Imagine thanking someone for not hitting you.

I prepare drinks and take them in a tray to the sitting room. I see some people coming, I don’t recognize the faces.

I put drinks on the table.

“Baba there are people outside,” I say.

Before he can get up and go check, one of the women is already standing at the door. She’s wearing a purple uniform with Khokho Furnitures badge.

“Sanibona, does Njabulo stay here?”

My heart drops to my feet. What has he done now?

“Yebo, you can come in,” Nyambose says.

The woman signals for others to follow.

“We are not even going to waste your time because we’ve already seen what we came here for. A few days ago there was a robbery at our furniture shop, Njabulo was identified by CCTV footage. We got his address from the truck driver he hired to deliver couches.”

Our couches? The ones we are sitting on?

“But he won them on Go and Win A Couch,” I say.

“No, we’ve never had any competition. These couches were stolen, it’s either we take them back or open a case of robbery and theft against him.”

To say I’m embarrassed would be an understatement. Bonga is sitting on the couch enjoying some juice after almost being assaulted by Njabulo.

“Babe they want the couches,” I say.

Nyambose looks angry and disappointed. We all thought Njabulo has repented.

Bonga gets off the couch, two guys lift it up and carry it out. They come back for the three-seater and another two-seater. Where is Bonga going to sit now? He looks confused by this whole situation. Nyambose walks out to talk with furniture collectors outside, he’s probably apologizing.

“I will get a bench,” I say. I can’t even look at Bonga in the eyes.

“Hawu the couches are going?”

Was he deaf this whole time?

Njabulo is in the kitchen, I’m going to kill him.

“Yazi gazi this is not funny, you just embarrassed...” Who am I talking to? There’s no one in the kitchen. He probably saw them coming and didn’t even warn us. All along I’ve been talking like

I come from a healthy background to Bonga. I don't think he will ever forget this.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 63

PHUMELELE

He's scared. I don't know what's scary about meeting a professional marriage counselor. It's not like we are going there for heavy duties, just sitting and chatting about life and marriage. I've never attended any but it can't be that bad.

I unwrap a slab of chocolate and break a few bars before climbing out of the car. He's undone three buttons of his shirt, he's sweating. I'm glad the counselor is a male, he looks carelessly sexy with a sneak peak of his chest exposed.

"Don't be scared, I will be with you nje," I say trying to be a supportive wife, even holding his hand as we make our way towards Freedom's counseling office.

"That's why I'm scared, I'm doing this with you," he says.

"Why does that make it scary?" I'm confused because I'm an easy company, I'm his wife, if there's anything that bothers him I should be the first to know.

"I don't know, I have a feeling that it's going to be hard," he says.

"Are you trying to say I'm hard to be around?" I'm seriously offended.

He links his arm around my waist and pulls me one step away from the door and onslaughts me with a kiss. There are a few

people in sight, I don't want us to look like that annoying couple that's always showing-off.

"Mpatho," I whisper with my face cupped between his hands.

"You're easy to be around, I love you." He kisses me again.

The door opens, it's Freedom himself. This is awkward but he smiles.

"Are you guys here to give me positive feedback or to get counseling?" He's a well-spoken young man, melanin dripping, with a healing deep voice.

"We are here to get counseling," I say, I'm still recovering from embarrassment.

"You can come in." He looks at Mpatho, "There are bathrooms on your left, just after the passage."

Mpatho chuckles, "No need, I'm okay."

"Alright then, please come inside and feel welcome."

His office is not that big but there's space between everything. I thought I'd sit next to Mpatho and hold his hand since he's scared.

"Are we not allowed to sit closer?" I ask.

He flashes a smile, "On the second day you will sit closer."

I sit on my chair, Mpatho sits on his. He doesn't look comfortable, I don't know why he thinks I'm going to judge him based on what I hear here. I mean, I've seen and listened to him at his worst moments.

"Hello once again, I'm delighted to have you here, and congratulations on taking this bold step. Marriage counseling isn't for couples who have challenges in their marriages, but it's for couples who have a desire to know each other and

themselves better, individually and in union. My name is Freedom, I'm a qualified marriage and relationship counselor and I will be your friend, brother, father, teacher, and shoulder to cry on to both of you for the next three sessions that you booked."

There's something about his voice, I think this thing is his calling. Because as soon as he spoke I just calmed down. I glanced over Mpatho, he's still tense. Freedom looks his age, I think that's what makes it more uncomfortable for him.

"I will start with you," he says looking at me.

I should've looked scared too.

"If you can introduce yourself to me, who would you say Phumelele is."

I thought we were here to jump right into our marriage problems. I prepared a list of things that Mpatho do, which I wanted Freedom to call him out on.

Sigh! Who is Phume?

"I'm 24 years old, I'm a wife and a mother to-be," I say.

"Outside of those two roles and your age, what does it mean to be you? What is Phume passionate about? Describe yourself."

Gosh, this is hard.

"Ummm, I'm passionate about fashion." This is actually a lie, I love fashion but I've never had passion for anything for too long. I think he can see that I'm lying too, I mean he's a professional somebody who get paid for sticking his nose in people's relationships and marriages. I like him though, I like listening to him talk, he's got a healing voice.

"I never had a wide set of dreams. I had everything growing up and I wasn't allowed, or rather pushed to dream big. I don't know what it means to be me, I don't think I've ever belonged to

me. About myself, I'd say I'm shy but I'm protective of myself and those that I love."

"Do you feel like marriage is going to give you back Phume?" This question suffocates me. I don't know how to answer and not look somehow. I'm happy, at this point I've accepted and embraced everything that comes with being Phume.

"No, I don't think I will have me. I have a husband and I'm going to be a mother," I say. I don't want to look at Mpatho's side. This is just introduction but I already feel like we are in too deep and falling apart instead of growing strong.

"What is it that makes you want to stay in marriage?" -Freedom.

"I've always wanted to get married, I think that's been always a dream for me and a relationship goal. I had two parents growing up, what I had is what I wish my children to have."

The nods he gives when I'm talking are encouraging, I feel like he understands everything I say, I make sense.

"And what is it about your husband that made you fall in love with him and see yourself spending the rest of your life with him?" What a question!

I take a deep breath and look at him. Him and I know how it happened. These questions are easy to answer for those couples that saw each other and fell in love.

"That he looks like that, he has muscles and big fists, he can fight my enemies for me," I say.

At long last he laughs. I understand why he was scared of coming here, these questions need one to be honest about themselves even when it's harsh.

"When I married him I did not love him. It took a while for me to even see us having a future together, let alone spending the rest of our lives together. We had common goals, that's what layered our marriage in the first place. We knew that we were

better together than we were apart. Apart we were going to face many challenges, mine were mostly going to be financially and starting over on my own, without a family. I can't speak for him but I know he was prepared to play a husband role on me since his late teens. So that's what he was psychologically comfortable to settle into, not exploring new people and stuff."

"Has anything changed or you're still together because you're scared of not being together?"

"Yoh Freedom, I don't think the fear is no longer there. Mine is no longer financially, even though I love his money. But I don't think anybody can understand me the way he does. I hate to admit this, but my mother kind of knew the kind of a person I am and how much patience and understanding I'd need. I'm not perfect, I'm far from it. For me to get out of my bubble I needed someone who'd help me take baby steps. I also think he brings out the best in me. He brings out a woman, I've discovered a lot of strengths I didn't know I possess."

Freedom smiles and looks at him. "How do you feel hearing all this?"

"A bit relieved," he says.

"Weren't you expecting it?"

"No, because I ruined her life."

"Did he ruin your life?" Freedom to me.

"No, I don't think he did. We both did what he had to do."

"Thank you so much for opening yourself up to this. Now I want to speak to your husband, we are just doing introductions as individuals," he says.

Mpatho already knows what's next. He looks a bit relaxed now.

"I'm Mpatho, I'm a husband, I'm a businessman, I love guns..."

Now what?

“I guess that’s why you went to the army,” Freedom says with a nod.

“No, that’s not why, generally I just love guns. I think with men it’s between cars, music and guns. She’s complained that I’m stingy because I don’t change my car, well I’m not into cars, my sport is guns. I also love family, except my mother and step-grandmother.”

Beauty is not a bad woman. Okay she is, but she’s not bad on everything. His mother, yes we don’t love her.

“What is it about marriage that you love the most?”

“I want to have kids, I want them to have mom and dad. That can happen outside of marriage but I want it to be in the union I’ve committed myself into and vowed to be in till the end of time. I want to give my heart to one woman and be in one place.”

“Is that woman her or it can be any woman who’s willing to do that with you?”

“I want it to be with her, I’m comfortable and happy with her.”

Why am I smiling like a fool?

“When you heard that you were going to marry her, were you happy?”

My smile disappears...

“I don’t think so. But it was a good offer, they knew what my dreams were and they assured me of their reality,” he says.

“When did you fall in love with the idea of her being your wife?”

“I became comfortable with it,” he says.

“If she didn’t end up with you were you going to be hurt? If plans had been changed.”

“No,” he says.

“Now if plans change would you be hurt?”

“Now yes, I’d be broken,” he says.

“What is it that you love about her and see your future brighter with her?”

He blows out a long sigh. His answer is not immediate. He’s thinking what makes him love me like it’s a tricky Math question.

“I’ve been growing, I’ve confronted parts of my life that I never thought I’d ever deal with, I’ve broken down and cried about the things that hurt me, I’ve exposed myself to my weaknesses and learned to communicate with her and with myself better. She challenges me. Even though she believes I can fight better than her, I think she protects us more than I do.”

“Is there anything you don’t love about her?” Why is Freedom asking this question now. There’s nothing not to love about me.

“We’ve talked about it, she doesn’t make me feel good about my insecurities, I think she plays on them a lot. And that hurts me because I don’t do that to her.”

Jeez! How many times do I have to hear this?

“But I stopped, didn’t I?” I don’t understand why he’s still bringing this up. I thought we were over the Sphakamiso issue.

“He asked a question,” he says.

“Yes, but you could’ve said it in a past tense, don’t make it look like I still do it.”

“Okay, I will wait for your instructions on how to answer the next question.”

I look at Freedom, hopefully he sees through this.

“He holds grudges, that’s what I don’t love about him.”

“You were not asked that question,” he says.

I look back at him. “This is not your session alone. I’m telling him what you do too. You bring things that happened ages ago when there’s a new fight.”

“You’re a bully, that’s what you are,” he says.

My whole body itches everytime he uses this word on me.

“Let’s take a minute to breathe,” Freedom says.

The minute I’m taking is to have some chocolate, that’s the only thing that can calm me down at this point.

“I think in whatever a person communicates or argues, manner of approach matters a lot. You can mean well but how your tone sounds will evoke a different reaction. With you two it’s different because you got married first, before getting to know each other well and seeing your level of compatibility. It’s going to be more challenging if you don’t work on how you talk to each other.” He looks at me.

Am I the one at fault?

“Look at this,” he says and faces Mpatho.

“ ‘I’m sorry that happened, I wasn’t aware that it still hurts you, I’ve been doing my best not to let it happen again.’ When people talk about their feelings you don’t argue with them, after all it’s how they feel. Acknowledge what you did and allow them to heal on their own pace and time.”

“Okay I’m sorry, I just...it’s not something I did intentionally. Fine, at times I did because he was pissing me off, but we talked about it,” I say.

“Do you think you bully him?”

I’m very glad Freedom is asking this question, hopefully we can let this word rest after today.

“I don’t think so. But if I do he can give me a few instances so that I will be aware and know where to work on,” I say.

“That’s a good approach, I’m glad you’re already learning,” – Freedom.

“I’m not expressive as you are Phume. You know you can talk from morning to sunset and that’s why you pick fights with me. It’s always your way or highway.”

“Give me instances,” that’s all I need.

“Is this the first time I tell you this? Why must I remember scenarios for it to be valid?”

This man! I just had a compliment from Freedom, now he wants me to take ten steps back.

“You can’t just create things in your head and then call me names. How can I bully someone who is two times bigger than me?”

“Being bigger doesn’t mean anything, you know that I love you and I want us to have a peaceful relationship, I will agree to everything you say and keep my feelings in my chest. Today is my first time hearing that I’m somehow a good husband to you. At every chance you get during a fight you tell me that I’m not a good husband, knowing very well that I have certain insecurities. I’m trying, okay?”

“Have you ever told me that I’m a good wife?” I ask.

“Have I ever made you feel like you’re not a good wife?”

“Yes, you called my food ‘YouTube food’ and sometimes you don’t eat when I cook.”

He swallows his pride and keeps quiet.

I lean back on my seat and keep quiet too.

“Mpatho, is there anything that you want to work on?”

He takes a deep breath and nods. “I want to work on everything. I want to be a good husband and I want her to know

that I'm giving my everything. And yes, I'm going to appreciate her for doing all that she does in the house."

"And you Phume?" Freedom looks at me.

"Manner of approach. And I want to be mindful of the things I say to him because sometimes I just say things to hurt him or provoke him, not necessarily because I mean them."

"I'm looking forward to seeing the results, I believe in you both and I'm glad you are both recognizing your own flaws," he says.

"Are we done?" Mpatho asks.

"For today, you both did amazing."

He gets off his chair and comes to me. He pulls me up and gives me a long hug. We've said a lot about each other, even though I feel a bit light I'm still worried because we are so flawed.

"I'm really sorry about the food issue," he says.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 64

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I never thought I'd have a room full of snacks and all the delicacies that I love and hate. I came back from work and sent one text telling him that I'm tired. One hour later he was here with food. I love the soft treatment, it's exaggerated but I'm not complaining.

"I was thinking of taking you out for dinner," he says.

"But I just ate, where do you want us to go?" I ask.

"Not me and you, you and my sister," he says.

“Your sister Nombuso?” I crack into laughter.

What makes him think I want to dine with Nombuso?

“I want you guys to get to know each other,” he says.

“But she doesn’t like me, you heard her calling me names. Now I’m sure it’s even worse, girls inherit their mother’s beefs,” I say.

“I don’t care about my mother, she can hate you or love you, nothing will change how I feel about you. But Nombuso is my only sister, I want to give her a chance.”

“Did you tell her already?” I ask.

“Yes, but I said I will confirm with you first then fetch her.”

“Okay, I will go.”

Personally I don’t care whether his sister likes me or not. His mother too. Mkhuleko and Sphakamiso like me, that’s something. I’m not going to be liked by everyone, even Mandela had haters.

“Thank you,” he says.

“When are we fetching Sphakamiso?”

He blows out a sigh. “I know that you want to see us together and I appreciate your concern. But sthandwa sami he’s not going to agree, I’ve spoken to him several times.”

“What if I ask Nombuso to come with us? She’s the eldest and she’s the only sister.”

“She’s the main reason why he left in the first place,” he says.

“Then she needs to self-introspect and apologize. I think her coming will make a difference.”

He laughs, “Nombuso apologizing? That would be the day your cousin

wins a real couch competition.”

That again! Njabulo gave him something to talk about, I will never hear the end of this.

“It wasn’t my first time actually seeing him, I know him from somewhere,” he says.

This makes me uncomfortable, I didn’t think their level of crime was the same. Njabulo commits even petty crimes, we once had our cable burning at home, he told us his friend had an extra one and went to the supposed friend to ask for it. Next thing we knew the village chief was issuing a warning because someone had taken his cable at night and left a burnt one at his doorstep.

“Where did you meet him?”

“I think he’s one of the guys who once robbed our hardware.”

Njabulo is undefendable. I can’t say it wasn’t him because those are the type of things he’s capable of.

“Let me go and fetch Nombuso,” he stands up stretching his arms.

“Okay, I will get ready,” I say.

He lifts my face for a quick peck and then ties his shoe laces.

“Please put on a warm top,” he says.

“Yes dad.” I don’t think he still remembers that before I fell pregnant I was an independent woman. I can still use my own brains, feel when I’m hungry and pretty much take care of myself.

Another kiss and he’s out of the door.

I’m not sure if I should pray or bath with a bathsalt before meeting with Nombuso. I don’t know what to expect, I’m going there for Bonga’s sake, I know he’d put an effort in knowing my family too if I asked.

They're probably on their way here by now. I need to get a jacket, I haven't done laundry in a while. I check Bonga's suitcase, he's got some clothes packed in here that he never uses. There's a leather jacket folded on top. It's very heavy, I pick it up and look at it. A whole Versace jacket! I sniff it, this is not Bonga's cologne. I don't know what to think, I will put it back inside but after putting it on. I need to feel how it's like wearing a jacket that costs like a second hand Yaris. It's even big, Bonga doesn't wear this size, he's slimmer than this.

I put it on and stand in front of the mirror. Something drops on the side of my tummy, I jump and almost trip on my feet. No, it's not something dropping, the thing is moving inside me. This is a witchcraft jacket, I take it off and throw it on the bed screaming. My hands are trembling as I dial Bonga's number.

"Babe, I'm pulling up outside the yard," he says.

"Bonga this jacket, it has tikoloshes," I'm crying.

"What jacket? Wait, I'm coming." He drops the call.

After two minutes I hear footsteps coming. I'm standing against the wall, the jacket is on the bed, I'm scared to even get closer.

He walks in with his eyes widen.

"What's going on?"

"I put the jacket on, I just wanted to feel it and then something inside my stomach moved." I'm still shaking as I narrate the story.

Nombuso walks in too, I will discuss her make-up later.

"What moved?" she asks.

"Something in her stomach," Bonga tells her and then looks at me, he's freaking out too.

“Is it still moving?” he asks.

“No, it moved twice and then I threw the jacket away. Whose jacket is this? It’s full of witchcraft,” I ask.

“That’s Mpatho’s.”

Oh, shit!

“You’re pregnant, you’re still going to feel more movements in your stomach,” Nombuso says.

Gosh, I feel so dumb.

“Is it not early?” I ask.

“It is, but that’s a Mcineka, we know each other,” she says.

“Huh?” I’m confused why she’s talking like this is already a baby, according to Life Sciences that I excelled with a whopping 67%, this hasn’t molded into a human being yet.

“You put on Nkosiyazi’s jacket, with all that’s happening, Malibongwe hating him while he’s our blood, you really thought the innocent soul would’ve stayed still.”

I look at Bonga, he looks uncomfortable with this analysis. I’ve been with him, with my father and all my closest people that I hold deeply in my heart, why didn’t this little kicker didn’t move all along?

“I’m ready to go,” I say.

He comes to me and hugs me. I’m still shaking, that movement was weird.

“Our baby is active, let’s be happy,” he says.

Both him and I know the truth, we are not kids. The first kick came after I put his eldest brother’s jacket on, one man he plans to have no relationship with whatsoever.

He brushes his lips against mine, brushing my tummy with his hand.

“I love you,” he says in a low whisper.

I’m lost in his eyes, just getting calm. Then a forced cough...

Sis’ Nombuso! We totally forgot.

“Let’s go,” he says to her.

She steps out of the room. I didn’t even think about her being inside while she was inside. She probably looked at everything and found faults to report to her mother.

I lock the door and follow them behind. I’m not even offended when she opens the front door. I mean she’s Nombuso, the queen. This is her brother’s car, nobody can tell her anything.

I sit at the back, I can’t stop touching my tummy, I was so scared I didn’t even allow myself to feel those movements.

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Bonga dropped us and left. We are in the same restaurant where Bonga and Mpatho had an argument. I don’t know what impression he gave his sister, maybe he told her he owns this restaurant because she’s feeling way too big.

“I want Coke,” she says to a passing waiter.

He’s so kind, he calls our waiter and tells him to attend.

“Can’t he go and get it? He’s also a waiter here,” she’s complaining.

“He has his own table. I thought you said you wanted juice, he even asked if we would like to add or change anything and we both said no,” I’m confused.

“I can have both Coke and juice, it’s my brother’s money.”

I put my hands up; okay mam, your restaurant, your rules.

“How is your son?” I ask.

“She’s a girl...she’s fine.”

“And my friend?” I ask.

“Who is your friend?”

“MaVilakazi, I’m sure she sent regards, I heard that she can’t wait to meet me.”

She starts coughing. I keep on a poker face.

Our waiter comes and takes her Coke order. I’m sure he will be back again after a few minutes, Nombuso is Bonga’s only sister, just in case they don’t know.

“Yes, she sent her regards,” she says.

“I’m sending mine as well.” I try not to laugh. I’m glad she cares enough not to hurt my feelings.

“Bonga wants us to know each other better,” I say.

“Are you his straight girlfriend?” What a question!

“I’m his only girlfriend. That’s why he wants us to start the skwiza vibes.”

“I’m sure he doesn’t want his baby to grow up without him.”

“Yes, he’s going to be a good father. I don’t know if it’s his father or my friend MaVee who taught him so well,” I say.

“Well, he grew up in a good family. How about you?”

“I was raised by a single father, he did a good job.”

“Oh, you don’t have a mother?” For a second I see sympathy in her eyes.

I love that she looks like Bonga. She’s a female version of him, just that he’s thin and she’s big. She could be a beautiful woman, she just needs to acknowledge that she’s not 50 years old and act her age and start dressing up like other women in

their late thirties. Why is her head always wrapped? She's divorced.

"My mother passed away when I was young," I say.

"I'm sorry to hear that." Surprisingly, she has a heart.

"It's the circle of life. I grew up, I survived, now I'm about to become a mother."

"Did you plan it?" This is my friend MaVee asking, she sent her to ask if I'm trying to trap her son with the baby or not

"Yes, I wanted to get pregnant by him," I say.

She tries to act normal but her eyes give the shock away.

"That's amazing, you must love him so much," she says.

"I do, I love him," I say.

"He loves you too obviously, he even left home because of you."

"Was it really because of me?" I ask.

"Who is keeping him in her house? Oprah Winfrey?"

"I'm not keeping him, he's there because he wants to. Did Sphakamiso leave because of me as well?" I ask.

"Sphakamiso left to look for a job."

"Bonga offered him a job but he still left. He's in hostel right now, KwaMashu. Only God knows how his life is there without his brothers, his only sister, his mother and his son."

Our food comes, the first thing she does is gulp down the juice. I can see the discomfort on her face. She knows that she's lying, particularly about Sphakamiso.

"Have you checked up on him since he left? I know you're a good sister, I've heard many times Bonga saying he either received a call or text from you checking up on him."

“We haven’t talked, him and I aren’t very close,” she says.

“And his son?” I ask.

“I’m not close to...”

My eyebrow is already raised, is she going to say she’s not close to a toddler?

“I will call Aphe if I get that woman’s number,” she says.

“I’m sure it’s nice having you as an aunt. You look like a loving aunt.” I’m so not happy for my baby.

“I am, I love everyone who has my blood. And those who love them, just like you.” Nombuso is a bad actress, I can see that she doesn’t like me much, she’s just here to eat her brother’s money and boss staff around.

“I advised Bonga to go and try getting Sphakamiso to come back home one more time. I think it would be easier if you come too,” I say.

“Come where? To the hostel where people die like ants?”

“Yes, before your brother joins those dying people and be like an ant too. Bonga is starting a business, Sphakamiso is better in a family business than away.”

She mumbles; “I wonder how life will be once you’re sprinkled with gall...”

Then she looks up, “You don’t want chips?”

“Not a fan of potatoes these days. So what do you say?”

“I will be busy,” she says.

“But you don’t even know when we plan to go.”

“You’re very annoying, you’ve been talking since we got here. Don’t you get tired? Do you have batteries inside your mouth?”

I’m not even offended, I didn’t come here to eat and be mute.

“I’m just trying to get to know you. Why are you pissed? I thought you liked me.”

She exhales heavily, “Gosh, she’s still talking!”

I think she’s something close to a misanthropist.

“I’m serious Nombuso, I feel like genuinely you’re a loving sister, that’s why I think seeing his eldest brother and sister caring for him will change his mind.”

“Sphakamiso is stubborn, but if that what’s going to take for you to let me have my chips in peace, then okay we will go.”

“Thank you, I will tell Bonga.”

“Why do you shorten his name like that?”

“I’m creative,” I say.

She laughs, this one is genuine.

Then she opens the can of Coke, then lowers her head to it.

“Why there’s no chhhhh? Is it expired?” She wastes no time raising her hand.

This is embarrassing more than Njabulo’s couch scene that played out in front of Bonga.

“It’s not a big deal, you’re drinking Coke, not the sound,” I say.

“Please teach yourself to keep quiet at times, just like this Coke.” She stands up, the waiter is coming. Bonga needs to come and get us.

This is enough for one day.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 65

He told Phume that he'd been celibate for a couple months before the will was read. Maybe he was, but Phume didn't break that celibacy. She did. It was when she left, Mvimbo was angry that he failed to convince her to stay. He had time, a true Mshazi wasn't going to be defeated by a woman. But he did...Mvimbo called him useless. Everything had been done for him, EVERYTHING. All he had to do was to convince her to stay. As old as he was he'd managed to marry one of the hottest street baddies. What was hard? That evening Mvimbo slammed the door and drove out. He was going to cool down in one of the apartments they are renting out.

She had no energy to follow him, he was going to come back when he felt better. But there was another grown up to comfort. Mpatho...he was feeling like a failure.

"He's just angry, you know how old people are," she said, trying to cheer him up.

"I know," he stood up and went to his bedroom.

She knew that he wasn't okay but she was the last person he was going to open up to. So he poured Mvimbo's whisky and took it to him. She found him standing miserably by the window.

"Here, cool yourself down," she said. It baffled her that he was so heartbroken over Phume as if they'd been together, even after he was told that he was allowed to marry someone else.

He gulped down the whisky at one go and wiped his mouth.

She looked at him, "Mpatho you can get any girl you want, let her be with that poor boy, she will regret it in the future."

"I will never be enough in mkhulu's eyes, he just said it because at the end of the day I have to get a wife and bear an heir," he said.

"He's going to die soon anyway, stop stressing."

That was weird but funny, it softened his face.

“Thank you for the drink,” he said.

“You’re welcome, we can sit down and talk, if you want to. Seemingly your future wife left you and angered my husband who’s now left me.”

He chuckled, “You know he’s going to come back before we go to bed.”

“Even if he doesn’t, I’d be okay.” She loved being Mrs Mshazi, not being Mvimbo’s wife. But she tolerated it, the title came with a lot of privileges.

“You will miss him, won’t you?” That was probably the first conversation they ever held for more than two minutes. He never liked her, he still doesn’t. But she didn’t take it to the heart because he didn’t really like the whole family, from his father down to his stepmother, Phume’s mother.

“Being married doesn’t mean you always want to be in each other’s faces. I love my own space,” she said.

Mpatho shook his head, people who love their space shouldn’t get married because that’s like joining your life with somebody else’s.

“I can get up to crazy stuff when I’m alone. Things that people your grandfather’s age don’t understand,” she said.

Mpatho just nodded, he wasn’t okay with her sitting on his bed but she was there to comfort him so he couldn’t say anything.

“I feel like if he was less old my life would’ve been fun, especially in the bedroom.”

He looked at her, “Private thoughts?”

“I’m making them public now, you have beautiful lips. Bonnie said a lot of nice things about you.”

He understood what it was that she was trying to do.

“I need to rest kancane,” he was kicking her out.

“I can help you relax, let me...” She stood up before he agreed and got behind his shoulders and massaged them. She wasn’t intentional about anything at that moment, she was just bored and missing being handled by someone with fresh blood and muscles.

“This is inappropriate Beauty,” he said.

“How so?” She dropped her hands to his chest and leaned on his neck.

“Your grandfather just called you useless, what makes this inappropriate?”

“I’m not in a good space,” he said.

“Because you were left by someone that you never had in the first place? Phume has been seeing that boy for years, she was long deflowered, she’s given her heart to him.”

He took a deep breath; bitter news to swallow.

“I know what you like, trust me I like it too.”

Her hand was getting down to his pants.

“Beauty!” the warning wasn’t too stern.

She took out her phone and called Mvimbo. She wanted to know where he was and when he was going to be home. He said before 8pm, he was with a friend just calming down his head.

Beauty threw the phone on the bed and came down on her knees in front of him.

“What he doesn’t know won’t kill him. I know you need this.” She pulled down the waist of his pants and asked that he shifts closer. It was causing an effect, when Bonnie told her about his

addiction of deepthroat and crying that it was too much, she knew that it was something she could handle.

“You’re my grandmother,” he slightly protested.

“Do I look like a grandmother to you? Come on loverboy, let me suck this dick.”

“Don’t call me that,” she said.

When she got a feel of his dick in her hands she gasped and lifted her eyes to him. That was two times bigger than her usual treat. It was shaven, circumcised and healthy-looking. No wrinkles.

After a few hand strokes she put it inside her mouth and suck. He was enjoying in silence. She gave him the best blow job and then held onto his firm behind and opened her mouth wider. That was his queue; he grabbed her head and thrust into the depth of her throat. It was when she started tearing and coughing when he slowed down.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

Bonnie was right, it was too much.

“Let’s finish on the bed,” she said, breathing heavily.

He was too turned on, he didn’t think twice before lifting her to his bed. Beauty opened her legs, giving him access to her wet coochie, he stretched her thong to the side and rubbed his tip against her clit. He entered her, that one thrust made him release his first moan. He pushed himself inside until he was fully buried inside her. They had sex; sweet and short. He didn’t look at her in the eyes, they didn’t kiss, they just exchanged pleasure with their lower bodies until he reached his climax. He pulled out already licking, Beauty opened her mouth and allowed him to shoot his warm cum down her throat.

Mvimbo came earlier than expected but there was nothing raising eyebrows. His grandson was in his bedroom stressed about Phume, Beauty was watching a movie looking fresh, she'd just taken a shower. Nobody expected Phume to come back after leaving with her bags, vowing to never come back or associate herself with Mpatho.

That happened, she didn't dream or imagine it. It's an event that took place. A conversation needed to happen but as soon as Phume returned home he jumped into his marriage project and became colder than he ever was towards her. He created the worst enemy for himself. Beauty sees him, she's also playing a game. He sees her too, he tries to always be one step ahead.

Beauty comes out of the bedroom after taking a short nap for glow. She wants to discuss business with Phume but for some reason she's not around, not even in the kitchen practicing how to cook. Poor girl, she doesn't know the devil she sleeps with and calls a husband.

Someone clears throat behind her. She's startled thinking it's Aunt Nomusa's ghost, only to turn to Mpatho. He can be aggressive, Phume saw a glimpse of it but didn't raise her eyebrows because she's naïve. She's not comfortable being alone with him in the house, they've had a lot of back and forth since that evening.

He doesn't greet, he just asks; "When are you leaving?"

"This is my house," Beauty says.

"You always remind us. So when are you leaving?"

"On Wednesday," she says after taking a sharp breath to compose herself.

“Okay,” he turns around to leave.

She’s not angry about the things he’s done to her. The cold treatment, the baby, none of it. She just hates his selfishness and cruelty. Now he’s attending therapy to live happily ever after? It’s very bold of him to think he deserves that.

“It’s interesting that Sphakamiso is now your brother,” she says.

He stops but doesn’t look back. His body tenses.

“Does Phume know how evil you are?”

He turns around, “Can’t you leave me alone for once?”

“I did a long time ago. I’m just looking forward to seeing your marriage blossom after Phume finds out that Sphakamiso may not live long because of you. You knew the damage your friends did to him, but you still tampered with the X-rays because you have connections.”

“He’s going to live long, unlike you.” That touched the nerve.

Beauty chuckles, “Oh, have you told him that he suffered some severe injuries after the police attack and you had him given wrong results because you didn’t want MaVilakazi to know that after killing her husband you had hurt her son too?”

His chest moves, he’s breathing heavily while trying to keep his face composed.

“He’s your brother now, are you going to let him think he’s fine until something bad happens?” she asks.

“It was minor injuries, now mind your business,” he says and walks off.

But he only take two steps away before she makes another statement.

“You weren’t the father,” she says.

Again, he stops and turns around.

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m saying you didn’t have to panic, the baby wasn’t yours.”

She knows, this he didn’t see coming, but he’s indifferent about it.

“But I must applaud you though, you know how to clean your mess. Did she help you?”

“No,” he says.

“I’m sure she’d be happy to know that you were behind my miscarriage because you’ve been in bed with me. And her ex-boyfriend, whom she loves with her whole heart even after marrying you, suffered some internal damages during those police attacks you organized and you made sure they were never shown to him.”

“Beauty going to France will help you,” he says.

Now it’s her turn, her chest starts pounding.

“I’m not going to France, I’m going to...”

“Wherever you’re going,” he shrugs.

He’s been stalking her, when she told them that she was taking a vacation she said the wrong country for a reason. He’s up to something.

“If you kill me she’d know,” she says.

“Who said anything about you being killed?”

“Because I know so much about you and you know that I will tell her when the time comes.”

“Which time is that?” He’s keeping a straight face, not showing any anger.

“The time when she needs to know who the real Mpatho is.”

“She’s not going to leave me, we are married, and please do me a favor, don’t come to any of the celebrations we are going to hold,” he says.

Uninvitation! She cracks a little laugh.

“We will see!” She goes back to her bedroom to change and get her bag. She needs to drive out and leave this stupid boy here. Last minute plans have to happen. She’s no longer taking this France trip, Mpatho has probably planned the worst ahead of it.

“Noxolo cancel the flights....” she says on the phone.

“Aw, why? I’ve already told my friends that I’m going there.”

“Mpatho knows, he’s up to something,” she says.

“How do you know he’s up to something?”

“He knows everything, I’m telling you. I won’t be surprised if he will have people with us in the flight going to the same places we are going,” she says.

Noxolo sighs, being her sister’s lapdog is tiring. What’s hard for her to get on the computer or phone and cancel everything herself? This is why things are the way they are...

“You’re home, right?” she asks.

“Yeah, I’m home,” Noxolo says, grunting under her breath.

“Ok, do it immediately and then wait for my further instructions. Bye!” she drops the call and take a long deep breath.

When she walks out of her bedroom with her bag and car keys she hears voices in the kitchen.

The legacy wife is back from shopping.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were going to the shops?”

“I figured you won’t need anything since you were there yesterday.”

“What are these?” She goes over the counter and looks at the pack of baby milk bottles that Phume bought.

“And then?” she asks.

“It’s for my friend,” – Phume.

“You’re lying. Are you pregnant?” If she is and Mpatho is exciting it would show her how cruel Mpatho is. She wasn’t crazy about being a mother, she doesn’t care to have babies, she’s still travelling the world and having fun. But the audacity!

Phume takes a deep breath and raises her eyes to Beauty. Between them it’s not that deep, they’re there for each other when they need each other the most, when it’s family time. No deep hatred like Mpatho has for her. But she married him, that’s why she gets stray bullets at times.

“Are you?” Beauty asks.

Mpatho walks right before she confesses. His eyes are on her, he walks in and puts his arms around her and kisses her lips. He’s never wanted Phume to give Beauty any sort of chance. Their friendship makes him uncomfortable, but one thing he excels in is keeping a straight face and acts like all is good while he’s planning the most cruel things in his head.

“Did you get everything you wanted?” he asks.

“Yes...I didn’t spend too much, did I?” Phume smiling like a fool.

“Well, I had to put my phone on silence because notifications were blocking my ears.”

He kisses her again, this time it’s not just a light peck, he’s showing off and trying to get her wet. He’s moaning inside her mouth and rubbing his waist against hers. It’s disgusting, but he

must enjoy it while it lasts. When the truth comes out marriages will break, siblinghood will be shaken to the power of 2, Malibongwe will increase the level of his hate and attack again. Peace does not have a place in this land...

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 66

PHUMELELE

I think I know him enough now to know when he's not okay. He's been down since yesterday, I didn't expect us to sleep early as we did. We never skip more than two days without having sex, that's why I was a bit disappointed when he just cuddled me and didn't initiate anything. Ntombi has called me out a number of times; I'm married, I shouldn't be ashamed of initiating sex to my husband when I want it. Mpatho is also open enough for me to trust, I just can't bear the thought of being turned down or to be asked to ride on top. I'm taking a long shower to try and have my confidence up. When I walk out of here I'm going to wake him up, if he's not already up, and I'm going to try...keyword; try. I've watched videos and did my assignment on how to give a blow job.

I hope I don't make a flop, I think that would turn him off because that's his main thing in the sexual department. I get out of the shower and lotion my body and then put on my silk gown. I'm not wearing anything under this, I still look sexy.

Breathe in...out. I'm ready to go.

I walk back in the bedroom and find him already up. He's making the bed, wearing his short and nothing on top. I stand behind him trying to remember what my first move was.

"Good morning," he says with his back turned.

“Morning...” Damn it, Phume!

I step closer and touch his shoulder, “You already made the bed, that’s sad.”

“Why? You still wanted to sleep?”

“Yes, but with you,” I say.

He releases a deep sigh and turns to pull me for a hug.

“I’m going to work sthandwa sami,” he says.

We are not that couple, when addressing each other we use our names, I’m not used to sthandwa sami but I love it.

“But I want to be with you, I’m cold.”

A gentle smile slips from his lips. “You’re cold yet you’re not wearing anything, just this silk gown that doesn’t even reach your knees.”

Gosh! Are my lines too weak or is it him who’s slow?

“Fine, I’m not cold, I want to have sex.”

I expected him to laugh or say something, not to just stare at me.

I move away, a bit embarrassed and scared. “So what do you say?”

This is so awkward.

“Uyaphi pho?” he asks, I’m moving towards the window, not looking at him.

“I’m giving you space to think,” I say.

“Come back here,” he says.

I take a few exercise breaths and then turn to face him.

He pulls me to sit on the bed with him, I can still feel that his energy is withdrawn.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

“For what?” I ask.

“I know what your body is used to and last night I just slept without watering my peach-peach. I don’t want you to ever regret marrying me. I’m not perfect, there are many things I’ve done that I can’t take back. I just hope that you understand and forgive me for my mistakes.”

Whoooah! It’s not that deep, I’m not even angry, I just wanted sex. .

“I love you,” he says and exhales deeply.

He’s holding my hand, I don’t see him engaging on a sexual activity, not with his spirit so low.

“Mpatho what is bothering you?” I ask.

“Your lobola, I want to send it as soon as possible. Do you think your aunt can be available during the weekend?”

“Which weekend?”

“This coming weekend.”

Yoh, this is not something I expected, we were planning together.

“You just slept and decided that you want it to be that soon?”

“There’s nothing for me to wait for, I have the money and the livestock, she will choose how she wants the lobola,” he says.

“It’s you who is rich Mpatho, not the Shandus, there are preparations that need to happen on their side as well, I feel like it’s better if you give Aunt Brandi at least two weeks.”

“I can help with whatever preparations she wants to make,” he says. Yes they say money makes the world go around, but that’s not always the case.

“I will call her,” he says.

“Hhayi-bo Mpatho, I’m saying give her two weeks.”

“No.”

Okay, I’m not going to argue with him, if sending lobola this coming weekend is going to improve this mood then Aunt Brandi needs to get her things ready during the week. The bank account needs to be open, I don’t want Mzimela anywhere near my bride price. Hopefully Aunt Brandi will see the light and use the money to rebuild grandma’s house, move back home and leave that man with his girlfriends and their children.

“Come here,” he says pointing me to his lap.

I sit facing his chest, my legs on either side of his waist.

“I will never not listen to you,” he says, his face leaning too close.

He pecks my lips a few times before taking full control of my lips and deeply kissing me. He pulls back his waist and pushes down his shorts to take out the stick of joy. He’s not hard yet, usually he gets hard by just me sitting too close to him.

“Your boobs are getting bigger,” he says.

“I’m pregnant, I hope they will stay big even after giving birth.”

“Do you like them big?”

I nod, “Yes, you?”

“If they’re yours I love them in any size or shape.”

That’s sweet but I wanted a direct answer.

“I love you,” he says kissing me again.

He lifts my gown and touches between my folds.

He’s firm enough to slide in, I’m moist and ready to accommodate. But this isn’t how I wanted this. He’s put me down on my side and lifted my knee up. It’s him who’s leading, I’m doing what he wants, how he wants it.

My body relaxes, he's slow with his strokes. He knows that I'm shy, especially here, but he wants our eyes to stay locked.

"I love you," he mouths the words.

Today I'm getting a lot of affirmation. I don't doubt his love for me, I think we both love each other more than we ever thought we would, the only thing that's missing is tolerance and patience. But we will get there.

He moves further with his back, finally removing his eyes from me. But that's just to open space for him to deepen his strokes. He shuts his eyes and starts moaning with each stroke. He's now into it more than me.

"Phume!" he lifts his eyes and looks at our joined parts.

He's never called me by name at a moment like this.

"Sthandwa sami," he says, moving his waist in circles and releasing a deep groan.

"Mmmmm," I'm feeling him inside me, but something is missing.

I feel something warm filling me and licking on my opening. I lift my head and look at him. I'm quite shocked, this didn't even last 5 minutes.

"Why?" I ask.

He doesn't look at me, he pulls out his satisfied dick and leaves me covered in his sperms. He's not going to try and make up for it because he's soft like a sun-burnt banana.

He kisses my cheek and buries his face beside me. This was a let-down, the worst sex I've ever had. What makes me angry is that he hijacked my moment, I woke up early, took a shower and wore this sexy gown because I wanted to give him a blow-job and be in charge of the whole deed. Why take my moment if you're going to flop?

“I’m sorry, I don’t know what happened,” he says. He searches for my hand, finds it and firmly holds it. He still hasn’t lifted his face to me.

Take a deep breath Phume and be nice.

I’m angry but I don’t have to tear him apart, seeing that he already wishes to disappear. Many things are wrong with this morning, what stood out was me losing the mommy title.

“It’s okay. Can you look at me?”

He exhales heavily and lifts his face.

“What’s going on?” I’m getting worried, I thought we were on the right path.

“It’s just one of those days when I’m not my best. I’m sorry, I will make up for it.”

“No, I’m asking what’s with you. You haven’t been okay since yesterday, when I got back from the shops you looked down. Did Beauty say something?”

“No, I’m just stressed about work,” he says.

“Are you sure?” I have a feeling Beauty has everything to do with this.

He nods.

Okay, I will confront Beauty about it, if it’s her who managed to get him like this she will proudly own it.

He gets a towel and wipes me.

“Don’t be late for work,” I say when he lies next to me instead of going to the bath.

He doesn’t say anything, he just lies on his back and stares at the ceiling. You can’t tell me this person is stressed about work but he’s not on his laptop sending emails and making calls to his team.

“I did something bad,” he finally says.

“Okay, what is it?” I have a bad feeling about this.

“It was before you, the day you left and went to the Mcinekas, I was not okay because of how mkhulu expressed his disappointment in me.” He takes a deep breath, on the other side I’m holding my mine.

“I lied when I said I hadn’t been with anyone shortly before you and I got close. I had sex with someone that day, I regret it,” he says.

I release a huge breath, relieved. Him and I were not together at that time, I don’t think he owed me any loyalty.

“Is that why you’ve been tense?” I ask.

“Beauty is threatening me, she knows that I was behind the miscarriage, now she wants to break us up,” he says.

“If she knows then why hasn’t she taken any actions?”

“I don’t know, what I know is that I’m not going to let her take something I’ve fought so much to get. Love wasn’t something I ever wished to fight for because I’ve had to fight for almost everything in life. I’ve had to prove myself more than twice for me to be accepted anywhere. I have no will and no desire to start my life over with another woman. I’m not going to raise my child from afar, you and I are going to be together as a family and as husband and wife.”

Owkaaaay. But I knew this had Beauty written all over.

“What makes you think I’m going to leave you for something that happened before you and I got married?” I ask.

“Because you’re friends with Beauty, you’ve never heard anything from her and didn’t come back to fight me,” he says.

I can’t blame him for thinking like that because I’m guilty of what he’s saying.

“She’s leaving soon,” I say.

“Wednesday is very far, I don’t want you around her, we’ve made a good progress, I don’t want us to go backwards,” he says.

“But you can’t force her to leave sooner than she wants to.” I mean, we are in Beauty’s house, it is what it is.

“We can move out and come back when she’s gone.”

My eyes widen, this is an extreme idea. We are not scared of Beauty, we can choose what to listen to and how to react to it.

“Are we going to leave again when she comes back?”

“We will be prepared to deal with her. Also, I need some privacy with you, this house stresses me out, I always feel like I’m going to see Aunt Nomusa when I wake up.”

“Beauty is going to think we are going on a vacation and copying her,” I say.

He smiles and pulls my arm over his shoulder. I don’t know how he manages to look this good even before he takes a bath.

“We deserve a vacation more than her. But for now it’s just us going away from the village to have peace and to spend quality time together. You’re not going to cook, we’ll have someone doing that for you, all I want to see is my wife looking this sexy for me from sunrise to sunset.”

I’m blushing, that doesn’t sound bad at all.

“Umuhle mkami,” he says.

My cheeks will be aching soon.

“I’m going to organize a team to get an apartment ready for us,” he says.

“Kanti we are leaving this morning? Aren’t you going to work?” I thought we’d have enough time to prepare, I don’t even know

where we will be staying while waiting for Queen Beauty to leave.

“Yes, we are leaving this morning, you’re not spending another minute with Beauty. Not while I’m still alive.” His phone rings just as he takes it under the pillow.

My eyes catch the name flashing on the screen. Noxolo?

He quickly drops it. I’m not going to be a nosy wife, after all he’s a businessman and there are many Noxolos in the world. Beauty’s sister wouldn’t be calling her sister’s enemy, that’s for sure.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 67

PHUMELELE

My battery is about to die, I charge my phone as soon as we arrive. He’s bringing our bags inside, we packed enough for four to five days. Personally, I’m not scared of Beauty, I’ve survived her many times. She’s come for me, I’ve come for her; we’ve tested each other’s strengths and weaknesses. My main focus being here is to spend time with my husband, I believe this is going to allow us an opportunity to work on our marriage and understand each other more. I don’t know whose house this is, it doesn’t belong to Mshazi Properties. It’s beautiful, I don’t know how many rooms are here but it’s quite big.

“Do you want to take your shoes off?”

I raise my eyes to him, he’s got this big grin on his face.

“For what?” I ask.

“Follow me.” He stretches his arm for me to hold.

I lock my phone and get up and follow him.

This is a flex room, I guess. There's a romantic set up; flowers, finger foods, non-alcoholic champagne and massage equipment on the floor. I thought his team was just getting the place ready for us, not this. I'm surprised, kudos to him.

"I haven't spoiled you in a while," he says.

"Oh man, thank you so much. Are you going to massage my feet?"

"If you can sit on the sofa and relax..." He helps me sit and brings me water in a bowl to wash my hands, then he wipes them with a napkin. This is going to be awesome.

"Forget about maize porridge and have some fruits and champagne while waiting for your masseur to get ready." He really prepared for this.

He turns on the music and disappears, leaving me on the couch with mixed fruits in a bowl and a glass of champagne. Sadly I left my phone in the charger, I can't take pictures.

He's taking his time coming, I'm about to finish everything on the table. Oh, finally he's here.

"What?!" I exclaim and crack into laughter.

He's body is oiled up, he's wearing only his boxers.

"Are you a male stripper now?"

He laughs, "Be appreciative. Look at this."

He does a 180 turn and then kneels in front of me. I appreciate the effort but I can't stop laughing at him. He starts massaging my feet. I won't lie, I'm turned on looking at him almost naked with his muscles glittering in front of me.

“You’re sexy, don’t stop going to the gym and never, I mean never shave off your beard. Just trim it like that, and I love you in jeans.”

“Okay mam!” he’s being sarcastic.

“I hate hairy legs, I’m glad you always shave them. And the potbelly, I swear on my life if you ever grow one we won’t be cool.”

“I also don’t like flat ass, you must do squats everyday after you’ve given birth,” he says.

Hhayi-bo, who does he think he is to tell me what to do with my body?

“If you want big ass go and ask Nicki Minaj out,” I say. Phela I don’t owe anyone a big ass.

“I knew it,” he’s laughing. “I’ve been told that our dinner will come in an hour.”

“You ordered?” I ask.

“No, there’s a chef cooking for us but he couldn’t come here because there’s no enough materiel.”

This keeps getting better.

“You’re such a good husband.”

He smiles, “I told you that you’re going to have a beautiful stay here.”

I’m glad his mood has improved. He looks happier than he was this morning when we left home.

I took a nap on the sofa when he was done massaging my feet. I’m waking up to a beautiful aroma filling up the house. I’m hungry, I feel like I haven’t eaten all week. I wake up and find

him in the kitchen. The food has arrived and mister is eating without me.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” I ask.

“You needed that rest. Come and sit, I will dish for you.”

He pulls the chair, I sit down and wait for my own. He’s dressed up in green and white tracksuits and high-top sneakers. I feel like he’s going somewhere and that puts me off a little bit because he said we are coming here to spend time together.

“Can I feed you?” he asks.

“No,” I grab the fork from his hand.

This food doesn’t taste good, I cook better than this chef. I also hate these lot of veges, I’m not on a get-thin diet, I don’t mind eating more than three different starch food on a plate.

He kisses my cheek while I’m chewing. “I know why you look moody.”

“Oh, I look moody?” I fix a stern glare on him.

“Yeah, you saw that I’m wearing sneakers. I’m sorry.”

“Where are you going?” Call me a baby or whatever, but I’m sad, I don’t want to be here alone.

“I have something to sort out, work stuff. I just need only one hour then I will be back.”

“You said you’re not going to travel for work, you will work from home.”

“I know,” he wipes the corner of my lips with his thumb.

“Okay?”

It’s not like I have a say.

“Okay, you can go.”

He turns my face and pecks my lips.

My heart breaks when he walks out of the door. He said we are going to be together the whole day.

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I don't know what to do except changing channels and eating. If this man doesn't come back now I will empty the fridge and cupboards. It's been over an hour now, he's not even texting me to say he's held up.

My phone rings, I quickly take it thinking it's him. It's gog' tshishi, she must've noticed that I'm not coming back today. I don't have to ignore her calls, I won't entertain whatever she's saying because I already know everything.

I pick up.

"Where are you?" she asks.

"I'm somewhere far from the village. What do you want?"

"I needed to give you my office keys and some documents. When are you coming back?"

I've forgotten that I agreed to keep an eye for her at the dealership while she's gone.

"Leave them in the dining, I'm coming back Friday," I say.

"Which Friday?" she asks.

"Coming Friday, I'm on a mini vacation with Mpatho."

"Oh, is it?"

"Relax, we are not copying you, we just needed some fresh air."

“No, I understand. How far are you? I prefer dropping them myself because some of these documents are confidential,” she asks.

“But there’s nobody at home, I will find them where you put them.”

“We have a new helper coming in tomorrow, with you gone I don’t want to put my trust on a complete stranger,” she says.

“Okay, we can meet at the mall, I need to buy something there anyway.” I’m trying to avoid bringing her here because Mpatho won’t take it well. I’m not friends with Beauty, I’m very much aware that she’s two-faced, but I don’t think she can do anything to move me now. I’ve dealt with her shenanigans, I know even today she will try to bring the issue of Mpatho having sex with someone else.

I send him a text saying I’m going to KFC to buy wings. My phone rings immediately, it’s him.

“Hey, I’m coming home soon, I will bring them,” he says.

“It’s fine, I need to breathe anyway, I’m bored,” I say.

“You can watch TV. You love Korean dramas.”

Is this man serious? Like he wants me to quarantine in here while he’s gallivanting God knows where.

“No, I don’t want to watch TV,” I say.

“Make your order online, they will deliver.”

“Hhayi-bo, am I in prison? I don’t want to be indoors.”

I hear him taking a heavy sigh. “Okay, I love you.”

“I love you too, bye.”

I’m requesting an Uber, at least he won’t be tracking me down. I don’t even know how and why I allow him to get away with so much. I never question any of his toxic traits, maybe this is why

people say love is blind, because the real Phume would question and contest everything.

I'm just ten minutes away from the mall, one half hour away from the village. But she arrived before me because I had to shower first and change into a dress. I didn't really want wings but my mouth spoke the craving into reality. My ride ends outside KFC, I text her and tell her to meet me there. Out of humanity I order for both of us, adding milkshakes.

The rich widow makes an entrance, she's wearing huge sunglasses and a scarf around her neck like American celebrities avoiding paparazzi.

"Do you have enemies who are after you?" I ask.

"I'm avoiding journalists," she says.

I laugh out loud. Yes, we make headlines here and there, but trust me nobody is out there looking for us. We are not celebrities, Mshazi just happened to be a well-known businessman. Then the 'sibling marriage' as they call it.

"I thought you were out of the province, or the city," she says rolling her eyes.

"We are yet to fly out of the country. Maybe on our honeymoon."

"Hopefully," she says.

If there's one person who doesn't rate this marriage at all it's Beauty.

"I bought you wings too," I say.

"I'm not really hungry, I will take them home and eat them later, thank you."

Wow, she said thank you!

“Does Mpatho know that you’re here?”

“Yes, I told him that we are meeting up,” I lie because Beauty uses everything to her advantage.

“I’m surprised, he probably took you to this vacation or whatever you call it to hide you from me.” I hate that she’s reading between the lines and getting it right.

“Not really, why would he hide me from you?”

“Because he’s cunning,” she says.

I know where this is going, she wants to spill the beans not knowing that I already know.

“Where’s the key and the confidential documents?” I ask.

“Here is the key, I will email the documents. I had forgotten that I have soft copies of them.” Very typical of her. Only if she knew that she’s wasting her time coming here.

“So, Mpatho...” she says.

I smile, “What about my husband?”

“Did he really say he was just taking you away to relax?”

Here it comes!

“Yes, he also told me about what he did the day I left and went to the Mcinekas. We talked about it, we are okay,” I say.

“Oh,” she looks very shocked.

“I can’t be angry about something that happened before him and I got married.”

“So you also forgave him for killing my baby?”

“I don’t have anything to say about that,” I shrug.

“But I told you that I was pregnant, obviously it’s you who told him. He wasted his time ke, just collecting an unnecessary sin for himself because the baby wasn’t his.” She’s turning into a

crazy woman. There was no possibility for the baby to be Mpatho's anyway.

"If it was his I would've aborted it myself. I don't want his stupidity to breed into my next generation," she says.

"If it was his?" I'm perplexed by her level of dumbness.

"That was his biggest concern, wasn't it? Someone who didn't even ask for a condom." She sips the milkshake with her nose wrinkled in disgust.

"Wait, Mpatho slept with you?" I ask. Everything in my stomach just turned.

"You said you know, kanti what did he tell you?"

My whole face itches. WTF!

"He said it was with someone else, not you."

She laughs, "Oh, he's good shame."

I'm embarrassed to say the least. I can't believe Mpatho could put me through this. All along I've been fighting Beauty not knowing that they hate each other because they've been in bed together.

"Your face just turned red. I feel sorry for you because Mpatho has many skeletons you don't know of." Joy is written all over her face.

I'm not going to break down and cry and I'm not going to do anything crazy until I see the community-dick-feeder himself.

"So what's up with him and Noxolo? I thought she was working for you as a PA, I was quite surprised to see her name popping up on his screen." I'm not sure if it was her sister but I'm not the only one who's leaving KFC with an accelerating heartbeat and pounding headache. Nope, everywhere there must be chest pains.

“Really? So it’s her who’s been snitching on me.” She removes the scarf around her neck. It’s suddenly too hot in here. “I knew that her behavior was something else. I can’t believe Nox would do this to me. Yes, I promised her a better job, but things didn’t go the way I planned. I’m the only one trying to make her a better person and this is how she thanks me.”

Ouch! I never thought anything could make the whole Beauty tear up. It’s good to see those tears rolling down. Victoria Falls.

“Askies, I’m sure it’s hurt to have that done to you by your own blood.” Hollard, siyaduduza this side!

She wipes her tears before they ruin her make-up.

“I can’t believe Mpatho would go that far and even turn my family against me,” she shakes her head in disbelief. “He wants everyone to be like him; not loyal to anyone. That madafucka!”

“He’s still my husband, it’s not like you married an innocent man either. And you’re just like him, you’re not loyal to anyone if it doesn’t benefit you,” I say.

“I can’t believe you’re still defending him after everything he did to your sweetheart. I guess you’ve joined the evil Mshazi squad, you also don’t care if Sphakamiso dies.”

“What are you talking about?” I’m confused.

She sighs, “So you just blindly left the house and said yebo baba to everything he said? He didn’t even tell you that he was behind Sphakamiso’s police attacks and that he instructed him to be cleared even though the X-ray showed that he had some internal injuries.”

“No, he didn’t say that. Did he correct that?” This time I can’t hide the pain. Mpatho has confessed to these things but he held back the whole truth. He just said what he thought would be forgivable and left the most crucial details.

“Correct what? Do you know who Mpatho is? He doesn’t have a heart, maybe MaVilakazi kept it with his placenta when she gave birth to him.” She puts her scarf back on and stands up.

“I will send you Shaun’s number, I have a blood enemy to deal with,” she turns away and leaves her wings behind.

I’m sure Mpatho is with Noxolo where she is, screwing her head and getting her to do his dirty work. He’s been thinking Beauty has gotten between us and I have fought with him. But trust me, today he will book himself for a twelve-hour session with Freedom because I don’t think there are counseling sleepovers.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 68

PHUMELELE

He’s back, the car is here. I’m not going to be loud, I will give it to him in a respectful manner, just to honor Freedom. I’m more angry at the fact that he dragged me all the way here pretending to be a romantic husband who just needs privacy with his wife. I’ve been fighting Beauty thinking she’s against us, not knowing that her and I are fighting over his dick. The Sphakamiso issue breaks my heart. That was my boyfriend and bestfriend for years. We had our problems but nothing would ever make me wish him any sort of pain. I’m not going to let Mpatho get away with it. That’s a no-go area, Sphakamiso has never fought with him, he’s never stood on his way regardless of everything that happened. He just expressed his dissatisfaction from afar, without harming anyone.

I walk in, he's not inside. I leave my wings on the bedside cabinet and walk out to him standing in the balcony. He's barefooted, shirtless and wearing only his trackpant. He's got a drink in his hand. I snatch and throw the drink over the balcony and put the glass on the spindle.

"Hello Mpatho," I say.

He doesn't respond, he just locks his eyes on me looking anxious.

"Why are we here again?"

He removes his eyes from me and exhales heavily.

"You didn't go to KFC, did you?"

"I did, I got my wings and I met with Beauty."

"Let's go inside," he holds my arm and pulls me.

No, nope, I want to fight on the balcony.

"Mpatho let go of me. Why are we here?"

"What did she tell you?" He wants to vomit more lies.

"Everything," I say.

"What is everything? We already talked about things."

"Did we? You never told me that you slept with your grandfather's wife. You're so disgusting, how can you dip in the same pot as your grandfather?"

"It was a mistake, I was vulnerable." I knew he'd defend himself.

How many times have I been vulnerable in this life? I've never opened my legs for a grandparent.

"Do you love her?" I ask.

He snaps his brows. "Are you serious?"

“I am, obviously you have feelings for her, you’ve tasted the forbidden fruit. Was it nice?”

“Can we go inside?” He’s not worried about the subject at hand, but what people would say if they see us fighting.

“No, I want...” I don’t finish, he scoops me up and carries me inside against my will.

I wish I wasn’t so light, that I had power to fight for myself. I loved his muscly-built physique until today, because he’s used it against me.

He closes the balcony door and then looks at me flaring up with anger.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

“Sorry for making me a fool or for sleeping with her?”

“For both,” he says.

I take a deep breath, I said I was going to do this calmly.

“Okay come,” I say turning towards the lounge.

He stands still behind me.

I look at him, “Let’s go and have a proper conversation.”

He’s hesitant but he follows me.

I will stand.

“Sit,” I tell him.

He looks at me. I have to repeat myself twice before he sits.

“You will call Malibongwe and tell him what you did to Sphakamiso,” I tell him.

“Phume, no.” He stands up.

“Mpatho sit, we are not fighting, are we?”

He sits down again.

“Have a heart for once. His mother abandoned you, but Sphakamiso had nothing to do with that.”

“That wasn’t the reason, you know that,” he says.

“I don’t know that, all I know is that I don’t want Sphakamiso to have health problems for loving me. He didn’t take me from you, he asked me out and I agreed. If you wanted to fight anyone it should’ve been your own family.” I don’t care if it sounds like I’m standing with my ex, what he did was wrong, even if it wasn’t Sphakamiso but someone else, I would’ve still felt the same way.

“What irritates me the most is that you lie Mpatho. Right now I’m not asking you to change your heart, you’re cold-hearted by nature. All I want is for you to make things right with that situation. You have ex-girlfriends too, Bonnie was naked in your bedroom, but I’ve never tried to harm her.”

He doesn’t say anything because really, there’s nothing for him to say. He’s everything I’m saying he is, maybe even worse.

I sit and face him, I still can’t believe that I married someone who’s capable of fucking Beauty and getting me to help him to kill her baby. But I’m kinda glad that happened because even if it wasn’t his baby Beauty would’ve played a chess game. That one cruel hypocrisy I can forgive.

“Even after finding out that you two share a mother, didn’t you feel any sympathy for him?” I ask.

“I wasn’t trying to kill him, when it happened I cared about his mother, I didn’t want her to think I was after her family. Things went a bit too far without my intention,” he says.

“I’m asking about now, if I didn’t find out were you ever going to come clean?”

He shrugs, “Whatever answer I give you’ll still be angry at me.”

“Okay, call Malibongwe and tell him,” I say and lean back on the couch with my arms folded. His relationship with Malibongwe is the last thing he should care about right now, Sphakamiso’s life matters more.

“I’d rather call him directly,” he says.

Stupidity should be his middle name.

“And you think that’s a better idea because...?”

“It’s him that I hurt, not Malibongwe.”

“But Malibongwe can help you resolve this without having an altercation with Sphakamiso. He respects people but that doesn’t mean he can’t fight for himself. Humble yourself to Malibongwe.”

He shakes his head, even when he’s wrong he can’t humble himself. I know Malibongwe, he will protect Sphakamiso and focus on whatever is needed for him to be okay.

“You don’t want to be humble?” I ask.

“It’s not that, but you know the history between me and Malibongwe, how do I start?”

How come he has a plan for everything except this?

“You will start the same way you started when you took out Beauty’s panties,” I say.

Freedom would be very disappointed in my overall approach. The same way this man sat with me in the counseling room and acted like he’s ready to repent.

“Don’t you have airtime?” I ask.

“I will call him,” he says.

“Now Mpatho, not tomorrow, someone’s life could be at risk.”

“It’s not someone, it’s your boy...”

“Mpatho don’t you dare!” I’m not playing that game, not today. Sphakamiso was my boyfriend, I’m not going to undo the past, I’m not embarrassed about him. I’m not going to be constantly reminded of him like he was a mistake and I should defend myself from being associated with him.

He takes out his phone and makes a call. Malibongwe will have him for supper, I don’t even care, he’s drinking his own medicine.

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MALIBONGWE

He’s at Unified, the work is almost done, his paperwork and everything is under process. Hopefully when they go to fetch Sphakamiso he will agree. He still doesn’t know how Miyanda convinced Nombuso to be part of the team, they still don’t like each other judging from the conversations he’s separately had with them. Disappointing, but they were likely not to become friends, Miyanda is blunt and confrontational, while Nombuso is the epitome of crazy.

His phone rings, when he glances at the screen the name that pops up is one that he didn’t expect at all. Him and Mpatho haven’t spoken since that day when they had a meeting, he should’ve deleted his number long time ago.

What does he want?

Malibongwe answers and keeps quiet.

“Ummm, hey Gwazela,” he says.

It’s annoying how he fakes being humble and full of humility while he’s the complete opposite behind doors. When you fight Mpatho it’s like you’re starting him, you’re the violent one, he’s cunning and manipulative.

“Hi,” Malibongwe says.

“Can you talk?”

“I’m talking,” he says.

“My wife and I…” Phume can be heard confronting him at the side, telling him not to mention her name. This is an interesting one.

“I’m listening,” Malibongwe says.

“I’d like to talk to you about something.”

“Okay,” he’s curious to hear this.

“It’s a sensitive matter, can we meet?”

“Mpatho, I have a pregnant girlfriend that I haven’t seen since 11am. You don’t have airtime problems, we can talk over the phone,” – Malibongwe.

“It’s about Sphakamiso, I don’t know if you can help me.”

“What about him?” His tone changes when he hears his brother’s name being mentioned.

“There was an incident when he was attacked by the police, the report he received from the hospital wasn’t accurate,” Mpatho.

“I don’t understand,” Malibongwe says, taking a few steps around in circles.

“He had some chest injuries, I didn’t want MaVilakazi to think I was coming after her family, between me and him it was just a boy rivalry,” – Mpatho.

“Sphakamiso never had any rivalry with you. You’re older than him.” He already knew that the police attacks were Mpatho’s orders, that’s how people in power fight, they hide behind their mansions and have others fighting their battles.

“He was with my wife,” Mpatho says.

“She had no ring. You’re a pussy Mpatho.”

“Okay, I’m whatever you want to call me. The reason I called you is because I’d like to correct my mistakes and I don’t know how to go about it.”

“Call Sphakamiso and tell him what you did,” Malibongwe says.

There’s a moment of silence...

“It’s better he knows that he needs to sleep with one eye open, you will kill him for simply loving a girl that your father bought for you,” Malibongwe says.

“You probably won’t ever like me, which I understand. But I need to you help me, I don’t want to burn all my bridges and I don’t want him to hate Phume. I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I do hope that our children will know each other and have a better relationship than us. That includes his son and my child.”

Malibongwe sighs, “What do you want me to do?”

“I’d like to talk to him, with you present, you know him better than I do. Then if he agrees I’d like to help him,” he says.

“Oh, help Mr Mshazi. Help?”

“Whatever you want to call it, Mr Mcineka.”

“It’s that attitude that’s going to make me stay out of this. You fucked with my brother, sending your police friends to brutalize him because you’re a bloody coward. Uyinja nje.”

“I’d rather take insults from Sphakamiso. I’m older than you, so mind your language.” Phume calls his name in the background, she doesn’t sound pleased.

“You’re older but you’re asking me for help, that says a lot about you.”

“I’m doing this for Sphakamiso, otherwise I wouldn’t be on this call with you, my wife is pregnant too,” he says.

“You’re doing this to stay on good terms with Phume, you’re a clown in that fong-kong marriage of yours.” – Malibongwe.

“A clown that’s not vat’ n sitting in a girl’s room. Udub’ ikhaya wayogana emjondolo,” he says. (you abandoned home to be a wife in your girlfriend’s shack)

“Udakwe amafa kayihlomkhulu, your grandfather who died a blessing.”

Phume snatches the phone before Mpatho gives his comeback. She’s had enough, this back and forth is no longer about the issue at hand, they’re riding on the wave to go at each other.

“Hey Bhut’ Malibongwe, are you going to help?” she asks.

He takes a deep breath, “I won’t stop Sphakamiso from avenging himself if that’s what he’d want. I will just be there, he needs to get his explanation clear and honest.”

“Okay he will do that. But I need you to promise me that you will talk to Sphakamiso, Mpatho didn’t do this intentionally because he wanted him to have health complications, he was just scared of disappointing MaVilakazi one more time.”

“He’s already disappointed her many times,” Malibongwe says.

“Is that a joke?” – Phume.

“Fine, I will talk to Sphakamiso. Now give your husband the phone, I want to say goodbye,” he says.

“No,” she refuses.

Phume won't always be around to protect him.

“Okay then,” he drops the call.

Now he has to soften Sphakamiso on Mpatho's behalf. The only reason he agreed is because he cares about Sphakamiso's inner peace, Mpatho didn't even approach him nicely but for peace' sake he will tell Sphakamiso that he was apologetic and wanted to make things right out of his own will, from the bottom of his dark heart.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 69

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Mam' Zonke has traveled all the way home to accompany me to the Mcinekas to report the pregnancy. It's a favor, she doesn't need to, she's only my father's girlfriend whom I don't really like that much. But unlike some people I won't mention, my dislike of her won't make me insult her or speak ill of her to my father, she's his choice and as long as she makes him happy I'm happy too.

We were supposed to arrive at the Mcinekas before sunrise, but circumstances didn't allow us. It's already 12pm, Malibongwe just fetched her from town, now we are heading there. I'm not nervous, Malibongwe didn't deny paternity, this is just to respect tradition.

“So how far are you? They're going to ask,” Mam' Zonke asks before we leave.

“11 weeks, we will tell them we came late because I'm working and busy,” I say.

“I hope they’re not going to ask me a lot of nonsense questions. Your father said I must be respectful and humble,” she says.

I still don’t know how Nyambose fell in love with her. They’re very different, my father is a soft-spoken man who loves peace. On the other hand Mam’ Zonke is loud, understandably because she works with customers who are mostly local and broke. She’s fought almost with everybody in my village. Not that I don’t wish them well, but I don’t think their relationship has a life span of more than 1 year.

Malibongwe has been quiet, I appreciate him for knowing boundaries. He’s got a bubble personality when he’s with me, he talks a lot and jokes around, but with my family he’s a reserved. Personally I find it hard to change myself for the sake of convenience, but today I will be on my best behavior and taking whatever MaVilakazi decides to throw at me.

It felt like a long drive, we were all sitting quietly like strangers. I couldn’t have a conversation with Malibongwe because all our conversations are crazy and inappropriate. I don’t want Mam’ Zonke to take a bad report home, I know she’s probably recording and watching everything for my father. Her and I are not close, we sat together at the back and had nothing to talk about.

Malibongwe drops us outside the yard, I think I’m dressed appropriately, I look good.

He comes to me at the side. “You will find me inside, I love you okay?”

“Okay,” I nod.

He probably wants to kiss me but he can’t. We share a stare for a second, then he leaves.

I take a deep breath and turn to Mam’ Zonke.

“Again, thank you for coming,” I say.

“I had to, your father was stressed.”

“He’s always stressing about things, Bonga is going to fulfill his responsibilities.” When it comes to Bonga I can be very naïve. I don’t even leave space for disappointments, I just took his word and ran with it. If two months pass and he hasn’t paid his dues to my father I have no idea what I will do.

“He has to, your father is too old to be taking on a father role to a grandchild. He’s also raised you well, this boy has to thank him for that,” she says.

“I know, he plans to do that. I hope you’ll be still around to see my baby,” I say.

She looks at me and doesn’t say anything. Hopefully she will be around, I’m not looking forward to a heartbroken Nyambose, he went through a lot losing my mother.

I’ve been here before but I didn’t see the place well because it was at night. Today I can see the whole village and the Mcineka homestead. There’s washing on the line, I don’t know which human being did that, hanging clothes upside down and mixing colors. My hands are itching to go and sort that nonsense out before we go in.

She’s outside playing alone, I don’t know what she’s building with the mud. When she sees us she pauses and stares. That’s Yoli with a few resemblances of her mother and big uncle. Now that I’m seeing her I hope that I’m carrying a girl, so that they can play together.

She returns my smiles and wipes the mud on her floral dress. Kids usually run away when they see strangers but this one is coming to us.

“Hi Yoli,” I say in a low whisper. We are close to the door, there are voices inside, I can hear Mkhuleko talking.

“Shhhh!” Mam’ Zonke shushes me.

Yoli’s eyes are on me, she’s next to me with her muddy hands.

“You’re here to see my mom?” Oh, she’s a bit talkative.

“Yes,” I respond whispering so that I don’t get a scolding from Mam’ Zonke.

“And see gogo too?” she throws another question.

Mam’ Zonke gives me a side glance before she knocks.

I give Yoli a nod.

“And Malume?”

“I’m here to see everyone,” I think this is the answer she’s looking for.

But she’s not answered enough.

“You’re here to see me too?” she asks.

“Yes, you as well.”

Her mother appears at the door. She already has a perception that I talk too much, now I’m here having a hushed conversation with her daughter the first day I see her.

“We are here to see you,” Mam’ Zonke says.

I almost drop on the floor. Nombuso will curse her whole lineage for this.

I clear my throat and say, “She’s not Bonga’s mother.”

“Oh, we are here to see your mother,” - Mam’ Zonke.

Nombuso doesn’t react dramatically as I expected, she asks us to walk in then sends Yoli to the outside tap to wash her hands.

“I will bring you a towel,” she says to me.

I look at my skirt, damn the mud stain from Yoli! I didn't even notice that she had her dirty hands on me. I walk in expecting an exaggerated confrontation about being here when the sun is up. But we are shown a mat to sit on by Mkhuleko before he walks out. MaVilakazi walks in wearing a new-looking apron and a scarf across her chest.

Her and Mam' Zonke exchange greetings, humbly.

"We are here to let you know that your boy Bongani has stained our daughter," – Mam' Zonke.

Who the fuck is Bongani?!

"Malibongwe, not Bongani," I whisper to her.

"Sorry, Malibongwe is his name," she corrects her statement.

But MaVilakazi has already caught on it and held on the mistake to exercise her dislike of me.

"It's hard for me to believe that when you, yourself, sound confused about who the real father is. Have you gone to Bongani's family as well?"

"There's no Bongani, I made a mistake because my daughter here always shortens his name to Bonga," Mam' Zonke clarifies.

"But surely Bongani has been in the picture too. There's no way you just said that name from nowhere. Anyway, I'm not denying anything, Malibongwe is going to speak for himself. I'm just disappointed that we waited for you to come as Malibongwe had asked us to. I even dressed up, look at me. Only for you to arrive at this time, obviously the journey started at Bongani's family, my stupid son was a second..."

Bonga appears, "Ma please."

I breathe out in relief. He doesn't look happy, he wasn't even supposed to come in before he's called. But his mother has

started, she's proving what he already told me about how she feels about me.

"I got her pregnant, it's my baby," he says.

"How long have you known her?" – MaVilakazi.

"I've known her long enough and that's not important. She's pregnant with my baby." He's not supposed to be this worked up over it. I expected his mother to be like this, I mentally prepared myself for it.

"Ayy okay, how long do we wait to see this so-called baby?" she asks.

That throws me off completely. Why would she refer to my baby like that? It's a baby, it has got nothing to do with her dislike of me.

"She's 11 weeks pregnant right now. Her father asked that your son comes and cleanse his house. This is her first time pregnant, no man has ever..."

"How do we know that for sure? She stays alone emjondolo, doing as she pleases. Who knows what she's done before this pregnancy?" – MaVilakazi, she's cutting Mam' Zonke short.

"Don't insult her. Are you saying she's terminated pregnancies before?" Now Mam' Zonke is angry. I didn't want her to get angry because once she gets down on the level MaVilakazi is in there will be no stopping her. Nobody in this area will be able to stop her.

"I'm saying we can't guarantee that it's her first time being pregnant, unless if Malibongwe found her a virgin," MaVilakazi says.

"It's my first time pregnant," I say, trying my best not to sound angry.

“And what makes you so sure that you’re carrying my grandchild? You haven’t been in the picture for long. I only heard about you when Malibongwe bought a car; you collected him immediately for us and now you’re pregnant with his child.”

“Ma, it’s me who will pay for the damages. I’m not going to take a cent from you. I asked her to do this because we respect culture.” He looks at our side, “You’ve done what you came here to do. Take Ma to the car, I will find you outside.”

I stand up, Mam’ Zonke does too.

“I still need to touch her tummy and feel the so-called baby,” MaVilakazi says.

Take a deep breath Miyanda!

I sit down on the reedmat again. She stands from the couch and comes to me. Mam’ Zonke lifts my shirt, she touches my tummy. I can’t believe this is a grandmother God chose for my baby.

Yoli comes out of nowhere and lifts her dress as well. She wants her grandmother to touch her tummy too, the whole house breaks into laughter except me. I’m annoyed, the only reason I kept quiet and took the insults is because I respect Bonga. I’ve never had an abortion, even if I did it wouldn’t have been any of MaVilakazi’s business. It’s not like she made perfect children who live by the word of God and respect the law and culture through and through. What’s standing out for me is how much she hates me and my baby. She gave me an old-looking R1, I guess she did so on purpose to hurt my feelings. The R100 note of ugwayi kagogo came from Nombuso, their mother was no longer budging.

Yoli wanted to come with us because her mother dressed up and came with us too. She's going to buy things at the mall, she will take a taxi back home. Bonga had to bribe Yoli with R10, she wasn't taking any coins. She's sharp-minded and adorably. Sadly, my mood was spoiled by her grandmother. I didn't think she'd get to me, but now I'm wondering what have I done for her to hate me like this. I love her son, I've never ill-treated him or banned him from going home. At times I even motivated him to visit them, I went to the shops with him and helped him buy them groceries. Maybe it's because I took him in when he wanted time away from home. Maybe she didn't want anyone to his rescue.

I sent Mam' Zonke home with a little grocery and some medicines that my father requested for his goats. I made sure that Nombuso saw me paying for everything from my purse. I don't know what makes her mother and probably her think that I'm using Bonga for his money. He only pays my rent, buys groceries and electricity, and gives me taxi fare if he's not able to drive me to work. I buy my own cosmetics, I'm not depending on Bonga.

It's time for us to drive her to the taxi rank, she doesn't have a lot of shopping bags.

"I will sit at the front," she says, aggressively.

I won't contest that, there's nothing special about the front seat.

I sit comfortably at the back and unwrap my chocolate to feed my so-called baby. I haven't spoken to Nombuso, sometimes when I'm angry I prefer to keep to myself until I'm calm. I'm not angry at her though, she didn't say or do anything today.

Malibongwe gets on his seat and glances at me. "Uright babe?"

I nod, "I'm okay."

"We will start at the garage, I need to fill up."

"Why don't you drop me off first?" – Nombuso.

"Because the petrol station is before the taxi rank."

"I don't want to start at the petrol station," she says.

It's easy to see that she's the oldest, sometimes she behaves younger than Mkhuleko. But I think they all enabled this behavior because she's the only girl. We are no longer starting at the petrol station because the overgrown princess said no without a sound reason.

"You have to come and stay with us when you're close to giving birth," she says to me.

"Stay with you and your mother?" I don't think I heard her well.

"Yes, Malibongwe said you only have a father at home, you need to be surrounded by women who know what to do when a woman is giving birth," she says.

"But you and your mother don't like, why would I want to be surrounded by you?" It doesn't make sense, what if they kill my so-called baby.

"Who said we don't like you?" She looks at Malibongwe behind the wheel.

"Did you? Are you serious?"

I think she's been looking for a way to provoke him and this is it.

Thank God we are at the rank, she will leave us in peace.

"You're very stupid to do that. There's no need to gossip about your own family. Yini uqala ukuqonywa?" She's still on his case.

"I didn't gossip, I told her what it was."

“Hey, you’re not the first person to have a girlfriend we don’t like. Sphakamiso never told her ex everything we said about her because it’s natural for us not to like a girl we don’t know.” So she’s confirming that they don’t like me, she thinks it’s a natural thing to hate someone for no reason.

“But you don’t even know me,” I’m confused.

“Exactly, we might like you when we get to know you. But this idiot has already turned you against us,” she’s pointing at Malibongwe.

His level of calmness right now is shocking.

“You’re going to blame him for something your mother openly did today?” I ask.

“I’m saying; when we are fighting with him and saying things there’s no reason for him to bring those things to you. It’s easy for us to forgive each other because we are family. But you’re an outsider, you’ll never forgive us. So obviously by telling you everything he’s closing every window for us to be family with you in future.”

That’s true but I still don’t fault Bonga for being honest with me.

“Are you done?” he asks her.

“Help me out with the bags.”

“It’s only three shopping bags, I’m not helping, you have two working hands.”

“I don’t care, I’m not going to condone what you’re doing, acting like a young boy who’s dating for the first time. Akuqali ngawe ukuqonywa, yeka ukutatazela.” She opens the door and climbs out with her three shopping bags.

She peeks through, “Did he say we are not happy for the baby?”

“Your mother openly showed me that,” I say.

“But he said it prior today as well, didn’t he?”

I don’t have to answer that, him telling me doesn’t change or build anything.

“You’re not smart, you’re very very stupid,” she says to him.

If Bonga loses his cool there’s going to be a scene. I don’t want to deal with that publicly.

“Please Sis’ Nombuso, just go,” I beg.

“I’m going, but he’s very stupid. Having a baby late in life damaged his brain. Sphakamiso had a child and a beautiful girlfriend for 6 years, he never lost his mind and behaved like a clown.”

“It’s enough, go before the taxi leaves you,” I say.

Finally, she closes the door and leaves. I blow out a long sigh. What a life! What a sister!

“Are you okay?” I ask Bonga.

He doesn’t answer, Nombuso has followed on her mother’s footsteps and helped her ruin the day.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 70

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

We are back in my room, he’s here with me, which I guess is the reason why his mother hates me. I’m basically vat’n sitting with him. We are both not okay; he’s been sitting on the bed silently while I clean, not cracking a single joke or making a ridiculous comment.

Eventually he exhales deeply and asks that I sit with him. I leave the pot I was washing and join him on the bed.

“I’m thinking of booking us for a night out. Maybe a BnB, hotels aren’t too far, I don’t want us to drive for hours,” he says.

“Why do you think we need a night out?” I ask.

“We need privacy for one night. Let’s do our things without worrying about someone next door listening. And after today we really need our time together.”

I’m not against the idea, but I would’ve personally preferred a hotel with room service.

“Your mother insinuated that I’ve had abortions simply because I’m a girl who lives by herself.” That really hurt me. I’ve never been accused of such before, not even by my childhood enemies

“I’m sorry about what happened, especially because I asked you to go there. I was so ashamed, I couldn’t even look at your stepmother,” he says.

“I think she hates me because as soon as you had a breakthrough you came here and lived with me. She thinks I’m keeping you here and exploiting you for what you have.”

“Which is not true,” he says.

It’s very easy for him to say that because he’s not the one being accused of things and hated on.

“But that’s how it looks like,” I say.

“Okay, do you want me to leave?”

I don’t want him to leave, I’m used to him being here.

“I don’t know, but I think she will only be happy if you go back home.”

“I don’t want to go back home, she cannot give me what you give me. She’s my mother, I’m allowed to stay away from her,” he says.

“But she hates my baby because of that.” I’m tearing, I can’t hold back.

“Her issues are with me, Miyanda. But she doesn’t want to confront me. She definitely doesn’t hate the baby, that’s her grandchild.” He’s lying.

I know what I saw, I felt what I felt, I heard what I heard. My child won’t have a grandmother from both sides. One is dead, another one simply hates me.

“Sthandwa sami,” he grabs my hands.

I don’t want to look at him with tears, he can’t relate to what I’m feeling.

“If I have to choose between you and my family, I will choose you.”

I pull my hands and cry openly. This shit he’s saying is the reason why his mother hates me.

“You can’t say that, they will hate me more.”

“I love you, nothing is going to change that, and I’m going to do everything for you and our baby. Everything!” He holds me close to his chest and wipes my tears. “I will find a place close to town, you’re not going to work tomorrow.”

I don’t contest, even though I know that Singh and I will have a problem.

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We ate out and came here for the night. He had his alcohol, I binged on Netflix. This place is amazing, there's free Wi-Fi and hot water. I haven't bathed while standing in a while, I'm always squeezing myself to fit into a washing basin. I stand in the shower and sing my heart out. I need to forget about my problems for a moment. Bonga slept late, I woke up twice and found him drinking and listening to deep house music in the middle of the night. He's still in bed snoring. I will excuse him, I know he doesn't have a tight relationship with alcohol, he was just stressed. Today I woke up in a good mood, whatever happened yesterday don't matter anymore. MaVilakazi may not like my baby but she's not going to mistreat him or her. That's one thing I can guarantee, nobody is going to treat this baby anyhow. Even those who don't like the parents they will hold their hatred when my baby is around. As for me, I don't care. Yesterday was the first and the last time I cried over MaVilakazi. I don't have a mother, she died, so I don't give a fuck what other people's mothers think of me.

Bonga is still asleep despite my loud shower singing. I won't wake him up, he said we'd order breakfast, I will do it on my phone and wait until he wakes up. I dress up and go back to the series I didn't finish last night.

There's a knock at the door. I doubt they will deliver our food so fast, I think 15 minutes max is the scheduled time for delivery. And how did the delivery guy open the gate?

I go and open, confused.

Boom, Mpatho Mshazi!

We both didn't expect to see each other. He's carrying a stack of white towels, I remember that there were only two towels when we got here. But how is he the one here?

"Hi, hello," he says awkwardly.

“Hi. You’re coming in?” I open the door and step aside, nerves are making me look stupid.

He walks in and looks around with a slight frown on his face.

“Excuse me, why are you here with the towels?” I ask because I’m confused.

“Ummm, they forgot to bring them in yesterday before you checked in. I’m sorry about that and for disturbing you,” he says.

“Oh okay, thank you.” I take them from him and walk away.

No wait, I still don’t understand.

I pause and look back at him. “Why is it you who brought them?”

“It’s a Mshazi property, my grandfather owns this place.”

He’s very humble, we all know that his grandfather died, so now he owns this place. I don’t think Malibongwe knew that before booking, he wouldn’t have booked us in a Mshazi property.

“It’s nice, I love the TV screen and that you added Showmax and Netflix. I love the WiFi as well, I can live here forever.”
Miyanda shut the fuck up.

I can even see it on his face; I talk too much than he expected.

“Sorry, you can leave. Thanks for the towels, if you knew you wouldn’t have bothered because we came with our own towels. We have a lot of them, maybe seven, but they’re not white because I hate washing white things. I will even use a black towel to wrap the baby around my back.”

“That’s nice...”

Again please, kindly shut up Miyanda.

“Okay, bye.” For real now I’m letting him go.

I wonder where he's coming from, there's no way he woke up from the village early to bring us the towels. Surely he has employees doing that for him.

"Sorry, do you know how long it takes for Eats&Delivery to deliver in the morning?" It's one last question.

"No, I've never ordered from them," he says.

"Why? Is their food bad?" I'm worried because I ordered two platters from them.

"No, I just haven't ordered from them." He steps back and peeks outside the door. My phone is ringing somewhere, there's a car hoot outside.

"I think that's them," he says.

I dash to the bathroom and leave the towels.

I come back, he's at the gate already letting their car in. I stand at the door, the delivery guy comes out with bags of food, Mpatho helps him. Maybe he's not cocky as Bonga made him to be. He's wearing dark green tracksuit, sneakers and a black cap. There's a two year difference between him and Bonga, he's not as tall as Bonga, he's bigger in frame, more muscly and dark in skin.

I make payment and return to the kitchen. He helped me bring the food in, I can invite him in for breakfast.

"Please stay, Bonga will wake up and join us for breakfast," I say.

He smiles...his smile is not warm and friendly as Bonga's. It's just a smile of avoiding making things awkward.

"Thank you, I've eaten," he says.

"Okay, you can have a cup of coffee and watch us eat then."

There are footsteps coming, it's Bonga.

“I heard voices, who were you...” He sees us and stops.

He’s in his shorts, topless and barefooted.

“He brought us towels, this is his BnB,” I tell him before he asks.

“Oh,” he comes in.

“Why there were no towels in the first place?”

Is he about to fight about towels now?

“Humans make mistakes, I’ve already apologized to usisi,” Mpatho says.

I nod, “Yes, he apologized. I’ve asked him to stay for breakfast, he says he’s never eaten from Eats&Delivery before.”

I look at Mpatho, he can’t say no, I’m not part of their rivalry.

“Rich kids don’t order, they have chefs,” Bonga says.

I’m not sure about that comment, but Mpatho seems indifferent about it.

“We will sit in the lounge and continue with episode 9 of The Inmate,” I tell them.

“I don’t like watching something I didn’t see in the beginning.” Bonga is up to annoy me. Who said I’m not going to tell them what happened in the first eight episodes?

“I never complain when I watch soccer with you,” I say.

He yawns, “Okay, I will take a bath and come.”

“Good!” I look at Mpatho standing.

“Please go to the lounge, you can’t say no now.”

“Okay, I hope I’m not stepping over boundaries.”

I think he's a nice person, even though Bonga says it's fake. We all have our bad sides, that doesn't mean our good sides are fake.

I make three breakfast plates and leave Bonga's on the table since he's still taking a bath. I know he's not a crazy person, he's not going to mind me eating without him and with his enemy. Mpatho is respectful like his younger brothers, unlike his sister Nombuso. He didn't press play, he's watching a paused screen.

I give him his food and sit.

"How is your wife? I forgot to ask."

He chuckles, "The one you called a slayqueen?"

"Is she not a queen?" I ask.

"Well, she is," he says.

"Doesn't she slay?"

"She does," he laughs.

"Exactly, she's a slayqueen. Also, she said things to me as well and she was coming for Bonga."

"No, she wasn't. Maybe it looked that way, but her and I were going through certain things, that dinner was important to us, that's why she came into the conversation and asked Malibongwe to talk about what he wanted to talk about some other day."

"But what he wanted to talk about was a priority to him, just like your dinner was a priority to her," I say.

"Okay, let's not bring that up again. My wife doesn't have a problem with you. Personally, I don't want you two to be enemies, you don't have to take sides or inherit beefs. I believe

you will have babies of the same age, they can be cordial cousins.”

“Would you let your child be my child’s cousin?” I thought him and Bonga didn’t want anything that has to do with each other.

“They will be cousins whether I like it or not. I’d love for my children to have a relationship with their families, both of them. I can never deny them that opportunity, it’s important for me.”

“Because you never had a relationship with one side of your family?” It’s too late when I realize how intrusive that question was.

“Yes, kind of. I also just want my children to have a normal life. I think having cousins, talkative aunts...” he says that and glances at me. “and heartless uncles makes life interesting.”

“Who is the heartless uncle? Bonga?” I don’t know why I find this funny. Bonga calls him heartless and here he is thinking Bonga is the heartless one as well.

“Who is calling me heartless?” Oh no, the devil himself.

We look at him, my eyes are widen, Mpatho on the other is unbothered.

“Me,” he says.

I hold my breath; yesterday was ruined by MaVilakazi and Nombuso, today cannot be ruined by her eldest sons too.

“And you’re good-hearted, you give grannies sleeping blankets and snowballs on Christmas,” Bonga says before sitting with his food.

“It’s charity and I give more than that. What do you give them? Tears?”- Mpatho. Maturity has flown out of the window.

“I’m poor, I don’t give them anything, I wait for MaVilakazi to come back with snowballs,” Bonga says.

I give him a look; this back and forth is unnecessary.

“You’re older, please act like it,” I say, I’m fed up.

“No, he’s older and he started it.”

Oh snap, Mpatho is older!

“How did I start? I’m just sitting here drinking my coffee,” he says.

Phewww! I thought he would be different from them, clearly this is in their blood. He’s stooping down to Bonga’s level despite growing up in the mansion with chefs serving him three healthy meals a day. Others are justified to sit on each other’s neck day in and out, they grew up eating samp for breakfast. They don’t have all the necessary nutrients in their bodies to act sane.

“You grew up eating yogurt and cheese, act differently. For Bonga this is a daily life, just yesterday he was fighting with Nombuso,” I say.

“That’s the difference between him and I, I don’t fight women,” Mpatho says.

“Because women have never emotionally abused you, that’s why you don’t fight them. You’ve never fed and clothed a woman, only for her to turn around and insult you every chance she gets. You’ve never been called useless after slaving at the hardware to rebuild your mother’s house and making sure that she has bread everyday.”

This is taking another turn.

“I’ve never had a mother Malibongwe and I’ve never had a sister,” – Mpatho.

“You married your sister,” Malibongwe says.

“Would you have preferred that I marry you instead?”

“Do I look gay to you?” – Bonga.

“I don’t know, you sound jealous that I married who I married, you’re always bringing it up. I didn’t ask for the life that I had, I chose to embrace it and be happy, so cut me some bullshit.”

My head is pounding, I must carry Grandpa everytime I’m going to be between two of MaVilakazi’s children.

“Then stop fighting with me, I didn’t ask for you to have that life. Your coming baby is celebrated, mine is doubted, but I’m not angry at you.” Bonga drinking last night was a sign of heartbreak. I knew he was lying to himself when he said MaVilakazi will love the baby.

“It will be okay, I will prove to her that I didn’t take you away from her,” I tell him. I think I’m the stumbling block between MaVilakazi and him. She will be happy and accept this baby if I give her whatever assurance she wants.

“That’s still a condition, if I love people I love them unconditionally. If I give to people I give unconditionally. Why is it different when it comes to me? Why can’t I be left alone and be where I get happiness and peace?”

I don’t know, MaVilakazi wants things her own way. She wants him back home, in that toxic environment that depresses him.

“Marry her and move back her home with her,” Mpatho says.

My eyes widen. Marriage? Just because MaVilakazi won’t allow her 30 year old son to move out of home.

He shrugs, “I’m just saying, he can’t be vat’n sitting without putting a ring on it. Unless if you prefer it that way.” I hate the smug look on his face.

Of course I don’t want to dish the cookie, do Bonga’s laundry and cook for him everyday without him putting a ring on my finger. I just don’t think I want it to happen because we are rushing to meet MaVilakazi’s demands.

“I can’t marry her over night, she’s also pregnant, I don’t want her to be stressing over wedding arrangements,” Bonga says.

“You can hire a wedding planner, wedding a pregnant woman doesn’t mean you’re stressing her out,” – Mpatho.

“Are you having a wedding?” I ask.

“We are still arranging lobola, we have to start there first because so far we’ve only signed at Home Affairs,” he says.

“Oh, so you’re not really a married man that you boast around as, uwumyeni wephepha?” Bonga bursts into laughter.

“I wasn’t talking to you,” Mpatho says annoyed.

“I will send you an invitation to the wedding, no plus-ones,” he says to me before standing up.

“Okay, if you invite me I will come,” I say, but I doubt Bonga would let me go especially if he’s not invited.

“Thanks for the coffee, call Mitchell if there’s something you need,” he’s leaving.

Bonga doesn’t bother to say goodbye. But I don’t think they still hate each other as they think they do. Now it’s just them being typical MaVilakazi’s children.

“His jacket?” I remind Bonga.

He stands up, “Hey, what’s your name again?”

Mpatho stops at the door and looks back.

“Your jacket, I don’t have space for it, come and fetch it.”

That’s not what I was implying by reminding him of the jacket.

“What jacket?” Mpatho frowns.

“The one with tikoloshes that tickle my baby, if you don’t fetch it this week I will start charging you for storage, I paid R565 to spend the night here as well.”

“Hawu Bonga, that’s not necessary,” I say.

“What’s not necessary? Are you his friend now?”

I look at Mpatho and mouth the word; “Go.”

He smiles and walks out, closing the door behind.

“You’re a hypocrite,” Bonga says.

“Eat my love, you need this kind of energy for Nombuso, not me. Tomorrow she’s coming with us to Durban, recharge yourself for that,” I say.

“Does she have to come though?”

“Yes, she has to,” I say.

He yawns...

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 71

PHUMELELE

I woke up alone in the bed. He didn’t leave any note, he just disappeared. We haven’t been on best terms the last two days. Us coming here has been useless because even in Beauty’s absence we are still having problems. I’m angry at him for his dark ways, I can’t forgive him for what he did to Sphakamiso. I don’t care if he takes it as me being an ex-girlfriend who’s still in love. I fuck with him, I’m married to him and I’m not going anywhere. But I’m not going to cuddle him and laugh with him even when he does cruel things to people who haven’t done anything to him.

It makes me even more angry that he chose to go without telling me. I feel like he's avoiding me, which is annoying because he's the reason why I'm moody these days, he should be next to me to deal with it. I will make breakfast for me alone, he will eat his wherever he is.

I fry two burger patties and eat them with bread and a cup of black tea. The door opens just as I throw my plate inside the sink. There are still unwashed dishes from last night, I don't think I'm going to wash them, I'm not in the mood.

He walks in with foodie bags. But I know he wasn't out to buy breakfast, it's 10:25 am, I woke up to him gone at 7am.

"Good morning," he says.

I don't answer, I wash my hands and go back to the bedroom.

He follows me after a short while with a plate of eggs and toasts.

"I know I'm late, I got delayed on the way, here's your breakfast."

"I've already eaten," I say.

He looks disappointed, he takes it back to the kitchen and comes back. He's obviously eaten too. This person woke up and dressed in tracksuits and sneakers and left. Maybe he was somewhere ruining more lives.

He stands by the window and stares outside. So I'm a fool in this bed?

"You're not even going to sit with me?" I ask.

"You want me to sit with you?" Dumb ass.

I don't respond, he reads between the lines and comes.

He takes his sneakers off and leaves his clothes on.

"You're coming in the tracksuit?" I ask.

I'm still wearing the nightie I was wearing last night. I looked sexy, hopefully, but he had the audacity to sleep on the far side and not even compliment me because I wasn't speaking to him.

He takes the tracksuit off and gets in bed with his boxers and vest on.

"Why are you like this?" I ask.

"How am I?" He's sitting far from me, that too makes me angry.

"You don't own up when you make mistakes, you prefer causing more damage all in the name of saving your ass. You're very heartless," I say.

"I just had Malibongwe calling me that, now I'm coming to my wife to the same statement."

Oh, he's been with Malibongwe all morning. I wasn't even told that they now hang out together.

"Where did you see him?" I ask, my voice is automatically loud.

"Why are you shouting? They booked in one of the BnBs, I went there to give them towels then Miyanda invited me to stay for breakfast," he says.

"Miyanda? Is that his rude girlfriend? You're friends with her now, you're leaving my breakfast to eat hers?" I ask.

"Yours? Where is it?"

Oh flip, I didn't make him any breakfast.

"That's not the point, I'm saying you have to change your ways, you're about to become a father, there's no dodgy father in the world, get straight." I think I've calmed down now.

"Take your boxers off," I tell him.

"Why?" He's asking me, his wife, why he should take his boxers off.

"I want to give you a blowjob that you've been crying for," I say.

“No, I’m good today,” he blatantly refuses.

I raise my eyebrow, “Did you get it somewhere else?”

“Phume...no,” he exhales heavily and looks at me pleadingly. “You’re shouting, I don’t think you are in a good space to do that.”

“Oh, is that a rule? I can’t shout before giving a blowjob.” I’m not experienced in these things, maybe it’s a rule and I don’t know.

“No, I’m not saying that. But I feel like you’re...”

I raise my eyebrow, “I’m what?”

“You’re going to hurt me,” he says.

Maybe if he looks in the mirror he sees me in his reflection.

“I don’t go around hurting people, that’s your style. So you don’t me to blow you?” I need to know, I can do other things if he’s not up for it.

“I’m not saying I don’t want you to do it,” he says.

“Okay then, take your boxers off.” I get off the bed and tie my hair up.

He’s stealing glances at me like I’m doing something dangerous, like planting bombs in my hair that are going to go off once I start blowing him.

“Are you angry?” he asks, holding his boxers below his knees like he plans to lift them up if I say I’m angry. This question is an insult to begin with; you can’t look at my face and think I’m angry for no reason, that means I’m ugly.

“I’m not angry,” I say.

He takes them off completely, but he still doesn’t look comfortable.

“Yini uzweni? That I bite and eat dicks?” I ask, his behavior confuses me.

“No, I’m happy,” he says.

He’s lying.

“Show me that you’re happy,” I say.

He blows out a sigh first and fakes a thin smile.

I roll my eyes and climb back on the bed and sit behind him.

He’s still wearing the vest. I pull it up, he voluntarily raises his arms, I take it off.

I start massaging his back, he’s very tense, it’s like he holds and releases his breath here and there.

I turn his face back and kiss his lips. He kisses me back, not because he’s feeling the kiss, he just doesn’t want any more problems.

“You’re tense,” I say.

My hands are soft, he should relax a bit.

“I’m just...” He turns his whole body and looks at me.

“Phume, I’m sorry,” he says.

“Okay, you’ve said it many times. Can I continue?”

He nods and turns back with a heavy exhalation.

I continue, slowly he starts to relax. I wrap my arms around his waist and press my lips on the side of his neck. He’s letting me do me, he’s not overtaking as he usually does. My confidence is boosted by the faint moan escaping his lips. I wrap my hand around his dick, he’s getting hard, I give him a few hand strokes.

“Give me more access, spread your legs,” I say.

His chest bounces, he glances at me for some reason and then slowly separates his legs. I grab his dick again and play with it. I've never done this so freely, anger gave me some confidence. I run the tip of my tongue behind his earlobe, his breaths become sharper and audible. He throws his head back, I raise the pace of my hand strokes.

"I'm sorry babe," he says faintly.

I let him go and move from his back to the front. He lies on his back, I kneel between his legs and slowly, praying silently that I don't fuck up, I go down to his dick with my face. His body smells good, that's some consolation. He has a colourless spill on his tip, pre-cum, God forbid. I grab his vest and wipe it off, ain't no way I'm going to lick that.

I wrap my hand around and give a hand stroke while I build up my sucking confidence.

He spills another drop of pre-cum again. Is he kidding me?

"Stop this," I say.

He takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. I can see on his tummy that he's holding his breath. I wipe him off again and then lick the head of his dick with the tip of my tongue. Raw meat! It's not bad as I thought. I push my mouth around it...how the hell am I going to swallow saliva? He's filled my mouth. The rules said you move your hand around it while sucking. But how do I do that knowing that hand strokes make him spill a bit?

He taps on the back of my head with his hand. I don't know what he's implying. I give it my all; I wrap my hand and move it while sucking.

"Mommyyyy!" he groans and attempts to sit up but lies back down again.

He grabs my head, his dick is stuck in my throat and I'm choking. He moves his waist up, I almost run out breath. He

does it three times and lets me go. I cough and go back to sucking. I'm recharged, all of a sudden I don't mind the little spills and him shoving his dick to the back of my throat.

"I- I'm- sorry," – his voice trembles.

His eyes turn, his neck tilts to the side, I see only the white part of his eyes. His whole body straightens and becomes rigid. I stop immediately, warm fluid runs all over my hand.

"Mpatho?" I'm panicking, he seems unconscious.

Or is it my eyes?

His legs still have a life in them; they're now shaking.

"Mpatho," I call again.

He turns his head and looks at me, his eyes are back to normal. But I don't think he's here with me, not with all his six senses. I get off the bed, it's wet between my thighs, I also need service, but I doubt I will get any. I get a towel and wipe them, he's closed his eyes, I'm not sure if he's sleeping or just catching his breath. I wash my hands and rinse my mouth before going back. It wasn't disgusting as I thought.

I lie next to him and put my arm over his chest.

"Mpatho," I say softly. I don't want him to fall asleep, the house will be boring.

"Mmmmmm," his eyes slowly open. He looks sleepy, maybe I should've done this at night.

"I want us to talk," I say.

He pulls my head and kisses me. It's a weak kiss, he's got no energy. He closes his eyes with his lips locked on mine, before I know it he's let me go and rested his head down.

"I miss you," I say. Not so long ago I was shouting at him for everything he was saying.

He licks his dry lips and opens his eyes again. He drags his body up and sits.

I lie on his lap and face up. I've wasted so much time being angry at him.

"Did you talk with Malibongwe?" I ask.

"Not really," he says and cups my face, he gives me a soft stare. I don't know a sexually satisfied face but this one, but his eyes say a lot.

He licks his lips again. I should've brought his lip balm.

"You look sleepy," I say.

He stretches a thin smile. "I'm okay, you suck the life out of me. Where did you learn that?"

"I'm a self-made dick sucker," I say.

He laughs softly. "Must I make you angry for you to do it?"

"You're scared of me when I'm angry. I don't even understand because it's not like I can beat you up, you're bigger than me," I say.

"It emotionally takes a toll on me and your words are sharper when you're angry. But I'm happy, even if I go to hell in the after-life at least I've felt how heaven is like."

I can't help but laugh. "You're so silly. But for real, I missed you."

"Then why have you been moody and unapproachable for two days?"

"Because I wanted you to feel the consequences of doing things that are wrong and cruel. I don't condone that, please change your ways," I say.

"Okay, I'm going to be honest and straight."

I will be a good wife and have faith on him.

“Why did you talk to that girl who called me a slayqueen and shamed my marriage?”

“She apologized,” he says.

“You’re lying, she didn’t.”

He laughs, “How do you know that I’m lying?”

“You looked at the side before saying it and then looked at the other side after saying.”

“Okay she didn’t, I’m sorry for lying. But I don’t think it was that deep, I don’t want you two to fight, your children are going to be cousins.”

Wonders shall never end!

“What kind of breakfast did she give you?” I ask. It can’t be a normal breakfast that has turned him into a peacemaker, not so long ago I was putting out a phone fight between him and Malibongwe.

“I only drank coffee,” he says.

“So it’s her coffee that has changed your perspective on life?”

“You changed my perspective on life,” he says.

“Really?” I’m smiling, that’s exactly the answer I was looking for.

“Yes, I wouldn’t want my destiny to be with anyone else, I love you. And thank you for letting me break your mouth virginity, one more to go.”

I frown; I’m confused.

“One more?” I ask.

Instead of clarifying he’s laughing.

My phone rings before I can interrogate him, it’s Aunt Brandi.

The weekend is almost here, we have to discuss the lobola and how everything is going to be conducted.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 72

SPHAKAMISO

He didn't want to come here without anything for his son. But time has passed, he had to see his son, he didn't have much to spend. He used the little he had to buy a pack of danone and chips. He took a taxi to Spingo where Thembelihle currently lives with Khulekani and Aphelele. He's both excited and nervous to see Aphelele. He's lost weight, too much of it. But things are coming together, bit by bit. The taxi drops him off, he walks a short distance to their house, Thembelihle knows that he's coming, he just didn't say the time. There's a car parked outside, a Yaris. There's another guest, he stands hesitantly outside the door with his single Spar bag. Well, there's no turning back, he has to go in.

He takes a deep breath and then knocks

The door is opened by a young girl, maybe she's in her late teens. She's got braids and irritably cute, pale face.

"Hi, I'm here to see..." He doesn't finish the sentence, Aphelele comes running and screaming 'baba!'

He forgets about the girl staring at him like he's some phara selling stolen items. Aphelele jumps into his arms, he lifts him up and hugs him tightly. Every self-doubt, fear and lack of value disappears. Life makes sense once he holds his little boy.

He brushes his head and lifts his face and kisses Aphelele's lips.

“Mmmmm!” Aphelele squeezes his little face in disgust.

He chuckles, “I’m sorry bafo, I just missed you.”

“Gogo wami,” he says pointing inside the house.

“Okay, let’s go and see her,” he says.

Someone clears her throat behind them, it’s the young girl with braids.

Oh flip, he left the Spar bag on the floor.

“It’s fine, I will carry it,” she says.

He nods and walks on, she’s following behind them.

There’s another lady sitting with Thembelihle, she’s older than the who opened the door. Maybe they’re sisters or something.

“What is that Nokwanda?” the one sitting asks.

It’s Nokwanda who opened the door, now she’s opening the Spar bag to see what’s inside. Sphakamiso feels ridiculed when she loudly announces what’s inside; just danones and a bag of chips.

Thembelihle is staring at him, looking concerned.

“Sanibona,” he greets, feeling a little awkward. He didn’t think he’d find Thembelihle in the company of strange, nosy girls.

“Yebo, come and sit,” Thembelihle says.

He sits next to her with Aphelele on his lap.

The other lady looks at him, “Your son is very smart.”

“And you are?” Thembelihle asks and gives her a look.

“Oops, sorry I’m Nondu and that’s my nephew’s aunt, Nokwanda.”

Nondu, he’s heard so much about her from Thembelihle.

“I’m happy to meet you, I’m Sphakamiso.” Not really happy, awkward is the word he should’ve said.

“Well, we were about to leave, hope to see you again,” Nondu says.

He could’ve given more than a nod but his eyes quickly met with Nokwanda’s. The look on her face says she’s judging him for his looks and the lousy Spar bag he came with. He doesn’t like it, Nondu seems more nice than her.

“We can wait for him, taxis might be scarce later,” she says.

That was unexpected, he didn’t think she has any bone of compassion in her.

“Aren’t you going to your father’s house?” Nondu asks her.

“He can wait, I’m sure he’s not dying to be disturbed in whatever he’s doing.” With that said they share a look, Nondu doesn’t look pleased with her statement.

“Seriously?” she says, giving Nokwanda a look.

Nokwanda rolls her eyes, only the two of them know what her father did.

“Okay, you two can wash my dishes ke and then make Sphakamiso something to eat while you gossip,” Thembelihle says.

Nondu stands, they both go to the kitchen. Before they disappear Nokwanda turns and finds his eyes on her, he quickly looks away.

“Sphakamiso,” Thembelihle demands his attention.

“Yebo Ma,” he looks at her.

“What’s going on?” She’s asking about the weight.

“Nothing,” he says.

“You’re not sick?”

“No,” he shakes his head.

“Are you eating well?”

“Yeah, I eat.”

“Have you gone to the clinic to check if there’s anything?”

“I’m not sick, I’m just depressed,” he says.

Thembelihle exhales heavily, she’s sad to see him like this. Even Aphelele sitting on his lap looks heavy.

“Give him here,” she says opening her arms.

Before he can say anything Aphelele refuses, he wants to sit on his father.

“He’s missed you,” she says.

“I also miss him, but I’m happy that he’s here and chubby like this.” He looks at Aphelele and smiles. He’s resembling his grandmother as he grows, MaVilakazi.

“No news about his mother?” he asks.

“No, you know once they start using drugs their lives depend on them, they forget all about the real world.”

“Is she on nyaope?” he asks.

“Yes, but she’s still working, doing her job.”

God knows how to choose his people, when he did Sphakamiso wasn’t at the front of the line. There’s a big possibility that Aphelele might never experience a mother’s love like other children.

“That Nokwanda girl, she seems very judgmental,” he says out of nowhere.

Thembelihle laughs, “She’s a nice child, you just caught her on a bad mood, her father refused to give her his car, she doesn’t like the one she came with.”

Nice life problems! He can't relate.

"Nondu is the talkative one, not filtered at all. But you won't see that because you share the same nose as her," – Thembelihle.

He chuckles, "No, she seems nice to me."

Or maybe he already concluded about Nokwanda? Well, she's concluded about him too. Maybe she wants to give him a lift so that she can drop him under the bright where all the pharas live.

"Where is Yoli?" Aphelele asks.

His eyes widen, Nondu was right, he's very smart.

"You still remember your cousin?"

Thembelihle chirps in laughing, "He even plays with Yoli and puts a portion of food for her and eats it on her behalf later. It's Yoli this, Yoli that."

He chuckles and looks at Aphelele, "Yoli is home with Aunty, they miss you."

Aphelele's face brightens up. Poor child!

"Your fathers miss you too, they're going to come and see you soon."

"Yoli," Aphelele says.

He smiles, "She's going to visit you too."

He loves this boy with his whole heart. He misses holding him at night, feeding him before he eats the remainders and giving him a bath while he plays with bubbles. Life has robbed him being a good father to his son. He can't have any of those moments again, it's a once-in-a-lifetime, soon he will be a big man who doesn't hug and take kisses from another man.

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Saying goodbye was definitely hard, but Aphelele didn't cry much. However, riding with these two ladies is hard. He's sitting at the back, Nokwanda is driving. Nondu is definitely a loud-mouth, it sounds like she has a little baby, she's been talking about being in a rush. And she has a boyfriend or whatever the man may be, she won't stop talking about him.

Nokwanda doesn't have a boyfriend, otherwise she'd be talking about him too.

"Where must I drop you?" she asks.

"Not under the bridge, you can drop me anywhere in town, I will talk." That wasn't a straight answer, Nokwanda glances at him on the rear view mirror with a slight frown. She's obviously born rich, she has that rich kid attitude.

"Where do you live?" she asks.

"KwaMashu," he says without specifying.

"Ehostela?"

Wow!

"Kahle Nokwanda," – Nondu.

He's already offended. Yes, he lives there, but there was no need.

"Yes," he says.

"You look like it, those type of guys that beat people."

He always gets this, he should be used to it now. People don't get to know him better, they look at him once and conclude that he's violent. Mcineka is to be blamed for that at most, especially in the village because he planted that seed on everyone's mind.

"You guys actually look a bit alike," she says.

Nondu laughs out loud. Obviously she wouldn't believe that she looks like someone like him.

"The nose only, I'm fat with a jiggly stomach and stretch marks," she says.

"Didn't you use the products I recommended for you...." They go back to their girly chats.

He sits silently, they're almost there, he will get off this car and by the grace of God never come across Nokwanda again in this lifetime.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

We've been here for over two hours now. We only found two men that he lives with, they told us he's gone to Spingo to visit his son. They're grown men with scars on their faces, the room smells like cow insides and cigarettes. I don't know how these are his friends, he's only 27 years old, they're not his mates. They took Bonga around and left us with 2l of Coke. Bonga is not talking to Nombuso, I think it's about yesterday. I can't say he's childish, she insulted him a lot.

The silent treatment he's giving her has gotten to her; she's very quiet. There's no TV here so we just staring at the walls in silence.

The door opens, Bonga walks in.

"He's coming," he says.

Thank God, this bed feels like a bed that's made of rocks. My butt actually aches, but there's only one chair here, Nombuso is sitting on it.

Bonga stands, he doesn't look okay.

Finally, Sphakamiso walks in.

Nombuso exclaims in shock. "Phaka, what's going on?"

That's not a good reaction. Yes, he's lost weight and he looks horrible, but let's not make him feel awkward. People go through things and lose or gain weight.

"Sanibona," he says.

Bonga is staring at him, his jaw is tightened.

"Hi stranger," I smile at him.

He's not holding any contact, all thanks to the shock on Nombuso's face and the disappointment on Bonga's.

"Are you eating here?" – Nombuso.

He looks at Bonga, "What's happening?"

Bonga looks at me, I give him a little nod.

"Ummm, let's talk outside for a minute."

They follow each other out.

I turn to Nombuso, "Sisi that was not nice."

"What? My brother is disappearing and you're busy analyzing my reaction. Didn't you see how thin he is? Only Morvite can save him." She's not a sensitive person, I don't know what went wrong when she was born. There's speaking your mind, then there's lacking compassion, and she's the last.

"But we are here to beg him to come back home because Bonga needs him for the business."

“It’s for the benefit of both you and him, not the whole family. I don’t have beautiful braids, I’m not wearing a new dress, I don’t smell nice perfume. I’m not going to benefit from that business.”

“Doesn’t he buy grocery for the family and takes care of bills?” I ask.

“How is that the same with what he’s doing for you? You’re a gold-digger, you’re sucking my brother dry.”

Exactly, I suck his dick too.

“So you want him to do for you what he does for his girlfriend? You’re his sister, I’m his girlfriend, his priorities when it comes to us differ.” I can’t believe I’m actually having this conversation, for the life of me I can’t keep fighting against the gold-digging tag. Anyway if not gold, what should I dig? Dust? I can never dig dust, it’s always going to be gold.

They walk in the middle of that heated argument.

I take a deep breath and ask, “Please tell me you agreed.”

“I already had this conversation with my brother...”

No, he can’t say no.

“Please, you can come back here, if you like the place that much, once you’ve made some money for yourself, then maybe you can start a business here to keep you going.”

He looks at Bonga, he doesn’t want to go back and forth with me.

“Let’s give him a few days, he’s going to come,” Bonga says.

“Does he have a few days if he continues living here?”

Nombuso asks.

What a weird question! We are all looking at her.

But Nombuso is Nombuso, she doesn’t care about anyone’s feelings.

She unbuttons her blouse and takes out a folded R100 note.

“Do you have a shop around here?” she asks.

Sphakamiso and her don't get along. I think among all siblings they're the biggest rivalries, even worse than Bonga and Mpatho from the things I've heard.

“Yeah, we do,” he says.

She hands him the creased R100 that looks brownish and torn.

“Here, buy Morvite,” she says.

Honestly, I give up, nothing can fix her.

Sphakamiso takes the money and thanks her. To me, he's the sweetest of them all. Mkhuleko doesn't talk much when he's around me but his face tells me he's not that sweet.

“Okay, we'll see you in a few days,” I say standing up.

“Walk us out makhanda,” Bonga says, slapping his head.

He finally laughs. The bond is there, even with Nombuso, it's always going to be there. It's just that fights take most of their time.

“Are we driving straight home? I needed some things from Durban station?” Nombuso asks.

Bonga doesn't answer, he walks side to side with Sphakamiso and starts chatting with him.

“I don't think he's going to pass by Durban station,” I tell her, I don't hold grudges.

“I didn't ask you,” she snaps at me.

This is probably why none of her siblings can stand her. I don't have a sister, neither does she, would it be hard for us to embrace one another and get along?

I sit at the back because the front seat is hers.

“No, I’m going to sit here,” she says.

“But you were at the front when we came.”

“Yeah but now I’m sitting here,” she says.

I’m not going to be bossed around by Nombuso.

“Then open the other door, I’m not shifting.”

Sphakamiso is silently watching the fight, this is exactly why he left.

“How was your son?” I ask while the angry bee goes around the car to get in from the other door.

“He was good, growing smart and talkative,” he says with a smile.

I’d say he took after his aunt, but Nombuso is not smart.

“I will see you soon, right?” I ask.

He hesitates first, I keep my pleading face on.

He chuckles, “Okay, I will see you soon.”

I’m going to hold him to that. Him and Bonga stand outside the car for a good while before we leave.

Finally, he waves us goodbye, Bonga gets inside the car.

“Did baba live in this hostel?” Nombuso asks him.

Heart-wrenching silence! How can silence be so loud?

Bonga starts the car and drives off.

We are just five minutes away from the hostel and I’m hearing sobs next to me.

The angry bee is crying.

I'm not going to say anything, lest I get accused of sponsoring Bonga's silence. Everything is my fault as far as her and MaVilakazi are concerned.

Sobs are getting louder and disturbing. I'm pretty sure that Bonga hears her, he's just choosing not to give her any attention. Cruel as it may sound, she deserves this silent treatment and I hope Bonga doesn't bow. She wouldn't be here if she knew how to say sorry. Or even better if she didn't insult and talk anyhow with her siblings.

Where are my earphones?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 73

PHUMELELE

We are back home, in the village. The reason we came back is because we thought Beauty was gone. I'm surprised to see her home. It doesn't even look like she's preparing to go somewhere. She was supposed to leave yesterday. This is the last thing I needed, knowing what I know now I cannot stomach being in the same room with her and Mpatho. As much as she's not beautiful to my eyes, she has the body and that's probably why Mpatho couldn't resist her. The fact that he had sex with her in this very same house is nauseating. He knows Beauty's nakedness, he's felt it and been inside her.

She's here with her cousin, Lindy.

I don't greet them, I connect my phone to the charger while Mpatho takes our bags to our bedroom.

"So you're pregnant?" Lindy asks.

"Yes, I am," I say.

“Congratulations to you and your brother. I mean, husband.” This is really getting old, I’m not even shaken by it anymore. Lindy already knows the whole story, I don’t think they were here planning good things about me. I’m pregnant, her cousin is not, even though she didn’t want a baby it still should’ve been her decision to make, unfortunately we made it ours.

“I thought you’d be on your vacation by now,” I say to Beauty.

“I postponed it, for safety purposes,” she says.

Lindy chuckles, “Basically because of your husband and Noxolo. Both you and Bee are being played here.”

I’m not back home for that. Mpatho has seen Noxolo, maybe, I don’t go with him everywhere he goes. But I know it’s just business, nothing more.

“How do you sleep with him?” that’s Lindy again. The same one who wanted Mpatho in bed not so long ago.

“We usually cuddle, close our eyes and sleep,” I’m done. I was here chatting because I’m nice, Mpatho didn’t even greet them, the wicked cousins.

I find him undressing in the bedroom, he better keep his shirt on.

“Whatever business you’re doing with Noxolo needs to end.”

He turns and looks at me. “Are we going back to square one?”

“I’m not unsecure, I just think the whole fighting Beauty thing has ran out of time, it’s now quite boring,” I say

“I’m protecting us,” he says.

“Just let her be, Mpatho. It got to stop, it’s not like you didn’t do wrong her.” This is what I’m noticing about Mpatho, even if he

does someone terribly wrong he'd never understand why the person should have the last strike.

"Okay madam," he turns back to what he was doing.

I need to change as well. I don't know how the cooking arrangements will be. Can we still dine together as a family? Now it's either Beauty goes back to her family or we move out.

"Mpatho," someone says outside the door.

It's Lindy's voice. I turn and look at him. What does she want?

He still hasn't put on a shirt, he comes and kisses my cheek before attending to the door.

They chat softly outside the door, then I hear footsteps going away. A huge, huge part of me wants to follow. I don't trust them with my husband. But then I got to have a grip, 'at the end of whatever they're summoning him for, he will come back to me'.

I'm hearing a little bit of a commotion but I mind my business. I need to find a place for my extra wigs, I only have one stand and lately, for some weird reasons, I've been trying to compensate my fading sexiness by buying hair wigs.

No, that's not a little bit of commotion, it's big commotion.

I leave what I'm doing and step out of my room to check.

What the fuck? These two bitches are throwing things at my husband. Something must've hit his lip, he's bleeding from the mouth. I don't know why the hell he's standing in the same position while he's being attacked.

If I wasn't pregnant I know I would've done more than shouting.

"Mpatho come back to the bedroom!" I yell.

He doesn't move, he's just a statue over there.

"Beauty what's wrong with you?"

She's still throwing things at him, the idiot doesn't even shield himself.

"Stay out of it wena!" she says.

"That's my husband, I'm not going to keep quiet while you're attacking him because you know abuse towards men isn't taken seriously."

"Husband my foot! This man killed Bee's baby," that's Lindy.

"And he's my grandson, I'm hitting him as a grandmother, unless if you Phumelele Mzimela thinks I don't have a right to do so as his grandfather's wife," – Beauty.

It's time I get this man out of the room.

Lindy throws a remote, it lands on me as I pull Mpatho's arm. He drops my hand and turns, within a blink of an eye I'm seeing him grabbing Lindy. No, no, no! I'm not going to let him hit a woman, even though Lindy deserves some beating.

Guess what? Beauty, the one Lindy is fighting for, doesn't even stand long enough to see what her fate is. The second Mpatho grabs Lindy, Beauty runs to her phone and car keys and disappears.

"Mpatho calm down," I'm the one fighting for Lindy now.

"You're hitting my pregnant wife?" He roars, his anger just blew up within a second.

"I didn't mean to hit her," – Lindy, she's now shaking.

"Who did you mean to hit?"

Mpatho though, the last thing I want to do is mop someone's pee.

"Let's go, your lip is bleeding," I pull his arm.

He obeys and follows me. Hopefully Beauty is waiting for her in the car. I can't believe they camped here to attack Mpatho when he arrives. Beauty wasn't raped by Mpatho, they were two adults who made a decision to have sexual intercourse. Things didn't go her way, maybe. I don't know why she's angry. I understand the baby part a bit, so I'm not going to say I blame her for this. But one day we also need to talk about how much nonsense Beauty has gotten away with in this family.

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"How long were you going to stand and take the beating?" I'm cleaning his face with a wet cloth.

"I was confused," he says, flinching, they scarred his forehead too.

"Lindy is really stupid. What made her think Beauty would have her own sister turning against her if she was a loyal person? Did you see her running and leaving her behind."

"Phume please be gentle," he flinches again.

"Askies. So tell me, were you going to hit Lindy?"

He doesn't answer the question. "I want us to go to MaVilakazi later."

Shocking, to say the least.

"Why?" I ask.

"I'm sending lobola, I want to have another conversation with her."

"You want to give her a chance?"

The last time we spoke he had canceled MaVilakazi, he wanted nothing to do with her.

“I just want to see if there’s anything that can come out of the second conversation,” he says.

“Okay,” I say. Deep down I wish he told me about this yesterday, I have my own history with the Mcinekas, I don’t want to just dress up and go there.

“Any news from Malibongwe?” I ask.

“We spoke,” he says.

“And what’s the update?”

“Sphakamiso is coming back to work with him in their business.” His face tells me he doesn’t want to talk about this. It’s surprising because I’m the one who pushed him to do it.

“How is he?” That’s what I want to know.

“He’s fine, I’m telling you he’s coming back to work, fixing cars and engines. But we will make sure he sees a medical team,” he says.

“Okay, I was just asking because you’re no longer telling me anything. To the Mcinekas, am I expected to cover my head?”

“Do whatever makes you comfortable,” he stands up.

I’m not even done cleaning his face, I guess my questions are suddenly uncomfortable.

I’m not going to cover my head, I don’t cover it even here.

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We are at the Mcinekas, with both Sphakamiso and Malibongwe gone it’s really quiet and less intimidating. Nombuso’s daughter is playing in the yard, when she sees us coming she runs away. It must be boring for her without Aphelele.

Nombuso comes out of the door and sees us. We didn't announce that we were coming, it's a surprise. Maybe an unpleasant one.

"Nkosiyazi!" she happily comes to her brother.

I'm thinking she's going to hug him, normal people do that when they're happy to see a person. But she doesn't hug him, she stands in front of him with her arms folded and a smile stretching on her face.

"You're visiting?" she asks.

"I'm here to see MaVilakazi."

"Oh, she's gone for the stokvel meeting. Come inside, I will call her." She turns, pauses and looks at him again. "Wait, what happened to your face?"

"Oh here, nothing, I bumped into a wall."

Why is he lying? His face shows that he was attacked.

Nombuso's accusing eyes turn to me.

"It wasn't me, Beauty did it," I say.

"Ushaywa umfazi?" She looks at him, angry and disappointed.

"She's my grandmother by tradition."

Yet you fucked her, I silently say.

Nombuso leads us inside the house and offers us seats. I will give her a compliment for cleaning, the house is squeaky clean while she's looking like a mess with calamine on her face.

"Makoti, you have to learn to dress according to your position," she says.

I expected her to say something, Nombuso is in a 80 year old body, her mindset is so backward.

I don't respond to her, I don't have to negotiate how I dress with anyone but my husband.

"Saturday I'm sending her lobola," Mpatho tells her.

"How many cows?" – Nombuso.

"Half of the price," he says.

I'm just staring at her. I know the type of a sister Nombuso is, she's not just asking about the cows to be informed. She wants to contest it because Mpatho wasn't my first. Well, newsflash, if she wants me to fetch another cow from the man who took my virginity it's still going to be a brother of hers.

"It's a funny situation because lobola is paid to honor the parents for raising your wife well. In this case, your family raised her themselves," she says.

"I want to do things appropriately, I will start where everyone starts."

Her daughter walks in crying, finally she can pull her nose out of my business. I remember how she complained when she came to see Mpatho, but we've been here for a minute and she hasn't offered us even pure water.

"I'm scared of a dog," her daughter says crying.

"What dog? Uyatetema wena."

"Malume came with a dog," she's pointing outside.

"Which malume?" – Nombuso.

The malume in question walks in with a puppy under his arm. It's Mkhuleko, he doesn't see us, he's carrying a bowl of food in his hand.

"Yey wena Mkhuleko, come here!"

He takes a few steps back and looks at our direction.

“I saw a car outside and wondered,” he says making his way to where we are seated.

“Sanibona,” he greets, not paying attention to Nombuso who actually called him.

We greet him back, he finds space and sits with his puppy. Nombuso’s daughter gets hysterical.

“Get out with that thing, can’t you see you’re scaring Yoli?” – Nombuso.

“Don’t worry, she will get used to Ruby, I bought it for her because she’s bored.”

Nombuso stands up and shoves Yoli to the back.

“You want my daughter to play with a dog?”

“It’s a puppy, not a dog.” Mkhuleko takes out a coin from his pocket and shows it to Yoli.

“Come Yolz, if you greet Ruby nicely I will give you this money.”

Lord forgive me for saying this, but Yoli is going to rob banks if she doesn’t make it in this life thing. I can’t believe a coin just made her touch a dog...I mean, a puppy. She even stops crying.

“Are you going to play with Ruby?” Mkhuleko asks.

She nods quickly.

Nombuso is still standing but she has no fight left. Yoli gets her a coin and runs out excitedly.

“You’re visiting us?” Mkhuleko asks, looking at me and Mpatho.

“No, we are here to see MaVilakazi,” Mpatho says.

“Okay, meet Ruby by the way,” he says.

Ruby is not a beautiful puppy. Nope, she’s not chubby, she doesn’t have bright colors, and she looks naturally sad. I don’t

know which breed it is, I don't like pets generally. But Ruby, I don't like her times twenty.

"Is that a sore on her leg?" – Mpatho.

Why the fuck is he touching an ugly dog's sore with the hand that touches me?

"Yeah, they say she was playing next to a fireplace," Mkhuleko says. They're both hovering over this new bitch, Ruby. Mpatho talks about taking her to the vet, Ruby has made them forget about other people in the room.

"Dogs are not allowed here," Nombuso drops the bombshell. Ever heard about someone cutting a celebration short? That's Nombuso right now.

"Why?" Mkhuleko asks.

"Because majority of us don't like dogs."

"You're big but you're not a majority."

"I'm older," Nombuso.

"Exactly, you should be in your own house making the rules there."

"It's not a rule, use common sense. Who is going to feed your unemployed ass and this ugly Ruby at the same time? Uyifuya kanjaniinja uyinja nawe?" (how do you keep a dog when you're also a dog yourself)

"I asked Bhut' Malibongwe, he said I can get Ruby," Mkhuleko says.

"Do you see Malibongwe around here?"

"He buys food, not you."

Wait a second, this is turning into a serious fight. Us, the guests, are now watching them go back and forth. Mkhuleko is still sitting on the floor, Nombuso is standing.

“And while Malibongwe buys food, you’re buying dogs?” – Nombuso.

“Just like you buy isnemfu too,” Mkhuleko.

Can’t he keep quiet for peace sake? Nombuso is making noise.

“Where have you ever see me buy that thing?”

Mkhuleko brushes Ruby’s head and finally keeps quiet.

That was too awkward. We came here to see MaVilakazi, instead we met Ruby and....

I don’t know what Nombuso did, I just saw Mkhuleko standing up, Nombuso throwing hands on his face and him wiping the calamine on her face with a slap.

My first instinct tells me to remove myself from the commotion and watch from a distance. Mpatho stands for a minute not doing anything, I’ve never seen his eyes so wide. This is scary and confusing. One minute they were arguing, now they’re killing each other. There’s a huge gap between them, Nombuso is the first born, Mkhuleko is the last.

Mkhuleko throws Nombuso on the floor, that’s when Mpatho moves. He gets Mkhuleko off her and drags him out of the house without saying a word.

Nombuso sits up and fixes her bra under the loose T-shirt. “I always tell him that I will beat him up, today was the day.”

But she’s the one who got beaten.

“Do you need help?” I ask.

“No, I’m fine, I’m so fine.” She winces as she gets on her feet.

“Maybe you need painkillers,” I’m just trying to be helpful.

“I said I’m fine!” she almost bites my head off.

Let me hold my peace. I never thought I'd ever consider the Mshazis a peaceful family until now. I'm lucky Mpatho doesn't stay here.

He walks in, I don't know where he left Mkhuleko, hopefully he's calm now.

I look at him, his face says 'I don't want to be here'.

"Are you okay?" I'm trying hard not to laugh because this person has been wanting to have siblings as long as I can remember and now he's standing there like he's praying for someone to come and kidnap him.

"I'm traumatized," he says and comes to sit next to me.

I'm hearing low sobs somewhere. Could that be Nombuso?

"Where is Ruby?" Mpatho asks.

Was I supposed to look after her?

I look around, she's no where in sight.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 74

PHUMELELE

MaVilakazi arrives after the dust has settled. Nombuso is still locked in her room, I guess she's angry because the sobs haven't stopped. Mkhuleko found Ruby outside and came back with her. He's sitting with us, talking about Ruby and laughing like nothing happened.

MaVilakazi looks more scared than surprised that we are here.

"I'm so sorry I kept you waiting," she's laying a grass mat on the floor.

“You didn’t know we were coming,” Mpatho says.

She fakes a smile and looks at Mkhuleko. “Uphi udadewenu?”

“Who?” Mkhuleko frowns.

“How many sisters do you have? Go and tell her to make a drink for the guests quickly.”

“Alright....this is Ruby by the way,” – Mkhuleko.

“Ngiyeka ngomgodoyi, be fast!”

He laughs and goes to Nombuso. He’s got an element of IDGAF, which is very funny to watch. Nombuso is still crying and he doesn’t mind going to her room to give orders.

“They fought,” Mpatho breaks the news to MaVilakazi.

There’s no shock, no fear, on her face.

“I’m sorry you had to witness that, especially umakoti,” she looks at me and smiles.

I don’t think she likes me, why would she start now?

“It’s good to see you here, Nkosiyazi. I didn’t think you’d ever want to be in front of my face again after what happened the last time,” she says.

“I’m Mpatho, thanks.” I can hear the amount of control he has over his voice.

I brush his arm quickly. They don’t have to be mom and son, as long as he’s able to move on.

“Saturday I’m sending lobola, then we will have a list for izibizo and set a date for the wedding,” he summarizes it all in one sentence. This has to be brief.

“That’s very nice, thank you so much for inviting me,” she says.

“I’m informing you, you’re not invited.”

I feel embarrassed on her behalf.

She drops her eyes, “Thank you for informing me.”

“Is there anything I’m expected to do that involves the Vilakazis?”

“Your uncle need to be informed so that he can ask for blessings from your maternal forefathers.”

“I’m 32, I’ve never had their blessings, that uncle has never bothered to look for me.”

“I know, you can do it however you want, as long as you’re happy I’m happy too.”

“And when I’m unhappy?” he asks.

“I...I hurt too,” she says.

“You didn’t show that Thandekile, I was just a whistle away and suffering throughout my childhood, you never bothered.” It will take time for him to engage with her without bringing up the past.

“My hands were tied,” she says.

“How so?” His voice rises, he stands up.

I’m holding my breath.

“You raised Sphakamiso with all your children. Why me?”

She can’t answer.

This is so twisted because he thinks Sphakamiso had an advantage, while Sphakamiso wishes he’d been given to his father instead of being raised here. MaVilakazi fucked up all her children.

“Not even a birthday card! But now I’m expected to inform your brother about my life.”

“Mpatho sit down,” I say.

He looks at me, I can see that he's angry but we are not here to fight, Beauty just did that not so long ago with us.

"Did you love my father?" he asks.

This question is not relevant at all. Worse Nombuso is making her way here, she's carrying a tray with tears still pouring from her eyes.

"I did, but I couldn't be with him," she says.

Nombuso stops with her mouth hanging open.

"Ma???"

Oh, oh!

She comes and puts down the tray in front of us.

"You loved his father?" she asks.

"Yes, I loved him, just like your father loved other women. He loved me too and her mother knew it," she says turning her eyes to me. I'm not going to react to that. Mshazi loved my mother, I can bet my life on that.

"Why didn't he fight for you if he loved you so much? He was richer, messier and connected than my father," Nombuso asks.

This is the most sane thing I've ever heard coming from her mouth.

"Because he loved his son more," MaVilakazi says.

Mpatho isn't moved by that, he's still wearing a bitter face.

"He chose his son over war and I chose you and your father. And I've infantized you your whole life, everybody has. The biggest mistake we ever made! You don't respect anyone, you don't love anyone, you don't care for anyone's feelings, because you've been a priority your whole life."

This is an unexpected U-turn, even Nombuso is surprised.

“This isn’t about me, your son is here asking questions and you’re coming for me.”

“No, I’m just stating facts. The boys were parented, you were infantized, now you’re rotten to the core. You didn’t grow up, you think you will be a baby girl your whole life. You are a grown woman but you’re still fighting with Mkhuleko, a mere child.”

Ok, I get it now. Nombuso fought her baby, she broke a basic family rule; nobody touches the last born and stay on good terms with the mother.

“He started it,” she says.

“Malibongwe is not talking to you. Sphakamiso took his son away because of you. Mkhuleko is always playing loud music to block your noise. Most neighbors don’t come here because of you. And you still think you’re not a problem?”

Phewww! We need aircons in this place.

“Oh, now you’re trying to be a super mom in front of your son who was fired from the army and his inheritance wife?”

What the fuck? Thina singenaphi manje, why is she coming for us?

She picks the tray with our juice.

“Sorry, we haven’t drank it yet,” I tap her arm.

“It’s Yoli’s Oros, I was doing her a favour by making it for you. But since she wants to make me look like a bad daughter she must sort herself out. Or call her beloved last born to come and do it.” She turns and walks away. I never thought I’d ever agree with anything MaVilakazi says, but today I will, Nombuso is very childish.

“Nombuso!” Mpatho calls before she disappears.

She looks back with a creased forehead.

“Bring it back,” he says, more like demands.

It’s her daughter’s juice, she’s said it, nobody can force her.

“No, MaVilakazi is not going to...” this woman swallowed a whistle in her previous life.

“I don’t care, bring it back,” Mpatho shuts her up.

He stands up and brushes his arms.

My eyes widen, he cannot be fighting for people’s Oros.

“Are you going to beat me too?” Nombuso.

“Mbuso!” he shortens her name.

Now it sounds like a serious warning.

She comes back and puts the tray down, then she angrily storms out of the room.

“Is she a borderline?” he asks MaVilakazi.

“She’s always this crazy, she’s badly behaved and lacks emotional intelligence.”

I can agree with her on that.

“Have you ever looked deeply into it? She’s not normal.”

“Nothing about them is normal,” she says about them collectively.

“Mkhuleko is normal, Sphakamiso also looked and sounded normal the few times that I’ve met him, she’s different,” he points out.

I still get goosebumps when I hear him calling Sphakamiso’s name without a flinch.

“What about Malibongwe?” MaVilakazi asks, she looks happy for a second, they’re discussing other children like they have a normal relationship.

“Who is Malibongwe?” – Mpatho.

She drops her eyes.

I don't know what entered her womb, all her children have things against each other, even the newcomer.

I don't drink Nombuso's juice, I don't know her that much but I know her too well to know that she's somewhere praying that we get stomachache from drinking this juice by force. I was hoping we'd disappoint her and not drink it all so that it haunts her at night. But nope, Mpatho drinks his glass and finishes it.

“Are you not drinking?” he asks me.

I shake my head, I'm one hard soul. I want Nombuso to see that I didn't drink it.

Mkhuleko walks in with Ruby.

“Nay' ijuice,” Mpatho tells him.

He wastes no time, he picks it up and gulps it down.

“I'm going somewhere, maybe when I come back you'd be gone,” he says wiping his lips. Nombuso will be mad when she finds out he also drank the juice.

“You have my number, right?” – Mpatho.

“Yeah, I have it,” Mkhuleko says.

“Call me later,” – Mpatho.

“Okay, send me airtime, I will call.”

Mpatho laughs.

He says goodbye and leaves. Him and Mpatho are likely to have a beautiful relationship compared to others.

We didn't start on the right foot with MaVilakazi, but now the conversations have become calmer. It's better when they're discussing others than when they're talking about themselves.

"I'm glad Aphelele will finally have a brother," she says.

"It could be a girl," Mpatho says with a smile, sending his hand to my tummy.

"It's a boy, I can see her nose," – MaVilakazi.

"Will it get back to shape?"

MaVilakazi chuckles, "Yes, it won't stay this big forever."

They're talking about me as if I'm not here, discussing the size of my nose. I'm disappointed in Mpatho because he's never told me that my nose is now big and ugly, he just had to do it in front of his mother.

We started on the wrong foot, I doubt their relationship will pick up soon. But they have calm conversation when it's about others, that's worth an applause. She gets up and walks us out when we leave. Nombuso is still angry somewhere.

"I will take your brother's number," he says.

This is better than nothing, I'm proud of him. One more session with Freedom there will be a wider light at the end of the tunnel.

"Nombuso is not going to say goodbye to us?"

MaVilakazi sighs, "That one always has attitude. But I will call her, maybe she will come."

I don't know why he has to lick Nombuso's ass. Why would an adult crave for attention so much? She wants to be babied, yet she has a baby.

"You really like her," I note out.

He chuckles, "And you don't?"

Duh!

I open the door and put my bag inside the car.

I see her coming out of the house with her arms folded.

“Now you don’t say goodbye?” Mpatho asks, smiling.

“Goodbye,” she says with a straight face.

“When are you visiting?”

My eyes widen. Visiting who? Where?

“You need to get away from the drama for a day or two. Go somewhere, let loose, have a drink, get a massage, and see a psychologist,” he says.

“Psychologist?” She looks at him eyes wide.

“Someone who is a professional, they can give you therapy, after all being the only girl child in the family of boys is not easy. Are you a borderline?”

“Mpatho!” I exclaim.

Is he crazy?

“What is that?” – Nombuso.

“Never mind, I will organize your vacation. Where do you want to go?”

Again, what the fuck? He hasn’t taken me to a vacation.

“Are you serious?” Her face brightens.

“Yeah,” he says.

“Okay, I will go, as long as I don’t go with any of MaVilakazi’s children.”

“No, it will be exclusive, just for you.”

She throws her arms around him and hugs him. I'm standing at the side looking like a bitter, jealous wife. But she isn't nice to me, why would I be happy for her?

We finally get inside the car, I'm ready to drill him with questions.

"What was that?" I'm confused.

"What was what?"

"You just promised her a vacation, brother champion!"

"I just feel like there's something wrong, her vacation will come with seeing a psychologist."

"Why do you always detect people who need mental help?" I'm so bored.

"Why are you mad?"

"I'm not mad, I'm just saying it's unnecessary."

"Well, you're sending your aunt money, that's not necessary too."

What?! That's not even comparable, I've known Aunt Brandi my whole life, he just found out about Nombuso but he already wants to be the brother of the year.

"Are you competing with Malibongwe?" I ask.

He frowns, "Excuse me? What does this have to do with him?"

"I don't know what you're doing," I shrug.

"I'm a caring person by nature, not everyone is cold like you."

I look around, maybe there's someone else he's referring to in the car. Me? Cold?

"I'm cold?" I need to be sure.

"Not in bed," he says and smiles, biting his lower lip tenderly.

This idiot, this was supposed to be a fight.

“Then where am I cold?” I ask.

“Nowhere, I was just trying to win an argument.”

I laugh and shake my head.

Why was I angry again? It can't be over Nombuso because she attempted to take away her Oros.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 75

MALIBONGWE

He got a call from his uncle, his mother's cousin, telling him that Mpatho called. He doesn't want to get involved in that because, just like Mpatho, he only found out recently that his mother has another son. They will sort it out themselves.

He's managed to find a house, there are some renovations being done, in a month or two they'll be moving in. Another thing on top of his list is the Mthethwa damages, then afterwards he will set a date for lobola negotiations because in his mind there's no doubt that he's spending his whole life with Miyanda.

His phone rings, it's Sphakamiso.

“Makhanda,” he says.

That was his nickname growing up because he had a lumpy head.

“Sho, I'm in a taxi,” Sphakamiso says.

He frowns, “You're in a taxi?”

“Yes, but as I said I won’t move back home. Is the place ready?”

“Oh yes, yes I got a room in the same yard with us. Why didn’t you tell me you’re coming today?” Saying he’s happy would be an understatement. Not just for Unified, but having his brother back. He’s lived in Durban before but this time it was different because he hadn’t left on good terms.

“My friends were going home too, I was going to be bored so I decided on last minute,” he says.

“Okay, I will get you at the mall,” he says.

He gets off the call and returns to the room. Miyanda is at work, she still insists to work for some odd reasons. He can take care of her, he’s proven that ever since he moved in with her. He takes care of the bills, all of them. He’d like for her to relax and stay at home, cook warm meals and wait for him to come home.

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Sphakamiso is waiting at the agreed spot. He’s lost weight, it’s hard to look at him and not show any sympathy. Malibongwe hits the back of his head and stands next to him.

“I didn’t see you,” Sphakamiso says.

“I parked behind Spar. Is this the only bag you left with?”

“No, I left another one in Durban, just in case I go back.”

“You won’t go back,” Malibongwe says and picks his bag.

They head to the car and drive to Home Choice, the room only has a bed for now.

Sphakamiso is just two doors away from him and Miyanda. When the house is done they will all move in, it's a big house that will accommodate all of them. But he hasn't discussed it with Miyanda, hopefully she won't mind.

They shop and get the best of what they need and leave.

"I got a call from Nombuso, she says Mkhuleko attacked her," Malibongwe says in the car.

"Why did he attack her?" – Sphakamiso.

"I don't know, I didn't respond to the text, I'm not talking to her."

Sphakamiso chuckles...tables have turned.

"Why? You're her favorite?"

Malibongwe sighs, "I got in a relationship with someone she doesn't like, I'm no longer her favourite, I think Mpatho is."

"Mmmm!"

The rest of their journey is filled with music.

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He introduces Sphakamiso to the landlord and helps him set up his room. Tomorrow they will be waking up and going to Unified, they need to start running as soon as possible.

"I need a nap," Sphakamiso says, he's tired.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Malibongwe asks.

Sphakamiso frowns, "Yes, why?"

"Man, you've lost weight. Maybe you should see a doctor before we start on any labor, I need to be sure that you're physically fit to work."

“As I said, I’m okay,” – Sphakamiso.

“But hearing from a doctor wouldn’t do any harm.”

“No, I’m fine.”

Malibongwe heaves a deep sigh and lowers himself on the bed.

“Sphakamiso this is life, you don’t have a spare one. You got attacked by the police, not once, not twice. Your body has taken some knocks. And I’m not the only one concerned, Nombuso is, so is Mpatho. He even offered assistance because he was behind some police attacks.”

“Some?” Sphakamiso raises his eyebrow.

“That’s what he said, most things were done by his stepmother.”

Sphakamiso breaks a chuckle and shakes his head.

“Now he’s your brother, you call each other and talk about me?”

“That’s not how it’s like. But I’d listen to anyone who raises a valid concern about any of my family member,” – Malibongwe.

“Why would he be concerned about me? I’m good if I’m dead to him.”

“His wife still cares about you, so I doubt he wants you dead.”

“Mxm!” Sphakamiso folds his jacket and puts it under his head and lies down.

He can’t tell him exactly why he wants him to see a doctor. As much as he doesn’t like Mpatho, he still doesn’t want to destroy chances of them ever making peace. It’s already too much between them as siblings, without Mpatho.

“Do it for me, go and get checked up,” he says.

“Okay,” Sphakamiso closes his eyes, maybe falling asleep with save him from this yep-yep.

“Do you still want to meet the Mhlongos?”

“No,” he says.

“Why not?”

Sphakamiso opens his eyes, “Why would I? You promised to go with me and you never did.”

“That’s why I’m asking, I think back then I had a lot going on too,” – Malibongwe.

“It was just not a priority,” he says.

“It is a priority, you know I’d kill for all of you. Well, except Mpatho. But we have to search for the family, we don’t know Ireland, unless if you ask your aunt to help.”

Sphakamiso frowns, “Aunt Teekay?”

“Yeah, she has a sister in Mandeni, right?”

“Yes...she has a sister who’s married in that place.” Why didn’t he think of this?

He sits up and looks at Malibongwe. “You’re right, she can help, her sister is married to the Mhlongos. Maybe they’d know a Mhlongo that my mother cheated with, if she describes him for them.”

“Hopefully it’s not her sister’s husband, that would be a bad coincidence,” Malibongwe says.

Sphakamiso nods in agreement, but now he’s worried. If he’s Thembelihle’s sister’s stepchild that would mean Aphelele has already been there to visit and she’s made a relationship with the side-chick’s family.

“I hope it doesn’t have anything to do with Aunt Teekay’s family,” he says with concern.

“You have us even if that doesn’t work out the best. We’ve been your family for 27 years, no ups and downs can put an

end to that. I know that even Nombuso loves you, she just doesn't know how to show it."

"I know, we talked before I left, I understand her," he says.

Malibongwe's eyes widen. "You understand why she insults people?"

"Yes. Why all of a sudden are you pointing out her bad character? You didn't speak up when it wasn't you she insulted. It's your turn, enjoy it."

"I will enjoy it in silence. I'm going to ignore her until she feels her soul shifting."

Sphakamiso laughs, "As if she will care."

"Trust me, she does. Imagine me not speaking to you! Anyway, I have to fetch future wife from work before she gets lifts from other men."

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Everyone knows who he is, he parks his car without fear in the yard. As he heads towards their room he notices that there's someone sitting outside the door. As he gets closer he recognizes him in his Redbat T-shirt and cargo shorts. This is a surprise, not a good one.

Njabulo raises his head and sees him.

"Ah, sbali!" he stands up and dusts off his pants.

Malibongwe's chest is rolling drums. The Mthethwas don't know that they're living together, it's not legal for them to do so, Nyambose would be disappointed.

“We are both going to surprise Mimi, huh?” Njabulo looks at him from head to toe suspiciously.

He clears his throat. “What a coincidence!”

“Yeah, a coincidence,” – Njabulo.

He waits a minute then takes out his own keys for Miyanda’s room. Njabulo’s eyes are all out.

He’s Mimi’s favourite cousin but he doesn’t have his own keys.

“You have your own keys?” he asks.

Malibongwe shrugs, “Yeah, she cut me a spare.”

“Mmmm, at least we won’t sit outside.”

They both walk inside, there’s a little table where they put all their cosmetics.

This is one hell of a situation, he should be changing his clothes and fetching Miyanda from work.

“Yey uMimi has a variety of taste in perfumes,” says Njabulo going over the table and taking Malibongwe’s perfume. He sprays it in the air a few times.

That’s a fuckin’ Oud Touch by Franck Olivier!

“Nivea moisturizer, also for men. Maybe Mimi is a transgender,” Njabulo says looking at him while squeezing out some Nivea...just for the fun of it.

“Lesbian? But never mind those are my things sbari,” he confesses before Njabulo empties everything.

Njabulo’s eyes twinkle with humor.

“So you live here?” He already knew, he heard a manly cough one day when he called Miyanda at night. It sounded like a thin, tall, fair skin guy’s cough.

Malibongwe takes a deep breath, “It’s a temporary thing.”

“The way my uncle is, if he finds out about this temporary thing there will be flames everywhere, even your forefathers will catch fire in their graves,” – Njabulo.

“He won’t find out, right?” Malibongwe says narrowing his eyes.

Njabulo shrugs. “Ay asazi, but I got kicked by a horse on the chest. Everytime I’m told to keep a secret I get heartburn.”

Heartburn, really?

“Okay, does it have a treatment?”

Now he’s talking; Njabulo’s lips stretch into a smile.

“You see Grey Goose, the 750 ml?”

Malibongwe nods, but he expected him to say something less expensive. Honestly Njabulo doesn’t even look like he drinks Grey Goose on a normal day, he could’ve just asked for a case of beer.

“I like it with water,” he says.

“Okay, I can sort that out.”

He lifts his hand, “No, not your tap water. I like it with tonic water from Checkers...no, Woolworth.”

Malibongwe’s eyes widen.

Nevertheless, Njabulo is not done.

“And lemon slices inside,” he says.

Malibongwe slips into laughter. This can’t be real, maybe Njabulo downloaded Instagram and got carried away. That’s not his life. But Njabulo is serious, he stops laughing.

“Okay sbari, is that what you always drink or it’s only because I’m behind the heartburn this time around?” he asks.

“No, it’s because it’s you,” he says.

Bitter truth! Malibongwe takes out his wallet to check if he has enough cash for his cousin-in-law's expensive drink preference. Luckily it's enough, he can get this one off his back.

"Ay wena, you're a good match for my cousin," Njabulo compliments as he tucks the notes in his pocket.

"Thank you, I'm actually going somewhere, I just came here to change clothes."

"Oh, are you not going to pass by the mall?"

"I'm fetching Miyanda from work," he says.

This is just perfect for Njabulo, he will see Mimi some other day, right now he's got money to spend.

"Oh, you're still changing clothes. I will go and wait in the car. Where are the keys?"

Malibongwe's eyes widen out of their sockets.

"The car keys?" He doesn't trust Njabulo one bit, this one will run away with his car.

"Yes, I will wait inside the car," Njabulo says.

"Okay, I will find you inside." He's saying a little silent prayer in his heart.

Njabulo takes the keys and walks out.

He changes into a black T-shirt and puts on sneakers. Just as he ties the laces he hears a car driving off. He jumps up and dashes out of the room with his shoes untied.

Njabulo sees him running towards the car and rolls down the window.

"I'm just steering it," he says.

Malibongwe releases a deep breath.

"Okay, give me the keys, I'm coming now."

Njabulo smirks and throws them to him.

He's not going to steal the car, he doesn't like to steal stolen items. If he steals it has to be a crime-virgin item, something that has never been stolen before.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 76

PHUMELELE

My lobola process was supposed to be smooth. It's not like the normal one where the husband's uncles come to negotiate first, I'm already Mpatho's wife, he's doing this to respect culture and my name. But when I decided to involve Aunt Brandi is when I complicated everything.

She came with her step-daughter that looks like me, God forbid! Her name is Zenande, she's the same height as me, same complexion, the only thing she's not is pregnant. It's awkward being around her, I see myself in her, she sees herself in me.

She's been in the kitchen since the crack of dawn, which wasn't part of my plans. I wanted a catering company to cook, Aunt Brandi promised that she knows someone who does catering around here. How do I trust a Mzimela that is my stepsister to cook for my in-laws? I don't get along with the whole family, Aunt Brandi is the only one I have a relationship with.

"Come and taste the chicken," she says to me.

I was just passing by, I'm already frustrated because the Mshazis are late. If Mpatho's grandfather was still alive he would've made sure his day goes well. These long distance cousins are making sure to spoil it.

I tear a small part of the roasted chicken and taste it. She's waiting for my reaction with her eyes wide. I nod and smile at her.

It's actually greater than I expected it to taste.

"It's the best chicken I've ever tasted," I say.

"I always tell people I'm the best cook. Well, the best after Snehlanhla," she says.

Hearing that name still gives me nightmares.

"You have a sister called Snehlanhla who is in Pretoria, right?"

"WE have a sister called Snehlanhla," she says.

Well, I'm not a Mzimela, I've never regarded myself or felt as one.

"When did you last talk to her?" I ask.

She shrugs and heaves a shallow sigh. "She's not someone you can get hold of easily. But someone called me two months ago when she bumped into her on the streets. She was sober, luckily, we spoke for a few minutes, she promised to visit."

"Is she a drug addict?" I ask.

"Yeap," she turns her back and faces the stove.

I still want details, immediate-twin.

"Is she the one who's a prostitute?"

She looks back at me with her eyebrow raised.

Am I poking my nose? Yes, but that's my business.

"It's very coincidental that someone with her name, surname and job description slept with my ex-boyfriend and bore him a son and abandoned the son with him about 3 years ago."

Her face flushes with shock. There's a little part of me that still hopes Sphakamiso's babymama isn't my blood sister. I'm

having a baby with his blood brother, it will be just too much of a mess. How can we go from destined lovers to procreating with each other's siblings?

"She can't do that! She already has a child that she left at home with Ma."

She's a drug addict and a prostitute, she's very much capable.

"Did you ever see her 3 years ago looking pregnant?" I ask.

"I can't remember exactly, but she was pregnant a few years ago but she promised that she was going to terminate. That's what they do when they mistakenly carry for their clients."

Sphakamiso was a client, I feel like there's a slice of bitter lemon in my mouth.

"Maybe she didn't terminate because Aphelele is alive, his mother's story sounds the same as her story." I still can't believe Sphakamiso did that to me. With a prostitute out of all people! I thought he had respect for me, for his own body.

"Maybe it's her, he was likely to feel sexual attracted to her out of the crowd because she looks more like you than I do," she says.

I feel a rock of ice sitting down on my stomach.

I'm cold, my inside just froze.

"She looks like me?" I ask.

This hurts me to the core. Sphakamiso wasn't horny, he didn't make a mistake, he knew what he was doing and he enjoyed doing it.

"Yeah, but she's older. Anyway, it doesn't matter, does it? You're getting married to someone else," Zenande says turning back to the pots.

It shouldn't matter, she's right. But it fuckin' does, I'm hurt.

I try to cover my face with a smile, it's my big day. The Mshazis finally arrived, they claimed to have gotten lost a few times. They were fined R1000, luckily Mpatho sent them with enough extra cash for pop-up expenses. They've concluded everything, I'm now recognized as the fiancé in the traditional world, because there the marriage certificate doesn't mean shit.

"Phume there's a girl here for you," Zenande says coming with a plate of food and lying on the bed. She eats while lying on her tummy, people are gifted out there.

I step out, I'm still wearing my traditional attire that I wore when I went to accept the Mshazi delegate. I'm thinking it's a relative I haven't seen in a while, my mother's old friends have been coming to see me. But it's Ntombi, she's 5 hours late.

I stand with my arms folded.

"I see it's all done," she says.

"I'm glad you can see that. Why didn't you just cancel if you didn't want to come?" She's my only friend, I'm very disappointed in her, out of everyone she's one friend I least expected to be dropped by.

"I got caught up, come on!" she moves me to the side and walks straight in.

"Did they pay everything?"

"No, half of everything, lobola can't be paid fully on one day."

She frowns, "Why not?"

"It's disrespectful to do so."

"Zulu culture bores the fuck out of me. Why ask someone to buy your daughter and refuse the full price?"

"Paying lobola is not buying, Mpatho wasn't buying me."

I can't believe her, she came all the way here to talk down my lobola.

"Makes no sense still, but congratulations!" She throws her arms around me.

I can't even hug her back, she's pissed me off.

"If you're not happy for me then why did you come?" It doesn't make sense to me. She could've just stayed at home, I wasn't going to die, the day was still successful without her.

"I came because I show up for my friends, Phume," she says.

"Maybe you shouldn't, if you're going to be this nasty." What the fuck! This is why I cut friends off, girls are full of shit, I can't be dealing with marriage drama and friendships as well.

"At least I came," she says, looking at me with a straight face.

"That doesn't give you the right to be this mean? Come, let's go to the bedroom."

We pass Aunt Brandi washing a pile of dishes and proceed to the bedroom.

Zenande is still eating on the bed.

"This is Aunt Brandi's stepdaughter, Zenande," I introduce her.

Zenande looks up, "I'm her sister."

This Mzimela thing is now being forced down my throat.

"I'm Ntombi, her friend...not sure if she's also my friend."

Okay, this one is coming with drama episodes I don't need.

"Nice to meet you," Zenande says and shifts to make space for us to sit.

"Why did you come so late? You've missed out," she asks.

“At least I came, late is better than a friend who never shows up for you,” – Ntombi.

This is about her memulo, I couldn't make it.

“Ntombi, I explained to you why I couldn't come, I even sent you an apology gift the day after.” All along I didn't know she was holding a grudge against me.

“A pair of shoes won't make up for your absence. Worse of all you knew the challenges I had prior the day, I needed your support. But you have the nerve to be angry at me for showing up a few hours late. We all have problems, being married doesn't make your problems bigger than mine, but I still show up for you every damn time.”

Zenande sits up straight. “Okay, this seems like a friends argument, I will just step out and help Ma with the dishes.”

I'm still lost for words.

She looks at Ntombi, “Beef or chicken?”

“Both,” Ntombi.

Zenande laughs and walks out.

I shake my head in despair and look at her.

“Really? This attitude is about umemulo that you didn't even want to happen?” I don't understand why, all of a sudden, she's acting like that was her dream day. She knows I love her I acknowledge and show up for her when she's celebrating something special. She wasn't even happy about that umemulo.

“Did you want Mpatho to marry you?” she asks.

“At first no, but now I do, you cannot compare the two situations.”

“I can, ever since you accepted this marriage your problems are above everyone. You couldn’t sacrifice two hours from your arranged marriage to show up for me. But I’m here, I took two taxis to be here for you, yet you think that’s not enough because you’re Beyonce.”

Okay, maybe I overreacted, I should’ve asked why she got here late and be happy that she’s one friend who stuck around through all the trials and tribulations.

“Can we talk, calmly?” I ask.

“Unfold your arms if you want calmness.”

Sigh!

I unfold them and sit next to her.

“I’m sorry I acted like Beyonce, I just have a lot going on.”

“So does everyone, Phume!”

Lord, she’s still shouting.

“Fine, I’m sorry if I’ve been slacking as a friend. How was your trip?”

“Nothing abnormal, I got in the taxi and gave the driver my number and had a free ride.”

How is that not abnormal though?

“You have a boyfriend,” I say.

She rolls her eyes, “Boyfriend, not husband, I’m keeping my options open.”

“Girl, now you want a taxi driver!” we both break into laughter.

Zenande walks in with a plate of two stews; beef and chicken at the side. I still don’t know where all the food Ntombi eats go, she doesn’t have a single fat roll on her body.

“Are you two okay now?” Zenande asks.

“I’m still not okay,” I say.

They both look at me.

No, no, it has nothing to do with them.

“It’s Sphakamiso,” I say.

Ntombi heaves a sigh.

Zenande is confused, “Your ex?”

“Yeah, why did he go for someone who looks like me?”

“Who? Aphelele’s mother?” – Ntombi.

“Yeah, I just find that creepy. Clearly it wasn’t a mistake or something he did out of lust. It was very intentional, he didn’t even use a condom with her.”

“But he’s an ex, why does it still matter?” – Zenande.

She won’t understand this. Sphakamiso wasn’t just a boyfriend, it’s someone I knew and trusted for 6 years.

“I can’t help but wonder. We were once destined lovers, how come we ended up having babies with each other’s half-sibling?” I’m having a lot of questions in my head. Why did Sne have to be a Mzimela? Why out of all women did MaVilakazi had to be Mpatho’s mother? Why couldn’t Sphakamiso and I break up and be with people from other walks of life?

“We are going to be in each other’s life forever. Is that even a good thing?”

Zenande shrugs, “But why does it matter so much? It’s not like Sne is someone who’s going to come back and be a babymama to him. She might die without you ever meeting her.”

“It would be good if she died,” Ntombi says.

We both look at her, boom laughter fills the room.

That's still Zenande's sister for Christ' sake!

"I feel like I need one last conversation with him," I say.

Two pairs of eyes bore me.

"Just after Mpatho paid lobola for you?" – Ntombi with the exaggeration.

"We will both go and meet with him. I want to see how he's doing and ask him a couple of questions. Him and Mpatho can hash things out too." I'm not sure they will, maybe it's too soon. But we are going to be in each other's life forever.

I need to call him and tell him what I think.

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MPATHO

His phone rings, it's his wife.

His lips stretch into a smile as he answers.

"Mrs Me," he says.

Phume laughs, "Traditionally it's just a fiance. How are you doing?"

"I was a bit nervous but now I'm okay because it all went well."

"I know this is unexpected and maybe not something we should talk about right now, but I'm with Zenande, my half sister, and we were talking about life. I think we should go and meet up with Sphakamiso, maybe you two can hash things out."

Here they go again!

He releases a heavy sigh.

“Why?” he asks.

“Because he has a child with my sister and I’m having a child with his brother.”

“Yeah, but I’m a Mshazi,” he says, trying hard not to sound annoyed as he is.

“Can we just be bigger than the situation and do it?”

“We will talk when you get here,” he says.

“Okay,” she doesn’t sound satisfied.

“Get ready, I’m coming to fetch you.”

“Now?” She’s shocked.

“Yes, you thought I will spend two consecutive nights alone?”

It won’t happen, if she spends more time with that half sister of hers a lot of things will fall out of place.

Just as he gets off the phone, it rings again.

This time it’s Malibongwe.

Must he answer?

He stares at the phone while it rings for a moment.

Then answers, “Who is this?”

“Malibongwe, don’t you know how to save numbers?”

It’s been a long day, the evening might be even longer!

“I’m at Unified, Sphakamiso fainted.”

His heart sinks down to his feet.

“Fainted?”

“He was dehydrated, he’s awake now and refusing to go to the clinic.”

“Is he sick?” He’s having a little tremor.

“He looks and sounds sick, but he insists he’s not.”

This can’t be happening, not at this moment.

“Phume wants us to come and see him. I told her that he’s alright when she asked for an update.” This is not going to end well for him.

“Your marriage is none of my business, I was just updating you,” – Malibongwe.

“If she finds out that I lied and he’s sick, possibly because of me, there might be no marriage.”

“Okay,” Malibongwe says, he doesn’t care one bit.

“I’m going to come....urgh, no I have to fetch her first. What do I do now?” He starts pacing up and down. “Take him to a doctor, please.”

“I cannot carry him, he doesn’t want to, maybe gets your wife to come and talk to him.”

What? No, Phume will have his head for dinner if she finds out about this

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 77

PHUMELELE

I left everyone behind; Aunt Brandi, Ntombi and Zenande. I feel like an objectified wife, someone who gets told where to be and where not to be. There was no need for Mpatho to come and fetch me, without giving me much of a choice. I wasn’t in a desert, I was at my grandmother’s house, U haven’t been there ever since my mother passed away.

I feel controlled, the person who fetched me from the great company that I had seems to be in a bad mood. I don't know why he felt the need to bring me back if he's not willing to be a good company.

He walks in wearing my kitchen apron and nothing under. Okay, I can forgive his bad mood if that's how he's going to look the whole evening.

"What are you cooking?" I ask.

"I'm baking," he says.

My eyes widen in shock. Baking?

"You love cakes," he says.

It still doesn't explain anything.

"When did you learn how to bake?"

"Your mother taught me," he says with a grin.

I was charmed a minute ago, now I'm thinking of the worst things that could've happened during those baking lessons.

"Did she teach you because I love cakes?"

"Yes," he says.

I feel horrible, surely he must've hated me growing up.

Maybe he still does.

"Why do you love me?" I ask.

He furrows his brows looking at me.

"Because you're my wife." This is not enough, my question is not answered the way I wanted it to be.

"Did you love me before I was your wife?" I ask.

"You were never not my wife, you've always been mine."

I'm not going to get the answer I'm looking for, I let it go.

He kisses my cheek and goes to the plug and charges his phone. It rings just as he steps away from it. He looks at me, then at the ringing phone, and back to me again. He doesn't answer.

My womanly instincts kick in.

"Answer it," I instruct.

"It's just Malibongwe, I'm busy."

Okay, I will answer for him then.

He grabs it before I reach to it.

I stand and glare at it.

It starts ringing again, I see the name flashing on the screen. Indeed, it's Malibongwe. I go back to the couch with my tail tucked behind my legs.

This time he answers but walks out with the phone. Now he has secrets with Malibongwe? This brotherhood is revolving fast. I sit my jealous ass on the couch and continue watching my music channel.

My phone rings, it's Ntombi calling.

"Have you gotten home?" I ask.

"I'm still in your grandmother's house, there's a fight."

Huh?!

I lower the TV volume so that I can hear well.

"Your father is here demanding that you aunt comes home tonight," she says.

"Where is Zenande?" I'm putting my flops on, I don't know where I think I'm going.

Mzimela has no right to demand my aunt to return home while she's at her mother's house.

"She's here, doesn't know what to do. He literally slapped her in front of us, now he's packing her bags."

"All her bags?" I ask.

"Yeap, even the black waist-leather, he saw the money inside."

No, no, Mzimela is testing me!

I'm one half hour away from my grandmother's house, even if I go there I won't make it in time. But I judge Aunt Brandi too. Mzimela is sickly looking man who can't even walk with his back straight. Why would she let him slap her? If she blows that man hard enough he'd fall down.

Mpatho walks in, coming from his secret call.

"I have to go somewhere," he says.

"Yes, we have to go, Mzimela is beating Aunt Brandi and taking the lobola money." Maybe it would've been better if we deposited it today, but some said it has to stay at the alter overnight before we can take it to the bank.

"No, I'm going to see Malibongwe, there's something urgent he needs me for."

"Is it more important than Aunt Brandi's life?"

Who knows what he's going to do to her when they get home? It starts with a slap and ends with a coffin. I can't believe Mpatho is not even fazed about this.

"There are other people there, Phume. It's not you're going to get there and arrest him. Your aunt is a grown up, her kids are also grown ups, let them handle it."

Wow, just wow!

“So you don’t think this affects me? He’s fighting her for my bride price for Christ sake!” This just proves how men stand with each other when a woman is being abused.

“Fine, let’s call her local police,” he says.

“Just say you don’t want to help.” I don’t even know why I’m begging, I have a car and valid driver’s license.

“I’m trying to come up with alternatives. Even if we go there we will arrive after one and half hour, they will be gone,” he says.

“Okay, go to Malibongwe, your two-second family is more important.” I turn and walk away. I don’t know where I’m going, I get outside the door and just sigh. I need to call Ntombi and find out what’s happening at the moment.

I have a phone against my ear, it’s ringing. A hand comes from behind and grabs it off.

If not my selfish husband, then who?

“Yini manje?” I look at him.

“Your mother is not here, you’re not anyone’s princess, get inside the house and lock the doors.”

What? Who does he think he’s talking to?

“Excuse me?” I’m perplexed.

“Inside the house!”

He shoves the phone back into my hand and walks away. He gets inside the car and drives out of the gate and locks it. For that bossiness I’m not going to get inside the house and lock the doors, I’m going to take the car and drive to the Shandus. I’m not that pregnant, I have a good vision, I can drive exceptionally even at night.

The gate keys are all gone, even the spares. Damn it Mpatho! First he brought me home claiming not wanting to spend another night alone, now he's gone to his brother of two seconds leaving me all alone.

Ntombi! I have to call her.

She answers, "Heyyy!"

"Hey, where is Mzimela?"

"They've left, it's just me and Zenande now."

"So it's late for me to call the police?" I ask.

"Zenande said the police are off limits. They were okay when they left; smiling and helping each other with the bags," she says.

I'm not relieved, if anything I'm more scared and angry. Aunt Brandi told Mzimela that she will be getting the lobola money after I pulled her ear and begged that she keeps it between me and her and the bank.

"If she gives her even a cent I will ask for it back," I say.

Ntombi chuckles, "You can't take your own lobola."

"You will see. If Mpatho didn't lock me in I was going to drive there and confront that ugly man."

"You're pregnant, it's late, don't take any risks," she says.

"I'm just annoyed. When are you coming back? In the morning?"

"Yes, someone is picking me up in an hour, if my mother calls you say you left me here helping your aunt with cleaning and you asked that I spend the night," she says.

"Okay, be careful out there."

Ntombi lives her youth, unlike me who missed most stages of life.

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MALIBONGWE

The only reason he's getting Mpatho involved is because he's behind this whole thing. He believes that Sphakamiso is sick and it's because of the injuries he got from Mpatho's ordered attacks. After he fainted at Unified the only help he accepted is that of pharmacy medication. He refused the clinic and the doctor and the hospital. Malibongwe and Miyanda are with him, he's fine for now. They're banned from calling MaVilakazi, so it's just them and Mpatho who just parked outside the gate.

Malibongwe goes out of the room to check if it's him. This is also going to drive Sphakamiso crazy because Mpatho is the last person he'd want to see when he's this physically unattractive.

"I thought you live in the township," Mpatho says, still at a distance.

"This is a township," Malibongwe says.

"No, your neighbors are the township, you're in the coops. Why would you let a poor girl live here while she's pregnant?"

Oh, he's started.

"Not everyone had a privilege to have a blesser grandfather. When you're done judging let me know because we have to go to Sphakamiso and have a real talk," Malibongwe says.

Mpatho adjusts his attitude and asks, "How is he doing?"

"He's not okay but ikhanda liqinile, maybe he will understand if you tell him what happened."

He takes a deep breath, “Okay.”

He’s going to do it and be helpful as much as he can. If Sphakamiso rejects his help that would be hurtful but there’d be nothing further he can do than go back home and tell Phume the truth.

Sphakamiso sees them walking in and turns to sleep on his other side. He suspected that Malibongwe has become friends with Mpatho, which is totally fine. He can’t control who people become friends with and whatnot. But for Malibongwe to bring him here knowing very well what their history is shows disrespect. Maybe he’s trying to embarrass him.

“Bafo there’s something Mpatho is here to confess,” Malibongwe says. He doesn’t want Sphakamiso to take this wrongly, that’s why he’s explaining right from the start.

But Sphakamiso doesn’t turn or respond.

Miyanda puts her shoes on and passes with a little wave to Mpatho and leaves. She’s going to her room, they’ll deal with the situation on their own, she doesn’t want to distract.

“Remember when you went to the hospital after being attacked by the police, you were still in Durban at the time....” – Malibongwe.

No response!

He continues and explains how Mpatho, out of fear, ended up interfering with his medical reports. For once Malibongwe doesn’t sound devilish when talking about Mpatho. He’s not trying to throw him under the bus, subtly it sounds like he’s on Mpatho’s side.

“Okay,” that’s all Sphakamiso says, without even looking at them.

Mpatho clears his throat, “I was wrong, I’m not proud of what I did. Can you please allow me a chance of having you rechecked, if there’s anything wrong I will make sure it’s taken care of.”

“Why?” – Sphakamiso.

This time he turns and faces him.

“You don’t care. Why do you want to undo what you did on purpose?”

Mpatho inhales sharply, “I’m a human, I have a heart.”

Malibongwe clears his throat, dramatically. They exchange mean glances.

“I’m okay, I know how to take care of myself,” Sphakamiso says.

He’s so stubborn.

Malibongwe steps forward. “But ndoda you’re disappearing right in front of us. How do you explain the loss of weight? The fainting?”

“As I’ve told you before, I’m under a lot of stress. I have no inner injuries, Mkhuleko makes umhlabelo that can heal absolutely anything. But since you’re already here and probably celebrating inside, I’d like to ask how far is your happiness?” He’s looking at Mpatho.

“Bafo this is not the time for you two to start fighting over Phume,” – Malibongwe.

“I’m not fighting, I’m just checking up,” he says.

“We are very happy, we are having a baby too,” – Mpatho.

“And she loves you, right?”

Malibongwe heaves a low sigh.

“Yes, she loves me,” Mpatho says.

“Does she know what you did to me?”

“Yeah,” – Mpatho.

“Okay, tell her I said hello.”

Mpatho’s face changes...he’s not passing any message to his wife, not from him.

“Doesn’t your chest pound when you hear my name in your grandfather’s house?”- Sphakamiso. He’s standing up.

Malibongwe quickly gets between them, they stand far apart.

“You and your stepmother cost me my job. I failed to take care of my son because of you. I’m depressed because of you. I lost Phume because of you. Do you know why? She told me if I had means to provide for her she wasn’t going to get in marriage. And deep down in your heart you know that, ukhwezela ngemali Mshazi.”

Mpatho tightens his jaw. He doesn’t respond though, he’s not going back and forth with a dying man. It hurts knowing that Phume said that, that if Sphakamiso wasn’t broke she wasn’t going to marry him. He knows it’s not far from the truth, she chose Sphakamiso on the first day, but for her to tell it to Sphakamiso hits differently.

“Sphakamiso this is not why I brought Mpatho here,” Malibongwe says.

Yes, he loves hurting Mpatho any chance he gets, from any angle. But right now the timing is off.

“Why did you bring him here? Why?” Now Sphakamiso is facing him.

“To confess, I thought it would be motivate you to go and get medical help.”

“Or you’re just trying to build siblinghood using me. I don’t need you, I don’t need him.”

“Okay, then how are you going to work because you faint?” – Malibongwe.

“Find someone else,” he shrugs and sits on the bed. At this point he doesn’t care anymore, about everything. Life can do whatever it wants.

“Maybe you should get umhlabelo for fainting,” Mpatho says, he’s trying to be helpful. Malibongwe seems to be helpless now.

“There’s no mhlabelo for fainting. But we can go and seek traditionally if he thinks it’s not a medical problem,” Malibongwe says.

“Now?” Mpatho’s eyes widen.

“You can leave, I’m sure you need your beauty sleep. I can go alone.”

Beauty sleep? That wasn’t necessary.

“I can go with you, I don’t mind,” he says.

“And Phume? Isn’t she alone?” – Malibongwe.

“There’s security,” he says.

Sphakamiso doesn’t comment; it’s so unlike him. He’s letting them make decisions, Mpatho involved.

Mpatho’s phone rings.

It’s Mapholoba

Maybe they want to know when he’s coming back.

He answers, “Mapholoba!”

“Your wife has fired us.”

“What?!”

They're crazy, more crazy than Phume. How can they be fired by someone who didn't hire them?

"She's calling the police on us if we don't leave. Mshazi, she's not playing with us, she even sprayed doom on my face," Mapholoba says.

"Make sure she doesn't get the gate keys, stay there, I will call someone at the station."

"What about the doom? Iyahisha lento."

"It's just doom, you're not going to die, you're not a cockroach." He drops the call and takes a deep sigh.

Oh yeah, the police station!

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 78

Never even in his wildest dreams would Malibongwe have thought one night he'd be in the car with Mpatho going to a sangoma. Sphakamiso hates Mpatho and seemingly Mpatho also doesn't like Sphakamiso either, mostly because of the arguments they keep having about Phume. He's only here because of his guilty conscience. Maybe trying to get away from his wife too, their phone calls don't sound like those of a happy couple that just paid lobola for each other.

Malibongwe made a phone call to alert Bab' Zikalala that they're coming. The candle is lit in the hut they're heading to. Mpatho's shoulders feel heavy, he's suddenly uncomfortable being in this creepy place at night. But if he expresses this to Malibongwe he'd probably mock him about it for the next two years.

"Shoes off," Malibongwe says outside the door.

“What does shoes have to do with any of this?” It’s cold AF and Malibongwe wants him to walk barefooted.

“Go back to the car if you’re not going to cooperate,” – Malibongwe.

“Who do you think you’re talking to boy?” He’s annoyed, Malibongwe thinks just because he’s tall and he took the role of being the eldest son now everyone must listen to him.

Bab’ Zikalala appears and clears his throat loudly.

They both shush it and look at him.

He’s covered in grey hair, he’s not really the type of thing one would want to see at night.

“Baba!” Malibongwe says.

“Ngenani, shoes stay outside.”

Malibongwe looks at Mpatho with satisfaction.

“I told you,” he says.

“I nyon yu,” Mpatho imitates with irritation as he takes his shoes off.

This is about Sphakamiso, they both walk in and kneel on the grassmat laid on the floor for them.

“You both could’ve came during the day. Why wake me at night?” Zikalala asks as he gathers impepho on the lid. It’s not even 8pm, how is it night?

“It was urgent baba, our brother is sick,” – Malibongwe.

“And you’re both worried?”

Malibongwe looks at Mpatho. Doesn’t seem that worried.

“Yes, especially me, he’s my boy and he’s been going through a lot even with his identity issues,” he says.

“Ngiyakuzwa, I hear you.” Zikalala burns impepho and starts praying, calling together the ancestors.

Oh, the T-shirt. They brought Sphakamiso’s T-shirt since he couldn’t physically be present.

“Here he is,” Malibongwe hands it to Zikalala.

He shakes his head, the smoke is filling up the hut.

“Both of you come and inhale impepho,” he says.

Mpatho looks hesitant.

Malibongwe clears his throat, “Baba this is about Sphakamiso, not us.”

“He doesn’t have any problem, at least his will be easily solvable. His people will come and get him, he will be okay. He told you there’s nothing wrong with him, right?”

They nod, still looking confused.

“He’s caught between two families; his biological family and his right family. Your mother was already married when she got him, which makes him her husband’s son. The only problem is that he’s crying, in fact he’s been crying for a very long time in the dark, now that his biological people are facing the front they want to fight for him. Unfortunately when two elephants fight it’s the grass that suffers the most. He’s the grass, uma sekukhona egoba umboko he will be fine.”

Malibongwe is more confused and stressed than he’s been. He thought they’d get some concoctions for Sphakamiso to be fine.

“Is there anything I can do?” he asks.

“No. His people will look for him and find him, nothing is going to happen to him, he’s fine, he’s just a ring they’re fighting on, it’s not him they’re fighting with.”

It’s a lot!

Zikalala picks the lid and hands it to Malibongwe.

“Inhale,” he instructs.

Malibongwe inhales without any second thought.

It's Mpatho's turn now...

“Why?” he asks.

“Because you and your brother are the ones who actually need my help,” – Zikalala.

“I don't mean to be rude, but I'm only here because of Sphakamiso who I thought was sick. I'm not here for myself or for him,” he says pointing at Malibongwe.

“But you need help, you need to hear what your ancestors are saying.”

“Which ancestors?” he asks. His grandfather just died yesterday, it's too early for orders and requests.

“You've done everything wrong, from a wrong place. That's why there's suddenly no peace in your relationship,” Zikalala says, right in front of Malibongwe.

“There's no peace in my relationship?” He's annoyed, his marriage is his private business, he doesn't need this man to air his laundry anyhow, without permission.

“Son, when you're ready to listen come back,” Zikalala closes off the topic. He knows that Mpatho will remember his words very soon; he will feel the heat. His father didn't do things the right way with his mother's family; the transfer to the Mshazi surname wasn't successful, therefore he's a Vilakazi. If he's a Vilakazi then his lobola should've passed at the alter of the Vilakazis before going to the Shandus. His wife is going to give him a very hard time.

There's something else too. That one involves both of them, their destinies are entwined in a way they can never imagine.

They need to make peace before the 4th of April...the biggest day of their lives.

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PHUMELELE

I slept alone and I'm not even angry. Maybe him not sleeping home saved me from jail. I don't know what I would've done if he came back. He left me with Mapholoba and his friend all night. They had keys for the gate but they didn't let me out. Basically I was prisoned.

I've eaten breakfast, our new helper has arrived. I just call her Sis' Theh, she's younger than Aunt Nomusa. I don't want to look like an angry bee, like Nombuso. I'm going to stay chilled throughout the day, nothing is going to ruin my mood. Not even Aunt Brandi who is currently not taking my calls.

The long lost husband finally found his way home, here he is. He doesn't greet me or Sis' Theh, he just walks past like we are statues. At least she will understand when I get angry, she's seen the kind of person I'm married to. Her and I are not close though, we just sit and talk when it's about her work, nothing else. Maybe I'm still hung on Aunt Nomusa or it's the fact that she was hired by Beauty and I will probably take time to completely trust her. Speaking of Gogo'tshitshi, I hear she already left for her vacation. I don't care if she returns in 2030, she will still explain why she attacked my husba...Mpatho.

"Mam, must I make food for Mshazi?" Sis' Theh asks.

I feel so old being called mam, and Mpatho is Mshazi?

“Please call me Phume and don’t worry about Mpatho. He knows his way around the kitchen, he didn’t even greet you coming in, why should you feed him?”

“Because he pays me,” she says.

I thought Beauty was covering that, but never mind.

“I will make him something if he wants food.” Nope, I won’t, I just want her to move on with her duties. Mpatho is full of himself, nobody should entertain his nonsense.

I leave her going to the laundry room, I need to see this man. It’s Sunday but when he wants to get away from me he goes to work regardless.

I walk into our room, he’s preparing for a bath.

“Going to work?” I ask.

He just turns, looks at me and says nothing.

I sit on the bed. “Sis Theh wanted to make you food but I told her not to because you didn’t greet her when you came.”

“Okay,” he says.

There’s a gum in his mouth. I hate gum, I just realized now.

“That’s disgusting,” I say.

He looks at me again, this time with his eyebrow raised.

“Chewing gum, it’s giving me...” I don’t know what it’s giving me but he should stop.

Oh before I forget, his friends that he left here last night.

“I don’t want strange men walking around the house while I’m sleeping,” I say.

“Is that why you sprayed him with doom on his face?”

They reported me to him.

“He wasn’t letting me out,” I say.

“He’s old enough to be your father but you had the nerve to chase him with doom like he’s a cockroach.”

“I wanted to go out,” I say.

“At night while you’re pregnant with my child, hopefully?”

What is ‘hopefully’ supposed to mean? He mustn’t ruin my morning, I woke up with so much positivity.

“Yes, at night while I’m pregnant with YOUR child Mpatho Mshazi.” If he has any doubt he should speak now so that I can file for the divorce, take my share and leave his black ass that was fired from the army.

“Do you ever think about how I feel or everything is about you?”

I’ve never met a man that whines like this one.

“What did I do?” I ask, rolling my eyes.

His nose flare in anger.

“Everything is about you. Everything! If it’s not about you then there’s a fight.”

Am I fighting him? I’m standing with a calm face, my arms folded.

“I paid lobola yesterday, a ridiculous amount, to your useless aunt. And the appreciation I got from you was; ‘I want to have a conversation with my ex’. You were thinking about your ex on our important day.”

Yawnfest! Why didn’t he raise concerns when I said it? He said we’ll talk about it, not fight about it. He hasn’t even heard my reasons, he’s just going off.

“Are you hungry?” I ask.

“Yes, for your love. I’m not happy Phumelele, I’m not.”

I think that's obvious, he's not happy and there's nothing Phumelele can do about it. I've done my part, I learnt how to be his wife overnight, maybe he needs to find happiness deep within.

I turn and walk away, I have things to watch on TV.

"Phume!" he's yelling behind me.

I stop and look back. I'm not Sis' Theh is listening to this and missing her real madam, Beauty.

"Why did you tell him if he had money you wouldn't have married me?" he asks.

"Who?" I'm confused.

"Sphakamiso," he says.

"I don't remember saying that but if I did it's probably how I felt at the time."

He blinks, his face looks flushed.

What's new? I even said I didn't love him and wished death upon him. I'm not going to keep apologizing for the things I said and did before falling in love with him. I'm done apologizing for the past.

"How do you expect people to respect me?" he asks.

I let out a heavy sigh. This marriage thing is exhausting, I wish it can be done in a long distance, I'm really not into emotional-sitting a grown man everyday.

"What people?" I ask.

He doesn't answer, I walk out.

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I grab a pocket of popcorn and sit in front of the TV. I'm catching up on a Netflix series, from here I will go out for pizza. I'm stressed about Aunt Brandi more than anything, that woman really allowed her whoring husband to take my lobola money. A man who never showed up for me even on my mother's funeral. I'm not even going to blame mother even though I know she probably closed all doors for him to have any relationship with me. But after her death and Mshazi's he could've come and tried to get to know me. But I guess he no longer cares about children, he has a lot of them. I will teach him a lesson he will never forget if I hear that he took even a cent from Aunt Brandi. Even if it's R3 for cigarette, he's going to pay dearly. He clearly doesn't know me...let me send Zenande a message. She needs to tell Aunt Brandi that I'm requesting proof of the deposit she made. If she hasn't deposited it yet then I want the cash. I will keep the money until she grows a backbone. Oh, and I'm coming for Mzimela.

I raise my head and see Sis' Theh wiping the windows. That's not necessary, I guess she's ran out of work and she's scared to come and sit down. I call her in and tell her to grab a snack and join me on the couch.

"Didn't Beauty tell you to rest? You don't have to be on your feet all day, you can even rest in the guest bedroom when you've completed your chores or needing a rest."

"Thank you, Phume," she says, looking at the TV, she still looks uncomfortable.

"Did she say I'm hard?" I ask.

She chuckles, "No, I just don't want you to think I don't need this job. She told me that you were hesitant, you loved the late lady who was working here."

"Yes, I loved Aunt Nomusa, but I never tried to stop or talk her out of hiring you." Beauty lies unnecessary.

Even if I was hesitant it wasn't because of Aunt Nomusa. It's not like she was released from the job, she died and she's not waking up.

Mpatho comes in, it feels like an intruder walking in.

Sis' Theh stands up, I don't know where she's going.

"Hhayi-bo sit, there are still two more episodes," I say.

She looks at him. Is his approval more important than mine to her?

"You can sit," he says and then lifts my hand up.

I look at him, trying not to frown.

"Ng'sacela ungenzela ukudla," he says.

Wasn't he saying he's not hungry not so long ago? Or didn't he say it?

But I'm the peaceful one, the most forgiving; I get up and go to the kitchen.

He follows me and stands by the kitchen counter. I'm going to warm up the vegetable soup I found here yesterday. Then he'll have a nerve to question my love for him as if I don't do wifey things for him everyday. I bend my back for this man but one sentence from Sphakamiso is enough to make him forget about everything and weep.

"Why is everything about you Phume?"

God, not again!

"Is it because you know that I don't have anyone to depend on?"

A husband for sale! He comes with a six pack, big dick, and money.

"Do you want bread?" I ask.

Over that simple question, he goes off again.

“I’ve done nothing but to love you. I’ve never said any bad thing about you to your enemies. I’ve never made you feel like you’re not good enough. I’ve never chosen anyone over you, or even thought about it. Ung’bukanisa nabantu. Everyone has an ex, but nobody behaves like you. You provoke feelings I’ve been honest and vulnerable about and then act like I’m crazy.”

“I’m not acting like you’re crazy. How many slices of bread?” I just want to know that and get his meal ready, he said he wants to eat.

“You’re just like your mother, you don’t care about anyone’s feelings, everything is about you and your failed 6 year relationship that didn’t even teach you how to hold a dick.” He’s losing his marbles.

I’m not going to respond, I will just count the slices of bread that I’m putting on his plate. Freedom is busy to have a random therapy session with him, because I swear if I say anything right now he’s going to cry about it for an hour or so, and then question the existence of his ancestors.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 79

PHUMELELE

I’ve never been at the Mzimelas before, Zenande had to send me directions. I will never belong to this place, I don’t feel any connection to the Mzimela name and I’m glad Mpatho has legally changed my last name before I encountered any difficulties. Aunt Brandi has a beautiful house, it’s bigger than I thought. She has a huge yard, there’s a kraal below, and a Jojo tank. I park below the kraal and get out of the car. I’m wearing a

white poloneck and a fur coat. I may have exaggerated, it's not that cold.

I make my way in, I hope there are no dogs. I head to the front door and knock. A child opens the door, she's shirtless and only wearing an underwear.

"Hey baby, where's mkhulu?" I assume it's one of their many grandchildren.

"Emva kwendlu," the little one says.

If I was a hit man this one was going to make my job easy. I turn and make my way to the back of the house. Aunt Brandi is sitting on a reedmat with a tray of beans in front of her. Her husband is sitting on a bench with two cold beers next to him and one empty bottle on the ground.

"Hello," I greet.

They look up. Aunt Brandi pulls her eyebrows, she looks shocked.

Did she think I wasn't going to find it here?

"Phumelele, what are you doing here?" She leaves the beans and stands up.

"I'm a debt collector," I say.

It was supposed to be funny but I guess I'm not much of a comedian. It didn't sound funny at all, even to myself. I'm not here to collect debts, I'm here for my bride price.

"I've been calling and texting you aunty," I say.

"My phone is not with me," she says.

"Where is it?" I look at the beer-lover who doesn't seem affected by my presence.

"Mzimela has kept it with him for a while."

Nope, he took it from her and she let him.

“Where is the money?” I ask.

She looks at Mzimela busy gulping down a bottle of beer like nothing is happening.

“Did he take it?” I ask.

“Phume this is complicated. Can we go inside the house and talk there? Neighbors are watching.”

“I’d love to sit and chat, but I’m in a hurry.” I unbutton my coat and go closer to my sperm-donor. He’s not drunk yet, he’s trying to.

“Ya madala,” I say, kicking the empty bottle out of the way.

“Phume, he’s your father,” – Aunt Brandi.

Mzimela looks up, his eyes squinted. Old, wrinkled crook.

“Ntombiyenkosi,” he says to me.

Excuse him!

“I gave you the name Ntombiyenkosi,” he takes me out of my misery.

I don’t like the name, even if it wasn’t given by him.

“I’m not that, my name is Phume,” I say.

“You’re Ntombiyenkosi to me. It was your grandmother’s name.”

Do I even care?

“I want my money,” I say.

“It’s lobola, you can’t have it. As your father I have the right to have it. I told your mother here, she understood. I will save some for your wedding furniture,” he says.

“First of all, you’re not my father. Fathers are not men who make children, fathers are men who take care of children. You’re not entitled to my lobola, neither is Aunt Brandi. That’s a

Shandu money and I want it back since the only Shandu I trusted with it broke my trust.”

I hear her sigh behind me, I’m very disappointed in her.

“I don’t know if you want me to fight to have it,” I threaten. There’s absolutely nothing I’m going to do, Mpatho is home, he doesn’t even know that I’m here. I cannot beat a man this grown and old.

“Phume we can sort this out,” – Aunt Brandi.

“Aunty, I just want my money, there’s nothing to sort out.”

He lifts the beer up. I grab it from his hand and throw it away, the soil will drink it.

“Hey madala, I want my money!”

He stands up, staggers towards the beer bottle that’s emptying on the ground. “This child Brandi, this child! Look at what she’s done.”

“Mzimela calm down,” – Aunt Brandi.

She’s like his little lap dog. Maybe it’s the abuse or stupidity.

I take my phone out. “Maybe he thinks I’m joking.”

“Who are you calling?” Aunt Brandi asks nervously.

“I’m calling my people, they’re men by the way, they’ll deal with this better than I.” I have no people, they don’t exist, even Mapholoba is not my person I was spraying him with doom yesterday.

“Phume don’t call anyone, he will give you the money.”

I drop the phone and look at her, “Is it complete?”

She stutters.

I bring the phone to my ear again. I dialed Ntombi’s number, she answers after a few rings.

“Mapholoba, I have a bit of a problem here,” I say.

“Bitch what? I ain’t no Mapholoba.”

I press down the volume button.

“Come with all the guys, be armed,” I instruct.

Aunt Brandi gets down on her knees. I didn’t expect her to do this.

Is she crazy?

“Is this a prank or you’re in some kind of trouble?” – Ntombi.

“Yes, guns,” I say and drop the call.

“Phumelele please my child, your money is short with R700 only.” She looks at Mzimela, “Baba get the money.”

What is he waiting for?

I glance at my wrist watch. Crap, I need to buy new batteries.

“I don’t have time,” I say.

“I never thought I’d give birth to a soulless child like this. You want to get me killed over money?”

“It’s not yours, wena ushaya abafazi,” I say.

Aunt Brandi wants to interfere and defend him.

“Trust me, my ancestors don’t play, the words you speak to me while I’m your father will lead you into a painful world,” he says, maybe in his head it makes sense.

“If your mouth spoke things into existence, if your ancestors didn’t play, you would’ve spoken wealth and prosperity into your own life. Don’t threaten me madala.”

I see his jaw tightening, I know that he won’t touch me. Even though we are not in good terms at the moment but I know Mpatho would put him 6 feet under the ground. He gets inside

the house and comes back with the leather bag. My business is done here.

“Call me aunty,” I say.

It's up to her, I'm not going to spend this money, I will save it for her until she's ready to grow a backbone. I'm not a Mzimela, her husband has no share of my lobola. It would've been my uncle's but I have none, so it's hers to use to better the Shandu house for when Mzimela kicks her out. I have no doubt that one day he will, she takes his shit in loads.

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I had nothing to rush home too, after I left the Mzimelas I went for a pizza and then took myself to a solo movie date. It's just past 8pm and I'm heading home. I haven't checked my phone, I put it on silence because I didn't want to be disturbed.

I get home, the lights are still all on. He's still up, at least I brought home two slices of pizza, unlike him who sleeps out and comes home empty handed the next morning.

He's sitting in front of the silenced TV, I walk in and greet.

He stands up, his eyes are blazing with anger.

“What time is this?” he asks.

Unfortunately my watch is out of batteries, I fish my phone out of the purse and check.

“It's 8:17pm,” I say.

He taps his foot on the floor three times, then his chest bounces.

“Ukhona umfazi obuya ngaleskhathi endlini?” He's asking if there's a wife that comes home at 8:17pm but the thing is, I'm

not in any wives chat groups, so I don't know what time other wives go to their homes.

"Did you eat?" I ask.

"Phumelele!"

I was trying to be kind.

"I'm going to take a shower then come back and watch TV." I walk away.

Just a few steps away, he roars my name.

"Hhayi-bo Mpatho, I went to the Mzimelas then went out for pizza, then a solo movie date."

"You could've picked your phone and told me," he says.

I guess he's forgotten that we weren't on speaking terms when I left.

"I'm sorry," I say.

I'm not trying to get into a fight, I had enough with Mzimela.

"What did I do?" he asks.

Now his voice is lowered, the anger has subsided.

"What do you mean?" I'm confused.

"When you left on Thursday we were okay. We talked over the phone before you went to bed and when you woke up. Everything changed when you came back, I don't know what I did, I thought paying your lobola was a good thing."

He's got a short memory, I guess.

"You're the one who's been angry at me, hiding the gate keys and hurling insults at me. Why don't you tell me what I did instead?" I ask.

"I tried to talk to you in the morning and you didn't even care to listen. I thought we were on a better communication level, I

wasn't doing anything wrong by telling you that you made me angry when you requested that we go and see your ex on the day I was paying lobola."

"Why didn't you ask me to explain my reasons? You just went off like a madman."

"Okay, can we sit down?"

Phewww!

I throw my bags down and sit. I hope this conversation won't lead to a fight because I'm tired.

"First of all, I want to tell you that ngiyak'thanda Phume. Sometimes when I say things it's because I'm hurt, you hurt me and sometimes I even think it's intentional, you're testing my patience."

"I'm sorry," I say.

"It's fine, let's talk about the urgency of you and me talking to Sphakamiso. What conversation do you need to have with him?"

"Not just me, you also need to mend things since you're family," I say.

"I understand that you have a history, maybe you still love him in a way. But I don't like Sphakamiso, I don't feel anything for him, I only do what I do for peace' sake."

"What do you mean you don't feel anything for him? You said everything you did was a mistake," I ask.

"I just don't feel anything, I'm sorry about the situation but I'm not sorry for him. I know he feels the same way, there's no relationship we could possible have. I will respect his space, hopefully he will respect mine as well. Other than that, there's no outstanding conversation between us."

I don't know how I feel about that. I feel like he's selfish and arrogant. There's no reason for him to be hateful towards someone he wronged, as far as I know Sphakamiso has never done anything to him.

"Yet you have a blossoming friendship with Malibongwe who killed a woman who took care of you for a decade," I'm pissed.

"There's no friendship between him and I. Nevertheless, you are also having a relationship with a woman who hated your mother," he says.

"You also hated her and I'm married to you." I mean, what's the difference. And Aunt Brandi is the only relative I have left, I don't want to be completely alone.

"Okay, let's drop it before you start arguing."

What? I'm not arguing.

"Why did you feel the need to tell me that you need to see your ex yesterday out of all days?"

"Because that's when I thought about it. There are things I found out about Aphelele's mother that just felt uncomfortable with me, I want closure from him."

"Details?" he asks.

"Apparently Snenhlanhla looks like me, I find that to be creepy and intentional of Sphakamiso."

"Okay?"

He's staring at me.

"That's it," I say.

"So how many closures are you going to need before you move on?"

Lord no, this conversation was better not had.

"I've moved on," I say.

“If you still need closure about who he fucked and how they looked like then you haven’t moved on.”

I don’t know what to say, it’s expected of him not to understand and I understand why he’d think of it like that. But the truth is I’ve moved on, even if this marriage doesn’t work out I doubt I’d get back with Sphakamiso. We are no longer compatible.

“Explain, I don’t understand,” he says.

“I don’t have anything more to explain.” I know it’s not going to make sense to him whichever way I put it.

“Ufuna iclosure kuye noma ufun’ isende?” The Mpatho I hate is out again. I hate how he gets harsh and aggressive with his words, yet cries a river when things are reversed. Do I want closure or a dick from Sphakamiso? How is this even a question that crosses his mind.

“You think very low of me,” I’m actually done with this conversation.

“Uyaphi?” he asks.

I grab my things and walk away.

“You’re not going to see him ke sisi, uyezwa? It’s not going to happen, you had 6 years to do whatever fuck you wanted together, as long as you’re Phumelele Mshazi you’re not going to see any ex in the name of closure. Don’t even set him up for...” I don’t hear what he says I’m setting Sphakamiso up for because I’ve slammed the door behind me.

Take a deep breath Phume!

I can’t believe my hands are shaking.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 80

MIYANDA

Things have been different ever since Sphakamiso came. We are no longer sleeping together, Bonga has to go and be with him at night, just in case he falls sick. The healer they went to said there's nothing wrong with him, he's not sick as he's been saying. Now we just have to wait for his family to allocate him, the good thing is that it's said they will come and find him. I'm hoping that would be soon, it's sad to see him getting thinner and weaker without any medical illness.

I woke up early, I don't want to be late for work on a Monday. I'm ready, I just need to make my lunch box. There's a knock at the door.

I open while putting on my earrings, it's my one and only.

"You guys are up already?" It's still early, Unified hasn't started to operate yet.

"Sphakamiso is still asleep," he says.

"Okay, are you here to kiss me goodbye?"

"I want to do more than that?" He bites his lower lip, resisting a cute smile from stretching out.

"Bonga, I'm going to work!" I warn.

That's like pouring petrol in a flame of fire. He blocks my way and grabs my waist closer to his. How tf did he wake up with an erection?

Well, it's been hectic, we haven't had a chance to be intimate this week. I have about 10 minutes to spare.

"I brushed my teeth," he says, rubbing his nose on mine.

I capture his lips in a kiss. Fuck, I've missed being touched by these hands.

"Close the door," I whisper.

He lets out the smile and reverses to the door and closes it with his foot.

He comes back without taking his eyes off me.

"Just a quickie, don't be messy I've dressed up," I say.

"I miss your second lips on mine," he says.

The obsession with eating my cookie! I'm starting to think maybe it tastes like sugar down there.

"Later, I promise we will do everything," I say.

"Okay sthandwa sami." He locks his lips on mine while dropping his shorts and underwear. I'm not taking anything off except pulling my panty to my knees and bending over.

He pushes my dress over my waist, then I feel his lips sweeping between my folds. I hold myself and just moan softly. He uses his hand to expose the opening and sticks his tongue in.

"I love you baby!" I say, my pleasure buttons are going up.

He stands straight, sends his one hand to my boob and slowly penetrates me. I hold onto the bed for balance and let him have his cake. I enjoy every stroke, I feel every groan and bounce with every spank.

"I'm going to cum sthandwa sami," his voice is shaky.

The whole point of this quickie is for him to cum. But nope, he's forgotten all about the limited time we have, he wants me on my back. He pulls my panty out of my ankles and spread my legs. It turns into a long, messy and wet love-making. I squirt all

over my dress and mess my legs. He spreads his load on my thighs and lies next to me, breathing heavily.

“Cishe ngafa,” he says after a moment, turning to kiss me on the forehead.

I smile, “What was going to kill you?”

“Inkumbulo, it feels strange not to sleep next to you and having you pull the whole blanket to wrap yourself throughout the night, throwing your leg over me here and there.”

“Please bear with me, Gwazela. I’m the only child at home, I wasn’t taught how to share my bed with people,” I say.

He smiles and kisses my cheek, putting his hand on my tummy.

“The only child that’s going to give birth to five children,” he says.

“Five. Are you serious?” I don’t even know how mothering one feels like yet, and he’s already planning on four more.

“Yes, I want us to have at least half of the soccer team, now that I know I’m fertile and quick to score once I’m let in.” He’s bragging about getting me pregnant on the first sexual encounter.

I wonder why I was so stupid. I let him sleep with me without condom, not even knowing much about him. But I wouldn’t undo it even if I had a chance. Everything that’s happening was meant to happen when it happened.

“Before I forget to discuss this with you, I was thinking of bringing Mkhuleko over. I know you’re not going to be forever happy with sleeping alone, if he comes this side then he can sleep with Sphakamiso. You don’t have to cook for them, I will come back with the stove today.”

“Okay....” I’m having some mixed feelings.

“Is it okay with you?”

“Not that I mind, Mkhuleko can come. But if all three of you move here, won’t your mother have another problem with me?”

“It’s me who’s bringing him here, just like I brought Sphakamiso,” he says.

“But you know nothing is ever your fault to your mother and sister, they will start saying I brought all of you emjondolo making you abandon home.” I have no doubt such accusations will start flying.

“Sphakamiso doesn’t want to go back home, I also don’t want him to because that place is depressing. But if you’re not okay with it...”

“It’s fine, tell him to come,” I say.

“MaNyambose, I don’t want you to agree to things you’re not happy with just for my sake. I care about Sphakamiso’s mental health but that doesn’t mean I don’t care about yours as well.”

“It’s fine babe, it’s not like they will beat me for it.” I peck his cheek and sit up. I need to wash myself from waist down all over again.

“I’m going to be late now. Don’t you know the meaning of a quickie?”

He laughs, “If you ever fucked yourself you’d know how delicious your cookie is.”

I roll my eyes and take my dress off.

“Futhi uyaphindeka,” he says sitting up.

He mustn’t dare, I didn’t wake up to be a sex machine.

“Going back to your brother is what you need to do right now,” I say.

“Unendoda echathayo, you need to be fit in bed because...”
He’s stood up, he wraps his arms around me. He kisses my cheek, “...because I love being inside you.”

“Okay my love, I also love you inside me but I fuckin’ work!”

He removes his arms from me and clears his throat. “About that...I don’t think it’s necessary. You’re a hard working woman, I get it and have respect for you. But I’m here now, I have means to provide for you while you enjoy and nurture my little seed growing inside you.”

“Alright, just two more months then I will take a maternity leave,” I say.

“No Miyanda, quit today,” he says.

My eyes widen. What am I hearing?

“Quit today?” I ask.

“Yes, I will pay you what you earned every month.”

Wait a second...

I sit, I’m only wearing a bra, I took off my dress and panty.

“You’re going to pay me my R2500?” I ask.

“Your payslip says R1800,” he says.

I roll my eyes. My word is more believable than a piece of paper.

“You’re going to pay me that?” I ask.

“Yes, I know you have a father to look after.”

“And still pay rent here and take care of bills?”

“Yes.”

“Do you receive money somewhere or you’re taking from your account?”

“I have investments and two cars operating and registered in Bolt.”

This guy is secretive!

“So your money isn’t just audio money, it actually exists?” I’m shocked.

“Why would I lie to you? I just can’t do things over night regardless of how much money there is. I need to be wise and I need my brothers on board, especially Sphakamiso because he’s got some level of education.”

“Okay, I quit,” I’m taking this bra off as well.

He snaps his brows, there’s a smile he’s resisting.

“For real?”

“Yeah, let me send Singh a text.”

My dream was never to work in a clothing store for peanuts but I appreciated the job because it put bread on my table. But now I’ve found a bakery where breads are made, Singh needs to give me my resigning funds. This resignation is with immediate effect, no warning or whatsoever.

“Wait, so what do I do the whole day?” I should’ve asked this before sending the text.

He looks lost.

“Ummm, cook,” he says.

“Cooking takes two hours.”

“I don’t know sthandwa sami, weave grassmats, maybe.”

Seriously! How old do I look?

“Mina ngiluke amacansi?” I can’t believe this.

“Do whatever you want, I will support you.”

“Okay, I will think about it, but I’m not going to weave grassmats hhayi-bo.” I’m offended that he even thinks it suits me at this age.

“But today I have plans for us,” he says.

I’m curious....

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MALIBONGWE

It’s been an awesome day, after a tough week they had she deserved some pampering and a shopping spree. They spotted some cute little clothes and bought for their little one. Miyanda couldn’t have come at a better time in his life. In a short time she’s become his pillar of strength, a best friend and a sister his young brothers needed. Unfortunately her pregnancy mood came over after long hours of shopping and she wanted to go home. He got her a taxi to take her home while he finishes some other errands. Now he needs some take-aways for Sphakamiso, then he will follow her.

Even though Sphakamiso is a fan of traditional food, today he’s not getting any rank food. Those Zulu intestines deserve to be surprised with Italian food once in a year. He gets what they call chicken genovese and add two pizzas. He grabs a seat while waiting for his order.

He’s on his emails for a few minutes, then he raises his head, his eyes find a man in the corner who’s sitting alone on his table. Is he seeing well? That orphaned diner looks like the guy

he knows from the village. Well, it's him, he's received his order but he hasn't touched his food. Isn't he happily married?

He walks over his table, smiling. Nothing makes his day like seeing this guy's sad face.

"Eating alone, where's the wife?" he asks.

Mpatho inhales a long deep breath. This face is the last thing he wanted to see today, God why?

Malibongwe pulls the other chair and sits.

"Kanti usizi luyafika naseSandton?" He laughs. It's therapeutic seeing a boy from the big mansion engulfed in grief. Proof that money can't buy happiness.

"Sawubona," Mpatho says, he's irritated.

"Yebo bhut' omdala. How is your dinner?"

Mpatho doesn't answer, he just looks at him like he's planning to cut his head off later.

"Ziyay'shuka imbodla kwa arranged marriage, huh?"

Mpatho clicks his tongue, "Who told you that you're funny?"

"I'm not trying to be funny, I'm asking out of concern." His eyes glitter with humor.

"Yes, I'm having a hard time in my marriage. Be happy, go and celebrate with your brother." He picks his fork and starts eating. Damn, he can't even feel the taste. His heart has been empty since yesterday, Phume didn't even look apologetic, she slept and faced the other side. It's not about Sphakamiso that much, but the timing of it all. She wasn't even grateful that he paid lobola for her. Yes, he wasn't doing her any favour, it was a responsibility for him. But an expression of joy would've been nice before she asked for permission to go and mingle with Sphakamiso again.

“What does this have to do with my brother? He’s sick, he’s not bothering you and your wife. What’s there for him to celebrate?” – Malibongwe.

“He’d jump on her the second she leaves me,” he says.

Malibongwe is in disbelief. Not because he’s lying, Sphakamiso would probably chase Phume again if this one is out of the picture. But what raises such thought in his head?

“Is she leaving you?” he asks.

Mpatho shrugs, “I don’t know.”

“You paid her lobola on Saturday.”

“So? It didn’t make me special in any way. People will love you because they love you, not because of what you went through to be with them and what you feel for them.”

“Now you’re a motivational speaker?” – Malibongwe.

“Your order must be ready.” This is the first time he’s this calm, not throwing any words back.

His heart must be really broken.

“You’re not poor like us who have to call elders for advices, go to marriage counseling,” Malibongwe says.

“We’ve already done that,” Mpatho says.

“Maybe call elders and ask them to sit down with both of you and get traditional marriage counseling.”

“I don’t have any elders,” Mpatho says.

This one is tough ke.

“Nombuso can stand in for you, I mean you love her, she’s your only sibling.”

“Nombuso will cause more harm than good. She will want to fight and hurl insults unprovoked. No, I’m good with her,” Mpatho says.

“I’m glad you’re a fast learner.” For the first time they laugh over something common.

“My wife is pregnant, I can’t risk Nombuso throwing hands at her because of me,” Mpatho says, they’re still laughing.

“She’s just a loud mouth. But for real, go back to Zikalala and hear what he wanted to say the other day. It’s questionable that everything went wrong after you paid lobola for her,” Malibongwe stands up with his order receipt in hand. “But I’m not an expert in relationship problems, such things don’t exist in my world because I wasn’t signed my woman in a will, I courted ngaqonywa.”

“One needs to have an estate to make a will, and not family fits to make one Mpatho says and picks his drink and sips.

Malibongwe gives him the middle finger and walks away. He still doesn’t like him.

Neither does Mpatho like him. But maybe he's right about hearing what that man wanted to say because Zikalala mentioned the havoc in his relationship, first maybe he shouldn’t have shut down the conversation before hearing him out.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 81

PHUMELELE

I went to Ntombi’s house for a sleep over and ended up spending the whole morning there. I didn’t think I’d ever feel

depressed about being in my husband's presence. Coming back home I was hoping he'd be gone to work. But his car is here, my heart drops. It's almost 12pm, obviously he's not going to work today. I told him about the sleepover, I don't know where he was because he wasn't here when I left. But I know he's going to ask questions and whatever answers I give won't satisfy him, then we'll end up fighting.

I walk in, I'm holding a silent prayer that at least I find him in a different room. Prayer answered; he's not in the bedroom. I close the door and throw my bag on the floor and lie in bed. I'm pregnant, sometimes I even forget that, there's so much drama I can say I haven't felt or enjoyed this pregnancy. Which is sad because this is my first baby.

I hear footsteps and quickly close my eyes. I don't want to fight, I don't want to answer any questions, I don't want to defend myself. Lord please help me!

I hear him walking in and dropping something on the bed, I keep my eyes closed. I feel his huge physique hovering over me. Is he thinking about killing me?

I feel his lips on my cheek, I don't know why the hell I open my eyes. Unfortunately they locked with his, there's no way I can go back to my fake sleep now.

"Unjani?" he asks.

He looks stressed, his eyes lack something.

"I'm good, wena?"

"I'm not okay."

If we start addressing it I know things will go south.

"Have you eaten?" I ask.

“Food is the last thing on my mind.” He blows out a sigh and sits.

I pull my legs to create more space for him. He pulls them back and removes my socks and holds my feet. I’m tired, a massage could do.

“There’s a man I visited this morning, his name is Zikalala, he’s a sangoma.”

That’s...strange.

“Okay?” I’m uncomfortable with this. He’s visiting zangomas now?

“Things were not done right, I have to go back to my mother’s surname, if not someone from the Mshazis have to stand for my father and starts the whole process afresh.” Thank God it’s not about our marriage, it would’ve been a tiring topic.

“You can get your father’s cousin to do it than to move back to the Vilakazis. I mean you and your mother aren’t even on good terms and you don’t get along with some of her children.”

“I know, but that means we have to go to the Vilakazis before all that is done. I have to kneel to the same people who abandoned me,” he says.

I understand his frustrations, but sometimes you just have to swallow the hard pill and roll with it. It’s his decision to make at the end of the day, I will support whatever he chooses.

“He said that’s the reason we keep fighting, I did things wrong on Saturday,” he says.

I’m not sure about that. Maybe it has effects, minor ones. We are both accountable for the fights, there was no unseen circumstance forcing us.

“The way you look at me when I talk to you...” he shakes his head. “There’s no love in your eyes. It’s like you’re looking at a

piece of used toilet paper. Last night...no, not last night, you were not here. The night before, I watched you sleeping peacefully and I was tossing and turning in bed until 3am. I wondered if it bothered you that we are not happy. Do you even care?"

Yes, I care. But I keep quiet because he's hurt me. One thing about Mpatho is that he never acknowledges or cares about what he's done to people, people who don't know would think you're a bad guy because he's good at playing the victim. He knows how to poke people, and the insults, damn. He says the worst things ever.

"Well, I was and I'm still going through the most. I wish we can talk without getting on our emotions," he says.

"Have I been on my emotions?" I ask.

"Asilwi, I'm just saying maybe we'd understand each other better. I was happy until Saturday. I know you love me, I just wish you wouldn't make me question my position." Yeap, we are going back to square one. Sphakamiso again, I don't think he knows that he's still a subject of our marriage.

"I told you what makes me uncomfortable, it took a lot for me to say out loud that I'm intimidated by another man in my marriage. But I did, because I thought you'd take it into consideration and not corner me in my insecurities by bringing up one thing that makes us fight every time you bring it up...your ex."

If he talked like this with me on Saturday I would've apologized right away. Sometimes it's the tone that mess things up, not what is being said.

"Maybe the timing was wrong. But it's fine, I'm not going to see him, I don't want you to kill him," I say. For a minute he's just staring at me. I guess my response didn't go well, he's now pissed again.

“I’m not going to see him, problem solved,” I say pulling my feet from his hands.

“It’s those little statements Phume, you shove it on my face that you still love another man. You canceling is not because you understand that it’s wrong to be obsessed about an ex while you’re married. You just won’t go because you don’t want him to be killed, as if I go around killing people.”

Doesn’t he? Sometimes you don’t need to point a gun to kill people, you go for their mental and emotional being and destroy them. Beauty was right about most things...he’s like his father. If I’m like my mother then we are a second version of our parents.

“Sphakamiso has turned out to be your brother. Why do you expect me to pretend like he doesn’t exist? I got married shortly after ending my relationship with him.” I don’t understand why he expects Sphakamiso not to have any effect in my life shortly after I ended things with him after 6 years.

“I also have ex-girlfriends, some dumped me for no reason, but you don’t hear me talking about going back to them for closure. If the issue here is that we got married too soon, didn’t I give you a choice to go back to him?” he asks.

“But I’ve never said I want to go back to him. I found out some details, Aphelele’s mother is my half sister, one way or the other him and I will share spaces. I don’t want to harbor any feelings against him, that’s why I wanted us to go to him and iron things out.”

“What exactly do you want me to say when we get there? I must sit next to you and listen to the two of you digesting details of your love life? What hurts the most is that he knows that he’s better than me. Do you know how hard it is for me to answer the same question from different people everyday; Mpatho are you happy?”

Wow, at least he has people who care enough to ask. I doubt Sphakamiso thinks he's better than him, or even think about him at all, it's me he thinks about.

"Mpatho you make a mountain out of a mole. That one request doesn't warrant all the tantrums you've been throwing since Saturday," I say.

"Maybe I'm too sensitive or insecure, but I know conditional love, I was raised with conditional love. Love that turns on and off, I'd wake up and try to speak to my supposed stepmother and she wouldn't speak to me for no reason. And speak to me again when she feels like. My father would love me openly when your mother wasn't there, as soon as she appeared things would turn sour. I had a family that loved me for agreeing with what they were saying and doing what they wanted. I never thought I'd ever accept questionable love, where I have to constantly ask myself if I'm the best or the option. I never thought I'd ever let anyone make me feel like I'm not enough. But here I am 32 years later, subjected into the same treatment. But you can go to him, if that's going to make you happy. I won't be there, you can kiss him if you want just like the last time. Or go all way, I don't have a problem. Vele ngazalwa ngingedwa, futhi ngiyofa ngingedwa."

I hurt him, I get that. Maybe I should've kept whatever frustrations I had about Sphakamiso and Snenhlanhla to myself. But everything he's done and said makes it hard for me to sit here and think he's a victim. He came for the jugular, over and over again. How can you constantly bruise someone's emotions? I'm not even just someone, I'm his wife. Even when I kept a distance, he still came after me.

"Is that why you were questioning the paternity of the baby?" I ask.

He tries to hold my foot again, I pull it away. I don't want to be comforted, I want to know why he says everything he says when he's angry. Even now he's talking about being born alone, as if I requested to see Sphakamiso because he's 'an orphan'.

"I didn't question the baby's paternity, I know the baby is mine."

He mustn't dare deny it. I didn't dwell on it because I didn't want to escalate things.

"Yes, you did. Are you doubting that the baby is yours?"

"It if came across as questioning then I'm sorry. It's not even something I've thought of, I have no doubt, none whatsoever, ingane yami le," he says.

"What about me? The insults you hurl to me everyday," I want to know. I'm demanding answers, I've allowed him to walk over me throughout the weekend. There's nothing he hasn't said to me.

"I've never insulted you," he denies it.

"You describe my mother as the devil's incarnate. Constantly saying I'm just like her, is it not describing me in the same manner that you viewed her?" His father didn't have a great reputation. Even though I can't name names but I know he had his hands dirty. His grandfather had no friends in the area either. Ikhehla eliyinkom' edla yodwa- isolated AF. That just proved how cold hearted he was, his mates didn't even want to get close to him.

"Have I ever compared you to your father or grandfather when you make mistakes?" I ask.

"No," he says.

"Then why can't I make any mistake? Why is every bad move I make attached to my mother?"

“I hear you and I’m sorry,” he says.

Too early for apologies!

“I’m not done. I can’t even hold a dick?”

That didn’t even hurt me, it just displayed his stupidity.

“I don’t know when and why I said that. Maybe I was just angry, I’m not complaining about our sex life, I’m very happy there,” he says.

“So you just say things because you’re angry. Can I ask you a question?”

He nods.

“Do you still know that I’m pregnant?”

“Yes, I know,” he says.

“So when you get angry at me and start saying things to intentionally hurt me, do you think about the fact that I’m carrying a life inside me?”

While he looks stupid trying to come up with a dumb answer, I have more questions.

“When was the last time you asked how the baby is doing? My cravings? Do you buy me anything?”

“You have two of my cards,” he says.

“Do you buy me anything, that was the question, answer it sir.”

“Things have been hectic, but yesterday I came back with pizza, unfortunately you were at Ntombi’s.”

“That’s it? When our child is grown, let’s say it’s a boy, you’re going to tell him that when he’s grown and have a pregnant wife he must buy her pizza once and wait for birth?”

“Now you’re making me feel like I’m a bad father, I may have allowed emotions to get on the way for some time, but I’m here, you’re not short of anything.”

“I’m short of affection. You’ve insulted me more than you’ve rubbed my tummy. I have to live with a woman you fucked under one roof because to this day you haven’t bought me a house, not a new car, nothing. But I’m not crying, I’ve endured crazy things from your ex Beauty.”

“Beauty is not my ex,” that’s his excuse.

“You fucked her, that’s your ex, finish and klaar! At least I’ve never slept with my ancestor.” Beauty is not that old, she’s five years older than him. But I don’t care, it sounds powerful in an argument.

“While some of us ask blessings from our elders you ‘Mpatha’ Mshazi be asking them for pussy.”

“Wow Phume, wow!” he’s now an ambulance; wawawawa!

“You’ve got the nerve to mock my sexual inexperience. Wena wonke pho! You should’ve married your strippers if you wanted a sex-lioness that’s going to hold your dick njengezikhali zamaNtungwa. Like you’re the best thing I’ve ever had in bed, mxm.” I know he’s going to lose his marbles for this. He can’t take what he dishes.

“I know I am,” he says.

He’s calm than I wanted.

I lift my head, with my eyebrows snapped.

“I’m telling you, you are not, I’ve seen and tasted better. I’ve had more...more fun sex before you. With people who were more handsome and had big sex tools.”

He’s laughing, I don’t know what’s funny, I’m pissed.

“You have no reason to talk me down about anything,” I say with a scolding face.

He stops laughing, even though humor is still clouding his eyes.

“Ngiyaxolisa, I’m really sorry. But you didn’t know anything about sex before me, you were scared to even touch my dick, let alone call it by its name. Sex tool? That’s humble.” He’s still doing it, this man thinks he’s the best thing since sliced bread.

“It’s not funny, I’m pregnant, be sensitive,” I say.

“I know, I’m sorry. Please sit up, I want to hug you.”

A part of me wants to refuse but we’ve been fighting for almost five days, it’s time to make peace and face the surname thing that has been raised. I sit up and let him hug me.

“I love you, I love my baby too,” he says.

I lock my eyes on his, I love him too, at this point he should know and be confident about that.

“But seriously Phume, some things shouldn’t even be a problem at this point,” he says.

“Like what?” I ask.

“Everytime I’ve had a problem with you it has been because of your ex. Every single time. Why can’t we have normal marriage problems? Let’s fight over you taking my car without permission, overspending my money, coming to bed late because of Netflix, things like that Phume.”

“Maybe it’s because we are not an ordinary couple. It wasn’t going to be easy to just blend together and leave the past behind like it never existed. But I feel like we are trying bro.”

He raises his eyebrow, “Who is your bro?”

I laugh. Seriously, that’s all he heard from everything I said.

“Bro just sounded nice,” I say.

“We need to start calling each other babe, my love, sweetheart, all those sweet names.”

I don't see myself being used to that, even though I find them romantic.

“As I said, we are not an ordinary couple. That ‘babe’ thing is not us, we call each other by our ID names like we are two schoolmates meeting in a train,” I say.

He bursts into laughter. It's funny, isn't it? We are just strange.

“So what are you going to do with the surname issue?” I ask.

“Speak to MaVilakazi, again!”

I know it's going to be emotionally draining for him. But it's for the better, those issues need to be ironed out before the baby arrives.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 82

SIS' NOMBUSO

This has been the best week for her after a very long time. She's been looking forward to nothing but her vacation, which is now tomorrow. She's leaving today, all thanks to her mother who cheated with a rich man who then left everything to his son, now her brother. Mpatho booked her in an all-expenses-paid vacation at The View, Amanzimtoti. Mkhuleko has been stealing her charger, taking the food she cooked and dishing it for Ruby, but she hasn't fought with him because she has bigger things to focus on.

Yoli keeps asking where she's going, if she's going with her and they will see her father. As much as she loves her daughter

but a break from motherhood and sisterhood was needed. She's more than happy to leave all these people here for five days. Maybe Mkhuleko will realize how important she is in this family when MaVilakazi starts cooking her watery beans everyday.

"Mama!" that's Yoli running in.

She's sitting on the couch wearing her only one robe. She bathed four hours ago, the car taking her to Amanzimtoti will come at 3pm, she's still going to wait two more hours.

"That big man is here," Yoli says.

Gosh, not visitors on this day!

"What big man?" She stands up and goes to the window and peek.

That's Mpatho's car. She's confused, why is he here? He said she'll go with one of his security guards who will guard her throughout the trip.

They meet at the door.

"You're not here to tell me I'm no longer going, are you?" She's holding her breath.

Mpatho chuckles, "No, I'm not here for you. Where is your mother?"

Phewww, thank God.

"Come in, I will wake her up, she's taking a nap."

They walk in, she shows him where to sit and get a jug of juice. Isisu somhambi singangenso yenyoni; she generously fills up the jug and throws some ices inside.

"It's the Oros?" Mpatho asks, his tone laced with mockery.

"Yes, yehlisa ukushisa," she says.

Very generous and nice today.

“Where is Ruby?” Mpatho asks.

“Do I look like a dog’s nanny?”

Scratch nice, she’s still Nombuso.

She walks away going to MaVilakazi’s bedroom.

Mpatho lifts his eyes to Yoli standing frightened by the wall. The child is scared of him.

“Hey mshana, come here,” he says, stretching a thin smile.

Yoli doesn’t budge. She’s Malibongwe’s niece.

“Come play the game,” he shows her the phone.

No response.

He takes out some coins.

“Go and buy ice-block,” he offers.

This is Yoli’s language, she’s in front of him in a minute.

Mpatho gives her the coins and then grabs her arm before she goes away.

“What’s your name?” he asks.

“Yoli,” her voice is kept low, she’s looking at her feet.

“Who’s your mother?”

Yoli points where Nombuso disappeared.

“Which grade are you doing Yoli?” he asks.

“Grade 10,” she goes straight to high school.

“That’s nice, you’re a clever girl.” He lets her go.

She waves her little hand before running out. He can’t help the smile on his face.

Nombuso and MaVilakazi walk in, he takes in a deep breath as they sit opposite him.

MaVilakazi greets. "Sawubona Nkosiyazi."

He doesn't feel any type of way when Nombuso calls him that name but with MaVilakazi it sounds like an insult.

"Yebo sawubona." It takes everything for him to respond and look at her in the eyes like she's not the last person he wants to see in this world.

"I'm not visiting, there's a problem that I think I have to report to you now that I know you're my mother," he says.

MaVilakazi nods.

"I went to see a man with Malibongwe a few days ago and..."

Nombuso cuts him short, "Did he say anything about me?"

"Who?" He frowns.

"Malibongwe, this is the longest time we've ever gone without talking to each other. I want to know if he said anything about missing me," she says.

Mpatho shakes his head, "He didn't talk about you."

Her face drops. What did she do to deserve so much hate from her brother? If it's Miyanda behind all this then she doesn't have a heart.

"I was talking about what the man said. We actually went there to seek about Sphakamiso's condition but it turned out it was me and Malibongwe who had bigger problems. My surname wasn't changed, I'm not recognized as a Mshazi by the ancestors. It is said that your people only received whatever they received and didn't report to the Vilakazi alter that I was being changed to Mshazi."

“Oh, that’s confusing because because your father did a ceremony for you,”- MaVilakazi.

“Yes, he did. But there should’ve been a ceremony back at the Vilakazis before my father did another one to welcome me,” Mpatho says.

This really doesn’t concern her, Nombuso stands up.

“Do you eat vetkoeks?” she asks.

MaVilakazi’s face blazes with anger.

“Can’t you see we are in the middle of a serious discussion?”

“I’m asking because I’m going to the kitchen, I don’t want to listen to confused identity issues,” she says.

Mkhuleko would’ve taken a jab, but Mpatho doesn’t pay her any mind.

“Yes, I do eat them but I’m full, thanks,” he says.

She walks away, leaving them unpacking his surname issue. MaVilakazi has to stand up for once in her life and come through for her eldest son. They have to go to the Vilakazis and correct their wrongs. Mpatho is only here because he wants his wife to be a wife at the right place and for his child to bear the right surname. They talked without fighting and bringing up the past.

Mkhuleko walks in, Mpatho is about to leave.

“You didn’t tell me you’re coming,” he says.

“Ama2000 nokungabingeleli...hello Mkhuleko.”

He laughs, “I’m sorry, hi.”

“I was asking Nombuso where Ruby is and she flipped on me. Where is she?”

“She’s outside, she’s way much better now,” – Mkhuleko.

“Good, at least I will see her before I leave.” His relationship with Ruby is kept a secret. Phume doesn’t like dogs, she made a huge drama the other day making him wash his hands with soap because he brushed Ruby’s legs.

“MaVilakazi, I have news,” Mkhuleko says.

“What is it boy?” – MaVilakazi.

“I’m going to be away for a few weeks.”

This is a bombshell!

MaVilakazi frowns, “Where are you going?”

“I’m going to stay with Bhut’ Malibongwe and Sis’ Miyanda for a few weeks. Bhuti asked me to come because Sphakamiso is also there and he’s not well.”

MaVilakazi sweats within a second. She claps her hands in disbelief.

“This Miyanda girl is a punishment from God! There’s no way one girl can stand against my peace and test my patience like this.”

“It’s not her who asked me to come,” Mkhuleko says, he’s confused.

“Keep quiet my boy, you don’t know anything. You see that girl, she’s on the steering wheel, your brother is just follows everything she says. Now she’s taking all my kids away from me, God will punish her!”

Mpatho’s eyes widen. That’s an extreme thing to say about a woman who’s carrying your grandchild.

“Let’s go to Ruby,” Mkhuleko says.

Mpatho badly needed that rescue.

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MAPHOLOBA

He's known Mpatho for years, that's why he's still around and making sure that his family is safe despite his wife being unbearable and full of tantrums. He's 41, old enough to be her father, but at the working environment she's justified to talk with him anyhow and even cry and spray his face with doom because he refused to open the gate for her to drive her pregnant self at night. He knows boundaries, he knows how to control his emotions and understand that work is work. He worked as a traffic cop for 8 years before resigning and working for private security companies. He's under Black Navy Protection Unit, which is co-owned by Mpatho's best friend, Zamani.

Today he's getting away from Mrs Mshazi, he's going to be away for five days. Even though his job is to guard and make sure that nobody messes with Mpatho's sister, he's also getting to refresh and get away from the village for a while. Mpatho gave him the Hyundai Tucson that belonged to Mshazi Snr to use for this trip. He was told that the lady is now waiting for him to pick her up.

He pulls up outside the Mcinekas and hits the hooter twice. He's dressed in black T-shirt, black pants and black tassels. Black is, without any doubt, his favourite. He added a white cap just so he doesn't look weird, like he's a bodyguard out to murder people. He lights his cigarette and leans against the car while waiting for the lady to come. Village girls are usually well-trained and not spoiled like Mpatho's wife. Phume is the second worst person he's had to look after in his job.

Nombuso comes out, she's dressed in her long A-line dress, flat pumps and a scarf tied on her head. The bags are the only thing showing that she's going on vacation. Most ladies he knows go on vacation wearing leggings, hats and sunglasses. This one looks like she's returning to her in-laws' house after visiting her mother. She's quite thick, maybe a size 38.

"Are you the driver?" she asks.

Mapholoba throws the cigarette butt on the ground and turns around.

"Sawubona ntokazi. Yes, I'm your driver, my name is...."

Nombuso shoves one bag into his hand. "Put this one in the back, I will sit with these ones because they have my expensive things."

Okay, there might be another version of Phume here.

He does as instructed and gets behind the wheel. Nombuso is now sitting on the passenger seat with her bag of expensive things, she's looking at her face on the hand mirror she's holding. She takes out her Ponds and applies some on her nose.

"Are you ready?" Mapholoba asks. He doesn't want to start the car and get scolded for ruining 'iphafu'.

"Yes, go before my daughter comes out and sees the car."

Oh, she's a mom, she got to have a little sense of responsibility, she won't need shadowing like Phume who doesn't even care if her decisions will put her life in danger.

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They had an amazing trip, she didn't give him the headache he anticipated. He already knows his job; carry all her bags, walk behind like a bodyguard that he is and let everyone see who the real guest is and that they're not coming here as a couple. They're checking in different rooms; he will be staying in the same hotel, going everywhere with her and driving her to see Freedom.

"You're not going back home?" She's surprised to see him receiving his own access card.

It doesn't look like she likes him that much. This is the only time she's looked at his face for more than a minute. She didn't even care to hear his name.

"I was asked to look after you," he says.

Brows snapped!

"I'm 35 years old, I don't need a babysitter, I literally came here to get away from people."

Sadly, there are people here too.

"You'll talk about it with your brother," he says.

They head towards her room, she's not happy with his presence.

They enter and put her bags on the floor.

"This is beautiful, there's a pool outside," she's ecstatic.

He doesn't say anything; he goes around checking if everything is good as it seems then says his goodbye.

"I will settle in my room, kindly take my number," he says.

She throws her phone to him and goes to open the curtain. Everything amazes her, she keeps exclaiming and complimenting.

He stands behind her to give her the phone.

She turns and almost gets a heart attack.

“Why are you so black?”

He’s confused.

“Wear bright colours,” she says, taking the phone.

Now he has to wear bright colors to please her.

“Noted,” he nods.

Her mouth drops open. Is he going to do everything she says?
What level of soft life is this?

“I’m going to swim in the pool before everything else,” she says.

“Alright, please let me know when you’re ready,” he says.

She smiles...she actually knows how to smile.

He walks out and goes to his own room. It’s not a luxury room, not that he cares. His clothes are in the car, for some weird reasons he’s not a fan of hotels. Who was even sleeping in this bed last night?

He calls Mpatho to give an update.

“Is she happy with her room?” Mpatho asks.

“She’s happy about everything, except me.”

He laughs, “Don’t worry Mapholoba, she doesn’t like a lot of people.”

“Okay, don’t worry Mshazi, she’s in safe hands.”

He needs a smoke, he stands outside his room and lights a cigarette. He might need to buy more packets, that’s how he copes in stressful working environment. It’s a bit cold for someone to want to swim, maybe she’s just fascinated by the swimming pool.

There's no update from her, which is strange because she said she was getting ready for a swim. She throws a minty gum in his mouth and goes to her room to check.

He knocks for ages without response.

"It's me, Mapholoba," he says.

"The bodyguard?" It sounds like she's close to the door, clearly she was ignoring him on purpose.

"Yes," he says.

The door finally opens, she's wrapped in ibhayi, there's a legging peeking underneath. A very strange code for swimming. She's got a big afro, she's trying to comb it.

"You're no longer going to swim?" He's standing by the door.

"What? Don't I look ready?"

Nope, she doesn't.

"I can go and get you some swimming clothes, some stores are still open."

"I do have a swim set," she says.

He's confused. "Why didn't you wear it?"

She blows out a sigh and takes the comb out of her afro and throws it on the bed. This hair is too big, she doesn't know what to do with it, the swimset she bought is now too small, and she has this man asking her why she's in leggings and covered in ibhayi.

"I will be ready in two minutes," she says.

Mapholoba stares at her for a minute, without a break. Her hair covers her down to her neck, she looks younger and beautiful without the scarf wrapped from her forehead. But she's Mpatho's sister, he pulled his ear that nothing should happen to his sister.

He stands outside the door waiting. She looked uncomfortable, which doesn't sit well with him. This is a vacation, she's meant to be free from whatever body standards the world has subjected her into. She can wear her swim wear, nobody is going to arrest her.

He knocks again, the door opens.

She's still in ibhayi. It doesn't look like she knows what to do with her hair, she's tied it into four big sleeping knots. She's been scratching her nose, he can see where her nails have been, there are marks.

"Ready?" he asks.

"Yeah, let's go."

Well, he's not getting in a pool, he doesn't know who's been swimming in there the whole day.

He walks a distance behind her and stands not too close to the pool. He wants her to be free, there's a white family of three who seem to be preparing for a swim too. At least now she has swimming partners.

As soon as she unwraps ibhayi he walks closer to pick it up so it doesn't get lost. His eyes dwell on her full figured body, with rolls of love handles and designed thighs.

He quickly shifts his eyes before he notices a lot of things.

He picks ibhayi, she's not in the water though, she's just sitting on the pool edge dipping her feet in the water. It's cold, isn't?

"Do you work here?" someone asks.

He turns his head. It's the white lady that was putting her son in a swimming costume with her husband.

"No, I'm with the lady," he says.

“Oh, when will she be done swimming?”

He looks at her skinny legs and at her wrinkled pink face.

“She hasn’t started,” he says.

“There’s another pool.”

Oh, this is one of those.

He knows them, he can deal with this calmly.

But it turns out Nombuso hears English very well.

She stands up, “Hello madam.”

That’s a nice way of addressing someone while your eyes are blazing with anger.

“What is the problem?” she asks.

The white lady tries to explain, but nothing she says makes sense.

“I’m with my husband, he didn’t want it to look like he’s swimming with someone’s wife and get himself in trouble.” They simply don’t want to share a pool with a black woman while there’s a black man wearing black clothes wandering by.

“I’m not someone’s wife. What are you scared of? It’s not like he’s going to kill your husband even if we were married. We are not a violent race, you are. Black people should be scared of sharing spaces with your people because your race has a history of violence.”

This is escalating, Mpatho would be disappointed to know that he stood by and watched her argue with a Karen.

“Go and swim,” he instructs Nombuso.

“Hhayi wena, you’re scared of white people? They must go if they’re not comfortable with me, I got here first, this is not her hotel,” she says.

“Okay sorry, I’m not going to argue,” the white lady goes back to her family. She packs their things, they disappear.

“Get in the pool,” Mapholoba says.

She’s not a person to take instructions easily.

“Guard, not God,” she says.

Mapholoba chuckles, “Yes, guard. I’m just trying to look out for you, swim before it gets colder.”

“You’re going to stand and watch?” she asks. Is this how rich people live? Have a bodyguard watch your every move.

“I’m here to make sure that nobody touches you,” he says.

Mpatho said that to him; make sure that nobody touches my sister.

But what if nobody wants to touch her, except one person...?

She jumps inside the pool, there’s a huge splash, even his shoes get affected.

He’s holding ibhayi, when she gets out of the water he will give her to wrap her body up. And that will probably be the last time he sees her today in this purest form. Something tells him that her cuddles are warm, that behind the angry face there’s a soft woman, someone capable of looking at his face for more than a minute.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 83

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I was against the idea of him buying a TV. He wanted a smart TV for a backroom, then he was going to install DSTV. It’s just

a matter of time before we move out, I thought that would be all unnecessary. Yesterday he came back with a laptop, I thought it was his.

“It’s going to be useful to you, you can research about whatever you want to do,” he said.

“Is it mine?” I was shocked.

“Yes, it’s yours, you have matric.”

I laughed, I was happy because I never thought I can own a laptop. I slept around 12am, I was up half of the night just prodding my laptop and downloading movies. This laptop has saved us from boredom, for now it’s not a research tool, it’s our TV.

Sphakamiso is here with us, we are watching a movie. Mkhuleko is coming today, he agreed to come and look after Sphakamiso at night. There’s unity among the three of them. Sphakamiso and Bonga fight here and there, but it never cracks their relationship. There’s a level of respect they have for him that makes it easy for him to love and provide for them. He still hasn’t spoken to Nombuso, I hear she texts and calls everyday and he doesn’t return any of her calls and texts. I know they will eventually talk it out, he’s not angry at her, he’s just giving her this silent treatment as a form of punishment.

“This idiot is here,” Sphakamiso says.

We raise our eyes to see ‘the idiot’. He’s talking about Mkhuleko who’s at the door.

Why is he not carrying any bags?

“Come in,” Bonga says.

Instead of coming in he glances behind his shoulder. He’s with someone, he looks a bit frightened. Just as Bonga stands up, to go check I guess, the other person appears. It’s their mother, I’m not a seer but I can already tell what’s about to happen.

Bonga stands confused, “Ma???”

She walks in, Mkhuleko follows behind.

“Is this your father’s new house?” she asks.

“No,” – Bonga.

“Then what’s going on here?” This time she raises her voice.

Bonga doesn’t respond, I think he’s still in a state of confusion. Mkhuleko looks apologetic, he can’t even hold eye contact with me. I’m sure MaVilakazi instructed him not to warn us that she’s coming here with him. I knew this was a bad idea, I knew she wasn’t going to understand why her three sons have to live here with the gold-digger.

“I hear that Sphakamiso you’re not well,” she says.

“Hhayi, I’m alright Ma,” Sphakamiso says.

“When did you come back from Durban?”

“Last week,” he says.

“And you didn’t see the need to tell me anything. I have to hear from the mountains that my son is sick.” She’s livid. She looks at Bonga, “This is how you want your brother to live?”

“He didn’t want to come home and he’s getting better,” Bonga says.

“Is he your child? Now you’ve given him up for adoption?” I knew she’d turn her anger towards me.

“Is this his new mother now?”

“Ma ungarasi, you’re being dramatic for nothing. Sphakamiso agreed to come back because I promised him that he won’t be forced to go home. You know why he doesn’t like that place. I asked Mkhuleko to come because I can’t be with Sphakamiso all the time, Miyanda is pregnant.”

“Everything is Miyanda, Miyanda, Miyanda! Malibongwe you cannot take my children away from me and give them to your Miyanda. I don’t care if you’ve told her that I’m a bad mother who can’t take care of her own children, but both of you have no right to quarantine my children in this tin room,” she says.

I’m quiet, I don’t want to interfere, she can drag my name and shout as much as she wants.

“Now you want all of them, huh? Malibongwe no longer satisfies you even after the love spell you’ve put on him. You want all my boys, what kind of a girl are you? Three boys for one cake! I’ve never seen anything like this in my life. What kind of a family...”

“Wait, what did you say Ma?” – Bonga.

I think he heard her well, he just thinks she said what she said by mistake. I know she meant it, I feel degraded and disrespected in a way I just never thought was possible.

“I’m not sleeping with Sis’ Miyanda,” Sphakamiso says. He’s hardly interested in speaking up. I appreciate him for standing up for me but his mother has gone too far this time.

“Go, all of you!” I say.

Bonga looks at me, “Sthandwa sami calm down, I’m going to explain this to her.”

“No, take your bags and leave my room Bonga.” I want them gone with their mother.

I don’t want anyone defending me, I just want them to leave me alone. I don’t have a mother, so I’m not going to have anyone’s mother insulting me everytime she sees me just because she doesn’t like me.

“Pack your bags, don’t forget everything you’ve bought. I can see the little computer in front of her, that’s you.” She looks

around the room, we recently went shopping, there are some boxes on top of the wardrobe.

“Take everything you want to take and go,” I tell him.

“Miyanda look at me,” he’s trying to pull the assurance act from movies.

I’m not going to look at him, I want him to take his brothers and mother and go.

“You found me living alone here, peacefully. I took care of myself, I didn’t need you, you know that. What have I done to deserve this treatment from your mother? Please help me, take your things and go. We will communicate via the phone about the baby,” I say.

“Sis’ Miyanda...” I raise my hand to shut him.

“No Sphakamiso, get up and leave with your mother, that’s all I want.”

It seems like Bonga needs help, I will get his Nike bag and his clothes from the wardrobe. If he wants to leave with the new pots he bought me and the stove, he’s welcome to put them on his head and go with them.

“I’m sorry Sis’ Miyanda,” – Mkhuleko.

“I don’t care, take them and leave, all of you.” I’m going to leave them to gather their things, when I come back they better be gone. I walk out, Bonga follows me and grabs my arm.

“Nyambose please listen to me...”

“Malibongwe Mcineka, I said take your things and leave my room.”

“Okay, I just want you to know that I love you. I’ve never loved anyone the way I love you. I’m going to sort this out, I’m sorry I’ve let it get this far, I should have...”

I shut my eyes, right now the only thing I want to deal with is that they're leaving.

"Please Bonga just go," I say.

If he knew how to put an end to it, if he knew how to make sure that his mother doesn't disrespect me and insult me, he would've stopped it the first time it happened. He's allowed them to say things about me and to me, however they like. It's not going to stop.

"Miyanda ngiyak'thanda," he says.

"It no longer means anything, go with your family."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean leave me alone, Bonga!"

I'm taking a walk, when I come back they better be gone.

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MALIBONGWE

He found her living peacefully alone. All he wanted to do was love her, and he tried his best. He's been at his happiest, why is it hard for his mother to accept that? He's calm as he drives them home. He didn't want Miyanda to be embarrassed in front of other tenants, that's why he left with his family. Sphakamiso is now back at the Mcinekas, despite him not wanting to be here. Mkhuleko can't be blamed, he's 21 years old, most of the times he does what mama says. MaVilakazi told him to lead her where they stay and not tell them, and that's what he did.

They get home, Mkhuleko goes to the neighbor to fetch Yoli. He's quickly trying to get away from the situation because he

knows there's a fight that's going to break between his brother and mother. Even though Nombuso pops off everyday, it's been a bit peaceful ever since others moved out.

MaVilakazi heads to the kitchen to continue with the beans she was cooking. They can't even bring a decent girl home who's going to cook if Nombuso is not around; it's that Miyanda girl up and down. Sphakamiso walks in after her, she's talking to herself angrily.

"Ma," he stands against the table.

MaVilakazi takes a deep breath and looks at him.

"Why didn't you take me to my father like you did with Mpatho?" There's so much hatred he feels for Mpatho that's not even related to Phume.

"Your father was married," MaVilakazi says.

"His father was married too, but you allowed him to be raised by his family."

MaVilakazi takes another deep breath. Mpatho asks her why she didn't raise him up the same way she raised Sphakamiso, Sphakamiso asks why she didn't give him to his father the same way she did with Mpatho.

"I did what I thought was the best, I'm sorry." She always watches what she says and how she says it to Sphakamiso. Malibongwe is not so far, he can hear the whole conversation.

"I hear you're supporting his marriage with Phume," he says.

"Didn't I support your relationship with Phume too? I welcomed her to my house, I was ready to take care of her like my child, then it happened that you two broke up."

"You did, but I feel like you could've stood up for me," he says.

"Sphakamiso please, I don't want to choose between you and him. I will support him in whatever he does, the same goes for

you. You're a loving boy, you're good-hearted, you are handsome. You're going to find another girl, she will mend your heart and you will feel complete again. Let this girl go, allow her to be happy with Nkosiyazi since that's who she's chosen. You need to focus on your health; physically and mentally."

"I'm not doing anything to disturb them, I'm cool," he says.

"How is Aphelele?" – MaVilakazi.

"He's fine, I saw him before I came back. He misses Yoli but he's happy where he is."

"I have to take that woman's number so that I can call him too."

"Mmmmm."

Malibongwe walks in, he looks hurt and sad.

Sphakamiso shifts, he grabs the chair and sits.

"I'm going to see Vela," Sphakamiso says.

MaVilakazi exclaims, "Hhayi! You can't walk around looking this thin, people will talk. Call Vela to come here, I will cook porridge for you every morning so that you can gain weight. What were they feeding you emjondolo?"

"I was eating Ma," he walks out before MaVilakazi involves him in shading Malibongwe.

After he's walked out MaVilakazi starts humming a song. She's not prepared to answer any of Malibongwe's stupid questions. She allowed him to vat'n'sit with that Miyanda, her only problem is that he's taking all her children there. For what?

"When you're done singing tell me why do you hate me?"

Here it comes!

She keeps humming. They're all going to have lunch, it's been a long time since they ate together. How does Malibongwe not

see the sudden crack in the family ever since he started dating that girl?

“Ma!” he raises his voice.

MaVilakazi looks at him. “Malibongwe what kind of spell did she put on you?”

“Why do you hate me, that’s what I asked.”

“Oh, is she the one who told you that I hate you?”

“No Ma, I’ve been thinking about everything, it’s clear that you hate me. You’re just not able to show it well because I put bread on your table. So tell me, why do you hate me?”

“I don’t hate you, why would I give birth to a child and then hate him? It’s your relationship I don’t approve of because that girl is toxic. See how she managed to convince you to leave this house and go live in a tin with her. Then told you to fetch your brothers.”

“I know it’s not about her. You’ve never acted like this with anyone. You didn’t like Phume because you had a problem with her mother. But when Sphakamiso introduced you to her and asked that you take her in after she got kicked out, you were nothing but supportive. You cooked usu and samp, and took out your new plate and dished for her. You never insulted her, even though you didn’t like her. Now she’s moved from one son to another, I know you still don’t like her. But you support Mpatho because he’s happy with her. Why is it different with me?”

“Sphakamiso’s behavior never changed, he didn’t leave home for her, she didn’t turn you all against me,” she says.

“Okay. Have I ever missed a month and not take care of the house?”

“No,” she says.

“I’m your child, I’ve been taking care of you and your children ever since Mcineka passed. What is going to happen to me when you die? Who’s going to take care of me since you don’t want me to have a girlfriend and children?”

“You’re having a child with her, aren’t you? When did I say I don’t want you to have children?”

“KwaMthethwa they won’t give me my child, not after I broke their daughter’s heart and allowed my family to insult her. You implied that she’s sleeping with Sphakamiso and wants Mkhuleko as well. That hasn’t even sunk in my head, like how could you?”

“Okay, I’m done with this conversation. Tell your brothers lunch will be ready in 15 minutes.” She turns back to her pot of beans.

“Nombuso talks anyhow with you but you love her. I guess Mpatho and Sphakamiso are loved and supported because you loved their fathers. Mkhuleko is just lucky because he’s the last born. No matter what I do, you will never love me the same way you loved them. I wonder why you didn’t just abort me.”

She starts humming again, asking God to help her. This needs His intervention now. Others are validated to complain and need assurance every now and then. Nombuso had a very difficult marriage, she’s also the only girl among boys, she can’t be harsh on her. Nkosiyazi grew up without her, she needs to make up for all the years lost. Sphakamiso had a hard life when Mcineka was still alive, she understands why he’s angry and so fragile. Mkhuleko is only 21 years old, he’s a baby. This one is 30 years old, there’s nothing she can fault herself for when it comes to him. His father loved him, he had the best life, she also raised him well. Why is he competing with others? All this for Miyanda, a girl he can replace with a decent village girl in a snap!

Her boys gather for lunch. She dished more on Sphakamiso's plate because the way he looks is scary. The nerve of that Miyanda to think that she can take care of her children better? She's going to make amahewu, within a week her son will be back in shape.

"Have you two met Ruby?" Mkhuleko asks as he comes to the table.

Sphakamiso frowns, "Who?"

"Ruby, my dog," he says.

"Mxm! Kanti you're talking about a dog, umgodoyi, pass me the aromat."

"She's your niece," – Mkhuleko.

"Udakiwe mfana!"

MaVilakazi looks at them. "Am I invisible?"

They keep quiet, Sphakamiso is eating. Malibongwe is just sitting with his plate in front of him. He's in deep thoughts, there's a decision he needs to make, once he does there will be no turning back.

"When is Nombuso coming back?" Mkhuleko asks, he's looking at his plate. He doesn't look appetized at all. Even the beans MaVilakazi cooked look embarrassed, the gravy has ran and hid under the rice. The beans are sitting on top of the rice; in couples, triplets and quadruplets.

"Why? You miss your sister already?" MaVilakazi asks.

"I miss her food, not her. Kanti why do you cook like this for us Ma? I remember when dad was still alive you cooled like a chef," – Mkhuleko.

Only he can insult cooked food and get away with it.

“You can’t expect me to cook for you like I’m cooking for my husband. Marry a chef.”

Mkhuleko laughs, “Hhayi, tomorrow I’m calling Nombuso and asking her to come back.”

Malibongwe pushes back his chair and stands.

They all look at him.

“You’re not hungry?” Sphakamiso asks.

“No. I will call you tonight about the project we talked about.”

“Are you leaving?” Mkhuleko asks, he feels guilty about all of this. He was happy about leaving, he was only informing his mother as a parent, he didn’t think things would escalate like this.

“Yes, you know where to find me if you need me,” Malibongwe says to him.

“You’re leaving me here?” Sphakamiso asks.

“You’re with your mother, I have no say over you. But I want you to be involved, I need you in the business. Our plans don’t change,” he says.

He takes a few steps away, then MaVilakazi asks. “Won’t you need me in the future Malibongwe? You’re walking out for the second time.”

“What do you do for me to need you?”

Her son definitely hates her, Miyanda won.

“I’m your mother, Malibongwe!” she says.

“It doesn’t mean anything, I will be wherever I want to be. The umbilical cord was cut, I’m not tied to you and I have no obligation to take care of you. I was doing what I thought was right. There are women your age who work in factories, others

are street vendors, maybe you need to find a table too and feel how it's like to take care of your children.”

“Malibongwe! Malibongwe!”

He walks out after disowning his blood family. He's choosing a girl he hasn't even known for a year over them. She definitely put a spell on him and then trapped him with a baby. Miyanda will regret her actions because she won't have him.

“Where are you going?” Mkhuleko asks her.

“I'm going to pee,” she says, leaving the table.

Yoli is eating in front of the TV, not paying attention to anything. MaVilakazi grabs her phone from the charger and stands by the window. What's the number again?

10111- she has information about the murder of Nomusa.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 84

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I wake up from my angry nap to a tall man sitting on my bed. I rub my eyes; are they deceiving me. Didn't I kick this person out with his family? I sit up, already my mood has dropped. I took a nap to release anger and stress, now I'm waking up to the cause of my problems sitting with me.

“Bonga what are you doing here?” I ask.

“How are you feeling?” He's still in the same clothes, I don't understand why he's setting me up again.

“I'm okay. What are you here to fetch?” I ask.

“Have you cooked? I want us to go out for a snack.”

“I told you to leave with your mother. Why are you back? Are you going to believe that she doesn’t want us together when she kills me?” I have no doubt that MaVilakazi can send hitmen to kill me if she has means.

“I want to be with you, that’s why I came back. I’m not going to allow anyone to come between us. You’re the only thing that makes my life worth living,” he says.

I’ve never doubted his love for me and I kind of knew that he’d be back, but I didn’t think it would be so soon. I thought he’d mend whatever is broken in his mother’s head before coming back.

“It’s not going to work, your mother is going to come back here again and start hailing insults at me. No thanks, return home,” I say.

He takes my hand and holds it. I can see the pain in his eyes, I hope he knows that sometimes love is not enough to win a war. I love him beyond imagination, but it’s not going to work, at least not this way.

“I’d rather not have a mother if her presence is going to destroy what we have.” He’s doing exactly what his mother hates me for. I’ve told him not to say things like this.

“I’m not in a competition with your mother, you don’t have to choose between us,” I tell him.

“What do you want me to do? At this point I’m confused Miyanda, who do you want me to be with?”

“Your mother, Bonga. If the gods allow it we will do us in a long distance. I can look after myself, as long as you keep your promises because I’ve already resigned from work.” There’s no other option, he needs to go back home, I cannot handle the stress his mother gives me.

“I don’t want that, I don’t want to be away. You’re pregnant, you can’t live here by yourself, I can’t take that risk with my baby,” he’s teary.

I know they will break him, he will go back to that man who was always zoning out.

“For peace sake, go home and figure things out with your mother,” I have no choice but to put an end to the cohabiting even though we need each other.

“I’m sorry,” he says and shifts his eyes looking away.

I told him that bringing Mkhuleko was a bad idea. His mother already thinks I think on his behalf and take every decision affecting his life. Asking Mkhuleko to come over was pouring petrol in a flame of fire.

“I don’t know why I feel like you’re breaking up with me,” he says.

“I love you, you’re everything I’ve ever dreamed of. I’m not breaking up with you, I’m saying figure things out, see if you can find another solution. Us living together is clearly causing more harm than good.”

“Uzoziphatha kahle?” he asks.

I finally smile. “Yes, I will take care of myself.”

“I love you, next week I’m going to send inhlawulo nomcelo.”

Bombshells!!!

“Next week?”

This person said he needs two months to sort things out. My father is not expecting inhlawulo next week, this is a rushed decision that’s motivated by the situation.

“Yes, I’m going to marry you soon after you give birth. Then nobody can tell me I can’t live with my wife,” he says.

“Ummm okay. But aren’t you supposed to ask me first? Like proposing?” I mean, hello!

“Will you marry me?” he asks.

I roll my eyes. Is that the best he can do?

“With a ring,” I say.

He touches his pocket and then fishes something out.

My eyes widen as I see the little box.

He takes it out, my chest is pounding.

It’s a diamond ring...he has the ring!

“I didn’t mean it,” I say.

Look where ukuphapha has gotten me!

“Will you marry me?”

“Bonga, no!”

“You are turning me down?”

What? I’m not turning down the diamond ring.

“It’s not done like this. You have to kneel down, there have to be people to witness it and decorations or something,” I say.

“We don’t need people, the love I have for you is beautiful enough to be a decoration. Please say yes, I love you.”

Bonga though! I have childhood friends and enemies. How can they not witness something so huge happening for me?

“Okay, yes,” I say.

He takes my hand and slides the ring on my finger. I will obviously take it off when I go home and just tell my father by mouth that he proposed. That old man would never understand me wearing a ring that no pastor blessed.

I’m looking at my hand, I can’t believe it.

“When did you buy the ring?” I ask.

“It’s been a while now, I thought I’d do it in the next few months. But now, we are getting married as soon as you give birth. I will give your father everything he wants in exchange of you, then we’ll plan our wedding.”

It feels like I met him and blinked once, boom a baby and marriage proposal.

“I love you baby,” I say pecking his lips.

He grabs my face and turns it into a long, deep kiss.

I’m definitely going to miss us living together. But I know this is for the best, for now. Soon we’ll be married and living together legally. I know his mother will never like me, at this point I doubt I will ever forgive her for the things she’s said to me and about me. But she’s my child’s grandmother, that’s why I need him to home and try to give her whatever validation she needs.

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MALIBONGWE

He’s back, he parks in front of his rondavel and climbs out. The door is open, it looks like there’s someone inside. Hopefully it’s not Mkhuleko, the last thing he wants to do on his first day back home is fighting with someone.

It’s him lying in his bed with his dirty sneakers and that Rose or Ruby is sleeping on his tiled floor.

Mkhuleko sits up, his eyes widen.

“You said you’re leaving!”

Malibongwe stands with an annoyed look on his face.

“So what? You’ve inherited my space?”

Mkhuleko stands up and picks his Ruby.

“Look how you’ve stained my sheet,” – Malibongwe.

“I didn’t, you’re just mad that you’re going to be sleeping alone tonight.”

If he slaps this child now he will sleep three days without waking up. But this puppy of his looks like a sharp one, it’s a good additional member of the family.

“Where did you get him?” he asks.

“It’s not him, it’s herrrr. I bought her from a man at Nsimbini.”

“What do you feed her?” he asks.

“The food that Ma buys.” This child is bold.

“Oh, she eats my money too. You need to build a coop for her because I’m not going to have her sleeping on my floor.”

He’s just an old man who exaggerate life. Ruby wasn’t sleeping on his floor, she was relaxing. But Mkhuleko nods and walks out with his Ruby.

He’s settling in, taking his clothes out of the bag. His phone rings.

Ah, she misses him already.

“Sthandwa sami, you miss me already?”

“The police...they were here, they are...” She’s breathing too heavy while talking, he can’t hear her.

“Take one deep breath and calm down, then tell me what’s going on,” he says.

He can hear her trying to calm down.

“The police were here, they are coming there now, they are looking for you,” she says, finally he can hear her clearly.

“Did they do anything to you?”

“No, but they turned everything upside down looking for your gun.”

This is bad, but he cannot panic because she will stress out.

“You told them where I am, right?” he asks.

“Yes, but I’m scared. What if they want to arrest you?”

“I will be fine MaNyambose, I will take care of it,” he assures her.

“Please call me and tell me what’s going on,” she says.

“I will, please relax and eat well,” he says.

He drops the call with a heavy heart. Dlamini took a leave, everything was in order when he did, what is this now? He tries to call Dlamini, maybe he can find out what’s going on, but his phone goes to voicemail. Maybe he’s already left for the honeymoon with his wife.

He makes a few more calls and then steps out to find Sphakamiso.

He bumps into MaVilakazi who looks shocked to see him home.

“You came back?” she asks.

“Isn’t that what you wanted Ma?”

“Did she kick you out?”

“No, she loves me, she wouldn’t kick me out. She told me to come back and fix our relationship. By the way I proposed, next week I’m sending people to her father.” He leaves her standing with a confused face.

Miyanda told him to come back? And he proposed?

“Malibongwe!” she yells.

She needs some clarity. Is he back for good? Back to being her son that she adored and told all her other children to look up to? The good son who never argued with anyone and put his family above everything?

Malibongwe finds Sphakamiso watching cartoons with Yoli.

“Ndoda, we need to talk,” he says.

“Wait, we are waiting for Masha to come back.”

“It’s urgent Sphakamiso,” he says

Sphakamiso looks at him, he’s not playing. He tells Yoli to continue watching, he will catch up later. They walk out and stand on the veranda.

“I know you’re not on your best at the moment; physically and mentally. But I need you to look after Miyanda, in case I go away for a long time,” he says.

Sphakamiso frowns, “Where are you going?”

“Jail,” he says.

“For what? What did you do?”

“I don’t know yet but I know the police are on their way. At the moment I don’t have any inside connection, I don’t know what they discovered.”

Now Sphakamiso is worried, Malibongwe is the only one who knows how to hold the family together. Without him things will be worse than they already are.

“You have a lawyer, right?” he asks.

Malibongwe nods, “But I know whatever they want me for, I probably did it and got away. You have to stand in for me, go to Unified tomorrow and meet with Stacey and see all the paperwork. If I go away I expect you to take the business off the ground and run it successfully. Next week Miyanda’s damages have to be paid, whoever you appoint to go there will pay the proposal price and come back with lobola requirements. And they will be paid immediately too.”

“What if she says no? If you’re going to jail how do you expect her to be engaged to someone who is behind bars?” – Sphakamiso.

“I proposed today and she said yes. And beside, she’s carrying my child, I’m not going to let anyone fill my shoes,” he says.

“Okay, I hear you. But what if you get sentenced to life?”

“My lawyers will negotiate,” he says.

“That doesn’t guarantee anything.”

“I will find a way to come back, at the moment just focus on the business and taking care of her. My personal and business budgets are on my emails.”

They’re still standing on the veranda talking, the police van appears. It’s over!

He looks at Sphakamiso, “Take of yourself too, please Sphakamiso. And take care of Ma, stay the way you are; calm and respectful. Don’t let bullshit get into you, you will heal faster.”

Sphakamiso nods. He’s a grown man, he’s not going to cry. His job now is to look after his brother’s little family and make sure that Unified stands on its feet. He trusts Malibongwe’s lawyer since he doesn’t know anything about law, he’s had his own challenges with it. But what he knows is that someone

organized this arrest. It's someone who is well-connected and rich enough to pay the law to be on his favor. That someone has done it before, in his filthy mind he's a god. Maybe they're being punished for being raised by MaVilakazi, he doesn't even know how hard that has been. A conversation needs to be had.

"No, no, please don't arrest my son!" that's MaVilakazi crying.

He takes a deep breath and goes to the scene. Mkhuleko being a hot-head that he is, he's trying to fight with the police cuffing Malibongwe's wrists. MaVilakazi is on the ground crying and begging that they forgive her son.

He needs to take Yoli away first...

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 85

SPHAKAMISO

This is the hardest thing he's ever had to do in his life. Okay, maybe admitting to cheating on Phume was more hard. But this is not something he ever thought he'd have to do to Miyanda. Yesterday was already hard on her when MaVilakazi came to fetch them and then accused her of sleeping with all of them. And today she has to hear that the father of her unborn child is in a holding cell being a suspect for murder. Well, it's not really an accusation but since there's no evidence it will remain like that. The police were tipped by someone, they're now turning everything upside down looking for evidence. It doesn't help that Malibongwe's car tracker shows that he was in the village when Nomusa got killed.

He heard that Miyanda likes gizzards from the side of the street. He's got them for her with a bag of goodies. It's just a

gesture, nothing is going to make her feel better after getting these news.

He finds her hanging clothes on the washing line.

“Sawubona sisi,” he greets.

He’s a bit uncomfortable because he doesn’t know how she feels about him after yesterday.

Miyanda looks at him, “Stranger, hey.”

He chuckles, “I’m here to see you.”

“Okay, let me finish here first.” She hangs the rest of her clothes on the line and then picks the basin. Some clothes on the line are Malibongwe’s, his heart breaks. Sometimes he wishes MaVilakazi can come and live with them for a few hours, maybe she’d realize how much they love each other and let them be happy, living their life however they choose.

He puts the shopping bag on the table and sits.

“Are those gizzards?” She’s taking them from the bag.

She looks so happy, like these gizzards were the only thing she was short of in life.

“Malibongwe told me that you love them,” he says.

“He knows me very well. Why is his phone not going through?”

Where does he even start?

He inhales a deep breath and looks at her with sympathy.

“He was taken by the police yesterday afternoon,” he says.

“I knew, I could feel it.” She’s teary but fighting hard not to break down. In the morning she prayed for God to give her the strength she needs, not for herself but for their unborn baby.

“He’s going to come out, his lawyer promised,” Sphakamiso says, he’s just trying to give her hope.

“What is he being accused of?” she asks.

“It’s the murder of the Mshazis maid.”

“So he’s going to be sentenced?”

“No,” he denies.

But she already knows everything.

“He did kill her, they will sentence him.”

He blows out a deep sigh.

“Look, Malibongwe is coming back for you and his baby. Nothing is changing, nothing is going to stand in the way of what he had already planned. Next week our uncles will come and pay for the damages and proposal to your father. I’m going to make sure that Unified stands on its feet.”

“What am I going to tell Nyambose when he asks where the father of my baby is? Am I going to tell him that Bonga killed a woman, now he’s serving time in jail? I was here when he left, I allowed him to get in the car with his gun and go there and kill. Maybe your mother is right about me, I’m not good for him. If I was...” No, no, he’s not going to let her do this.

“Bonga is not a child, he makes his own decisions. There’s nothing obliging you to contests what he commit sanely. Please don’t stress about this, he’s going to come back, you need to be strong for the baby...and me.”

She looks at him and blinks back tears.

“Are you going to cope?” she asks.

“I have no other choice but to cope. Don’t worry, I will drink water and eat fruits, I won’t faint.”

She's still worried, Sphakamiso wasn't a person to be given so much responsibility. Mkhuleko would've been fit for the job. But his siblings still think he's just a child, even though she doesn't know him too well but she knows that he's the strongest of them all. She just does.

"Didn't your mother blame me for the arrest?" she asks.

"No, surprisingly she's worried about you. The apples I got you were a suggestion from her, she said a pregnant woman needs fruits," he says.

"That's strange a bit," she laughs.

Knowing MaVilakazi she's just sad that her son was arrested, as soon as he gets out she will go back to hating and insulting.

"I have to go, there's a man I need to see before I go home," Sphakamiso says.

Miyanda gets a bad feeling about it when he looks at his eyes. She's going to be nosy and asks right away.

"What man?" she asks.

"Mpatho, I want to know what he wants from us."

"Wait Sphakamiso, how does he get in all of this?"

"He's called the police on me before, a number of times. It's his style, when he's not getting along with people he hurts them," he says.

"I don't think he'd call the police on Bonga. I know they had their differences but the timing is off. Now they can even tolerate each other, why would he report him now?"

Sphakamiso shrugs, "Who knows?"

Miyanda sighs, he's going to fight with Mpatho. If MaVilakazi puts the efforts she puts on hating her in uniting her children, they'd have peace.

She doesn't care that much if it's Mpatho and Bonga because theirs is based on disliking each other over what happened in the past. But with Sphakamiso and Mpatho the hatred is deeply rooted. There's also a woman between them, peace is something that's always going to be foreign between them.

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PHUMELELE

I went all out with supper...I ordered it. Sis' Theh has left, I have the house to myself and my husband.

He's going to be home anytime now, I need to take out his casual shorts and T-shirt. When I hear the car outside I will rush and run a bath for him. It doesn't get better than this, I'm a good wife. This week started off badly but we turned things around. We are happy again, I make him breakfast in the morning and iron his clothes, because he made it clear that he strictly want that to be done by me.

I need to call Ntombi before I forget, it's her father's birthday today. She's complained about me being an absent, or rather absolute bad friend. I'm trying to balance everything; marriage and friendships. I need her in my life, she's that one person I will always need in my corner. I'm trying to be the same for her; I want her to know that I will always be there for her.

Okay, I will call her a bit later, there's a car outside. I rush to the door with a smile stretching to my ears.

He sees me, I'm in my cute dress wearing my new wig. But he's going to the gate instead of rushing to his beautiful wife? I'm mad.

I see that he's talking to someone, after that he slams the gate and comes back. The person is behind him, I don't know what he has in his hand. It's a slim guy wearing a hoodie and jeans. Mapholoba went to look after Nombuso on her vacation, there's no security present at the moment, the other one left around the time Sis' Theh left. It looks like this person has a gun, he just pushed something behind his waist.

Aunt Nomusa died in this very same house, I'm not a fan of sighting guns.

"Right now you're trespassing," Mpatho says.

You can tell that he's angry. What I don't understand is why he's letting the person come inside the yard and follow him inside the house with a gun?

They're getting closer, I'm freaking out.

"Handle your shit and stop sending the police to fight your fights," says the person.

I know this voice, I've known it for years. My chest turns dry.

He looks up, our eyes meet. He looks horribly different than the last time I saw him. I don't know if I'm sad for him or angry at him for what he's come here to do.

"Hey my wife," Mpatho says, kissing my cheek.

"Hi," I say.

He grabs my face and onslaughts me with a kiss. This is intentional, I don't know how I feel about this kiss. Why is Sphakamiso here? I can't even ask because both of them are standing next to me.

“When you’re done shoving your tongue in her throat tell me why did you send the police to arrest my brother,” Sphakamiso says with a demanding voice.

“What brother? You’re stupid.” Mpatho looks confused, but instead of asking for clarity he’s fighting.

“You sent the police to arrest Malibongwe for killing your maid. As if he just did it unprovoked, you fuckin’ killed our father, that bullet was meant for you,” Sphakamiso says.

“He wasn’t your father, so don’t come here and spill rubbish.”

“I knew him as my father, I had two parents growing up. I wasn’t dumped, so before you shove that on my face know that he raised me,” – Sphakamiso.

“So you’re going to brag about being raised by two parents? I know my father, okay?”

This is not necessary. Didn’t Mpatho see that he has a gun? If he pulls it out won’t I be in danger with my baby? Mpatho never puts this baby first.

“And I had a mother, I didn’t go to Swaziland chasing nannies,” Sphakamiso again.

“Why are you dying? You come from a functional, well-structured family,” – Mpatho.

This exchange is making me dizzy. Both these men claim to love me, why are they doing this with me standing between them?

I turn and grab the car keys from Mpatho.

He doesn’t even pay attention, all he cares about is settling scores with Sphakamiso.

“Answer the question, why do you keep sending the police to fight for you? Did Malibongwe tell MaVilakazi to dump you?” I hear Sphakamiso behind.

“Yey wena golo lenja, I said I didn’t do anything, I don’t even know what you’re talking about.” I can’t believe those words just came out of my husband’s mouth. The same mouth I feed scrambled eggs and healthy smoothies every morning.

I hear ‘msunu’ coming from Sphakamiso, I get inside the car and release the long breath I’ve been holding. I’m taking a drive, I’m not going to take any side or stop them. The better solution is for me to leave them alone.

So Malibongwe has been arrested for murdering Aunt Nomusa. I’ve had nothing but love and respect for him. He’s a family guy, his family is everything. But when he killed Aunt Nomusa I was bleeding. She died and left her daughters behind. It wasn’t fair. I’m glad justice is finally being served, even though it won’t bring Aunt Nomusa back. But this is the closure her family has been wanting. I know that Mpatho didn’t do it, maybe there’s a witness who’s come forward, Aunt Nomusa was murdered in broad daylight. If we have nothing to do with it, then there’s nothing the Mcinekas can hold us responsible for. Malibongwe will serve time and learn his lesson, he will come out a better man.

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It’s been almost an hour since I left the house, I’m sure they’ve squashed it or reached some sort of conclusion. I head back home with fresh tomatoes I bought from the side of the road with the coins I found inside his car. I don’t know what happened to Sphakamiso in Durban, he’s lost a lot of weight. Something tells me that maybe he’s not well, but I will never find out because if I dare ask Mpatho about it he’d lose his marbles.

The house is quiet now, I walk in the kitchen and leave my tomatoes in the sink. I will wash them after seeing Mpatho and finding out what was that all about and how it concerns him. He's in mkhulu's study, sitting in front of the laptop. He still looks angry, he's fighting with the keyboard.

As soon as I stand next to him, he pushes back the chair and stands up, with his chest bouncing.

"I'm being attacked by your ex and you're leaving me alone?"

Whoooooah! Yima kancane.

"Huh?" I'm confused right now.

"Your ex came here, armed with a gun, and you didn't even care to say anything. You got in the car and left me to die." Here he goes again, blaming Phumelele for every problem under the sun.

"Wasn't it about you calling the police on Malibongwe?" I ask.

"I didn't call the police on him!" He bangs his fist on the table.

Hey, he mustn't shout at me, calling the police on people is his style.

"You didn't say anything Phume. Do you even have my back?"

"What did you want me to say? 'Mpatho is better than you because he lived with his father'?" I'm confused, they were going off at each other with their major emotional traumas.

"Maybe you could've asked him not to come to your husband with a gun."

"You could've told him too," I say.

"What if he killed me after you drove out?"

"I would've called the hearse and laid down the mattress." This is it, I'm not engaging with him on this any further. I didn't ask

Sphakamiso to come here, he personally allowed him through the gate. I'm not his bodyguard, I'm his wife.

"Phume!" he calls.

I stop at the door and take a deep breath. "What, Mpatho?"

"Malibongwe came here because I called him to come and help. He didn't shoot, he was here to help us."

WTF?!!

"No, he didn't and you didn't call him." Is he out of his mind?

We already wrote our statements, we are not going to change what we said.

"Yes, that's what happened. I called Malibongwe to come because he's my brother, I was being attacked by strangers," he says. The most ridiculous part is that he's serious.

"Are you going to stand with Malibongwe in this, knowing very well that he did it?"

"It was a mistake, you know that he didn't mean to kill Aunt Nomusa. If her kids call and ask what you know about it, don't mention me and Malibongwe not getting along. I'm going to the police station right now."

I can't believe this!

"Did Sphakamiso threaten you?" I'm asking because I don't understand.

"Yes, and I got scared, I'm shitting on my pants."

Ha ha ha! He's so funny.

"Drive safely," I say.

"Why? You'd be happy to call the hearse and lay the mattress."

"Bye!"

I'm going to throw all the food in the bin. I'm not even mad about our fight, we will make up soon. The fact that he wants to protect Malibongwe and lie to the police to save him from paying for what he did to Aunt Nomusa irks me to the core. He's being loyal to someone who wanted him dead that day. He's an asslicker. Aunt Nomusa's death will go in vain, someone who partially raised us.

MaVilakazi's whole womb was cursed!

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 86

PHUMELELE

I regret throwing away the food. That was stupid of me, now I'm hungry and I have to eat bread or leftovers. I'm watching TV, my joints are aching, I don't want to go to the kitchen and be on my feet. But do I have a choice? Mpatho doesn't even try, I blame my belly for not growing big, maybe seeing the belly would remind him that I'm pregnant every now and then. Ntombi says it's not every woman who gets a big belly when they're pregnant, some even give birth with unnoticeable bellies. I guess I'm one of those women and it's not working on my favor.

He comes in, he has a plate of food in his hand.

He sits and puts it on his lap. He made food just for himself but when I cook I cook for everyone.

I don't know why he treats me this way. He said he wants this baby, why is he not supportive?

"Phume," he calls my name.

I don't answer.

“Are you crying?”

Must I give him my tears in a tray to confirm?

“Yes, I’m crying,” I lift my face for him to see.

“Is it because of me?”

“You didn’t make food for me but I always make food for both of us.”

“But I tried to ask, you didn’t want to talk to me.” He should’ve tried harder, I didn’t know he wanted to ask me about food, I was still angry.

He leaves his plate unattended and returns to the kitchen. I steal one piece of meat and wait for him to come back. He’s taking time, I steal one more and rearrange his rice to make it unnoticeable.

He comes back with a bowl, at least he knows that I prefer eating rice from a bowl, not a plate.

“So what did you do at the police station?” I ask as I dig in, I’ve wiped the fake tears.

“I don’t want us to fight, let’s not talk about it.” He’s always insinuating that I start the fights, I’m asking a simply question following up, I have no energy to fight.

“Before going to work tomorrow I will go and see MaVilakazi, she needs to keep her son in check.”

Trust me, this is what going to make us fight- MaVilakazi’s son.

“The only reason I didn’t break his three ribs is because I don’t want Malibongwe to think I’m kicking him while he’s down,” he says.

I’m sure he would’ve done so without thinking twice, he’s done it before, Sphakamiso hadn’t even recovered from the police attack at that time.

“Why do you hate him so much?” I’m confused.

“Is that even a question? He’s disrespected my marriage too many times,” he says.

“I don’t think that’s the main issue. But just so you know, he didn’t have the best life either. I don’t understand why you like your other siblings and hate the one who had struggles similar to yours. He was emotionally abused by Mcineka, he still doesn’t know his paternal family and he’s never done anything to you.”

“I knew you were taking his side when you left. The first time you’ve ever walked out and left me in a situation.” He’s driving the conversation backwards. I’m not going to bow.

“I’m just telling you that even if he gave you his life you wouldn’t have liked it.” Sphakamiso doesn’t have anything, the only thing he could want is his life, not knowing the ins and outs of it.

“Who said I want his miserable life?” His voice rises.

I struck the nerve, didn’t I?

“Don’t you? Mpatho you will never make peace with the fact that I was with him and I was actually in love with him first. Yet I didn’t find you pure either, you had been in love before me. I don’t know why it’s so hard for you to trust me after you’ve changed me so much to fit into your world.”

Now his eyes aren’t holding my contact. His jealousy is turning into a disease.

“Do you know that I didn’t raise my voice when talking before you? I had never cursed before you. I had never cooked for myself, let alone a man. Before you I had never threatened to kick a bottle of beer to a man’s face; a man I share DNA with.” That’s how much I’ve evolved, not for the good.

He frowns, “What are you talking about?”

I leave the plate of food and go to the bedroom to fetch the leather bag. I open it and show him the cash inside. This is what I'm capable of now!

"I fetched my lobola money," I say.

"When?" He looks shocked, his eyes are popping out.

"That day when I came home late, I started at the Mzimelas to collect my lobola money."

"Why?" I can't get over the confused look on his face.

You'd swear I dragged a dead man's body from the bedroom.

"I wanted it back because Aunt Brandi gave it to her husband."

He throws his head back on the couch. "So it really wasn't successful," he sighs heavily.

"The lobola? No, I will give Aunt Brandi back if she grows a backbone and not dance to the tune of her abusive husband," I say.

"No Phume, you did that because the process was rejected by the ancestors."

It looks like I just added him more stress with this.

Where was I? I fetched this money to prove a certain point.

"Yeah, as I was saying, I've changed a lot. I'm not the little girl Sphakamiso fell in love with, he's just hurt that I ended up with you, someone he admired as an important figure in the community and then brother-in-law."

"I was never his brother-in-law. Where did he ever see me?" He's purposely running away from the point I'm trying to make because holding onto the hate makes him feel better.

"There's no reason for you to lose your sanity everytime his name is mentioned or he makes an appearance. That shit makes you look weak bro."

“Phume if you ever call me bro again....”

“What are you going to do?”

Nothing, exactly!

“So bro, stop letting my past get to you like this. Where is the calm and collected guy I married in court? I miss him, not this angry and easily intimidated person in front of me.”

“Things changed Phume, you made me look for her,” he says.

I was trying to help him find closure. Do I have to pay for that?

“In whose interest did I do that?” I ask.

“Mine, I’m not faulting you for that, I know you were trying to help me. I’m grateful for everything you’ve done for me, how you’ve supported me during my low moments in life. But it hurts, him and I were born under similar circumstances, but MaVilakazi chose him, but with me it was a different story . At times I’ve felt like you could do the same and choose him. I’m sorry if I’ve overwhelmed you with my insecurities.”

“You have Mpatho and it’s tiring because I don’t have feelings for any other man but you. And I’m loyal, if I say I’ve got you for life, it’s you who comes with the scissor and cuts that life short. Don’t keep pushing me away, don’t keep accusing me of things, because one day I will get tired and leave for good. I love you, I want to share the rest of my life with you and give you babies.”

He looks at me, for a good minute. I think he understands because I’m calm. I haven’t thought about leaving him but I know one day it will get too much. I’m young, I’ve put my life on hold to be a wife he needs.

He puts his plate away, “Please come here.”

I sit on his lap with my bowl, he takes it from me.

Feeding me is not going to make me forget that he can be an asshole. Unfortunately I've fallen in love with this asshole in a way I couldn't have imagined.

"Kumnandi?" he asks.

"Yes, you still cook better than me."

His ego is tickled there, I see all his teeth.

"This time are we going to know the gender?"

I smile, "Yes, I can't wait!"

"Me too. You're going to be a good mom. You and I deserve a long honeymoon after our wedding, but we'll be new parents, we can't travel easily."

"That's why you shouldn't have made me pregnant," I say.

"You opened too wide, I had no choice." He's such a clown.

I'm eating, he's feeding me. I don't know when was the last time he put me on his lap and fed me.

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MPATHO

It feels like he's always here. He's had more conversations with MaVilakazi than he had planned to. He thought he'd forget about her and move on with his life. But it turns out Phume pushing him to search for his mother was God's doing, he was going to need her in the long run, especially regarding the surname issue. Today Yoli doesn't run away when she sees him, instead she runs towards the car. He's never been anyone's uncle before, the only thing he has in the car is a packet of gums. Kids love gums, don't they?

He gives her three, she takes with two hands and walks away. Without saying anything.

MaVilakazi is sitting on the veranda, there's a chair in front of her where she's put a basin of water as she washes Yoli and Sphakamiso's clothes.

"Good morning," Mpatho greets.

"Yebo, you always surprise us," – MaVilakazi, she yells for Sphakamiso to come out with another chair

"I won't be long, I'm still going to work. I'm here regarding your son, the second one."

"Malibongwe?" MaVilakazi asks.

"Sphakamiso," he says.

He hasn't accepted her as his mother; her face drops with disappointment.

"Has he done something wrong?" she asks.

"Yesterday he came to attack me with a gun, in front of my wife."

Sphakamiso comes out with the chair and sees him. He stands and listens to the conversation.

"He's accusing me of reporting Malibongwe to the police. I don't know why I would do that, what have I been waiting for all this time if I wanted him to go to jail."

Sphakamiso drops the chair and stands with his arms folded.

MaVilakazi looks at him. "You still haven't got rid of the gun?"

"Everyone has a gun, they just don't get reported to the police by well-connected, trust-fund spoilt brats who were given everything growing up, even wives as inheritance," he says.

Mpatho doesn't respond to him, he looks at MaVilakazi. "I don't want it to get to the point where I have to retaliate, tell your son to leave me alone."

"Hhayi, this is beyond me, my whole life was cursed. I don't know where this is coming from because..."

"Just tell your son to leave me alone!" Mpatho says, more firm.

She can't tell him, he will say she's choosing a side. It's always been like that with her children, if she reprimands she gets accused of loving the other one more and taking a side.

"I came here to deliver that message, I know you're not going to call him out on his behavior because it's me he attacked with a gun. But I promise, if he ever does something like that again he's going to catch these hands."

"I'm not scared of you, don't come here and try to intimidate my mother," Sphakamiso says.

"Can't you let it go Phaka, please?" MaVilakazi begs, if they continue going back and forth like this she might have to stop a fight. Sphakamiso is not even in a condition to argue with people, he's just stubborn.

"I will go to the police and tell them what he did to Mcineka," he says.

MaVilakazi's eyes widen. If that happens she'd be implicated as well and Mpatho will go to jail and blame her.

"It's not him who called the police," she says.

"Let him believe what he wants to believe, I'm going to make sure that Malibongwe gets bail, only because I know Miyanda needs him. She's a good woman, I only learned to tolerate him because she taught us that we can sit on the same table and not kill each other."

“Oh, she’s invited you to live with them too?” MaVilakazi, she’s looking at him trying not to look annoyed.

“No, they were booked in a BnB, I happened to be there to do something in the morning and she invited me for breakfast,” he says.

“Oh, okay,” she takes a deep breath and looks away.

Mpatho turns his eyes to Sphakamiso, he’s still angry even after the conversation he had with Phume.

“You can come with me and join the meeting with my lawyer and Malibongwe’s. Maybe you will believe that I’m innocent, I didn’t send anyone to do anything,” he says.

“When?” Sphakamiso.

“The hearing is next week, Tuesday.”

“I will be there.” He doesn’t trust Mpatho one bit, and he doesn’t like him, which is mutual.

Right now he trusts what Zikalala said, as soon as connects with his real father’s family he won’t have to rub shoulders with Mpatho and Phume.

There’s a dog barking...it’s Ruby. That irons Mpatho’s face and melts it into a smile. The owner appears, he’s been sitting behind the house to avoid drama. Now that they’ve stopped arguing he comes and greets Mpatho. Sphakamiso knows that he doesn’t have a problem with him, especially now that they know his story. He won’t take any side, he will talk to all of them.

“When are you bringing my sister back?” he asks.

“The one you beat?” Mpatho asks with a chuckle.

“She started it. For real, when is she coming back?”

“Two more days, then you will see her,” Mpatho says picking Ruby up. He loves dogs and this one specially, it’s just a pity that he might never own a pet because of Phume.

“She’s gaining some weight,” he compliments.

“Because his aunt who talks everytime I feed her is not around.”

“I thought you missed her,” Mpatho says.

“I miss what she does for me, for us, not her company. I’m tired of eating beans and potatoes.” That was loud enough for MaVilakazi to hear.

“You have two hands, you can cook what you like,” she retorts.

“Don’t worry, today I will be in charge of the kitchen, I will call Nombuso, she will tell me how to cook and make food delicious,” – Mkhuleko.

“Come with me and taste what I cooked last night for the wife,” Mpatho says.

“You cook for her?” Mkhuleko raises his eyebrows.

“You will cook for your wife too, if you love her.” At least Sphakamiso has left, he’s not hearing this.

Mkhuleko rushes to his room and changes his T-shirt and gets in the car with Ruby. Phume is said to have gone over Ntombi’s house, he will leave with Ruby before she comes back.

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They let Ruby run freely around the house, Mkhuleko sits in the lounge while Mpatho warms the food and grills extra meat. He’s sacrificing an hour of work, there’s nothing to hate with Mkhuleko, none of his behavior is non-excusable. He acts and

talks his age, and defends himself if he has to. But he's not a hater and he doesn't have a dark heart like his two brothers.

Mpatho comes their food and returns to the kitchen to dish for Ruby. He opens the cupboard and grabs a square salad bowl that looks old. He dishes generous pieces of meat for the niece and puts her in front of them as they dig in.

"You shouldn't have told Ma that Sis' Miyanda invited you for breakfast," Mkhuleko says.

"Why? That's not a bad thing," Mpatho asks.

"She doesn't get along with Sis' Miyanda, she doesn't like it when she does things for us, so you set her up for another drag," he says.

"But there was no bad intention there, she was nice and she looks like a good woman for him. She has brains, something Malibongwe doesn't have."

"Ma doesn't think she's good for him, which is unlucky," he says.

"Why is it unlucky?" Mpatho asks.

"Because we are family, she's not going anywhere, if anything she's the only person that can make sure that she has a relationship with Malibongwe. She can make or break them."

"Mmmm, that's rough!"

Mkhuleko frowns and tilts his head, listening to the sound outside. That's definitely a car pulling up outside.

"There's a car outside," he says.

Mpatho stands up and goes to the kitchen window.

"Fuck, hide Ruby!"

"Huh?"

Mpatho waves his hand, he reads between the lines and grabs Ruby away. He throws her behind the couch and rushes with her food and puts it in front of her so that she can stay in one place.

He sits innocently and eats his food.

Phume walks in and gets a tight hug.

“You’re still home?” she drops her purse on the kitchen counter and opens the fridge to get icy water.

“I invited Mkhuleko over for breakfast,” he says.

“It’s brunch now.” She drinks water and puts the bottle back in the fridge.

Then she turns and looks at him.

“What did you do?”

He pulls his brows, “Hhayi-bo, I haven’t done anything. Come and greet Mkhuleko.”

She still has a bad feeling but she lets him take her hand.

She’s known Mkhuleko for years, he used to deliver Sphakamiso’s messages to her.

“Hello,” she says standing next to Mpatho.

“Hello skwiza, for the second round,” Mkhuleko says.

Mpatho laughs. If it was her who said something along those lines he would’ve gone on a two weeks rant.

“Mpatho didn’t tell me you’d be here,” Phume says.

“It was unplanned, I wanted him to...”

She frowns, “What is that sound?”

Mpatho freezes...

Ruby emerges behind the couch.

“Oops!” – Mkhuleko.

Mpatho knows that she doesn't dogs, they could've left it outside the house. But she won't be a witch, it already looks like Mkhuleko was told that she's a Ruby hater. She keeps a straight face, it rolls on the carpet before rushing to Mkhuleko's legs.

Mpatho clears his throat, “Are you hungry?”

“No, I'm good, I will go and take a nap. Are you done here?” She wants to take dishes back to the kitchen for them before she goes.

“Yes,” Mpatho hands over his plate.

Mkhuleko gathers glasses and his own plate.

“Wait, the bowl!” He goes to Ruby's hiding spot and collects the bowl.

Mpatho pops his finger joints. Mkhuleko could've left the bowl behind the couch, he was going to take it after she's gone. Now he's got an explaining to do.

“This is my salad bowl,” she's looking at him.

“It's old, there are others in the....”

“Okay,” she turns and walks away.

His eyes follow her until she disappears.

“See, everyone loves Ruby!” Mkhuleko says with pride.

“No, I need to replace the bowl,” – Mpatho, he looks stressed.

Mkhuleko frowns.

“She said okay nje,” he's confused.

“You'll understand when you're older, I need to go and look for the bowl.”

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 87

SIS' NOMBUSO

There are a lot of things she could've done but that Mapholoba person didn't want to break Mpatho's rules even one bit. So yeah, she's here seeing a man she doesn't even know. His name is Freedom but she will call him Nkululeko because she's not colonized like that. Mapholoba is literally outside the door, just a few feet away, he's like a stalker. For the first three days it was uncomfortable, even when she's dining he stands a few feet away and watches her like she's a 3 year old baby.

The Nkululeko person sends for her to be let in his room, office or whatever. She doesn't pay much attention to his looks, it's not like she will ever see him again after this.

"Nkululeko, right?" she's the one confirming.

He smiles and stretches his hand for a shake. "Yes, welcome Nombuso, I'm delighted to see you," he says.

Well, first things first.

"So what do you do for a living?" she asks.

Even though the question is a bit awkward, he keeps a straight face. "This is what I do; I help people understand themselves better and navigate through their mental wellness and relationships."

"More like poking your nose and making judgment. Did your father approve of that? I doubt any father wants a son who grows up wanting to be a gossipmonger," she says.

“As someone who had mental health issues he was proud of me before he passed. I know this profession is still scarce because we are a society that doesn’t believe in asking for help and admitting that we are going through things.”

She adjusts on her seat, “Okay, so why am I here because I’m not in a relationship, I’m divorced, and I don’t have any problem understanding myself?”

“I want to understand you,” he says.

“I’m not a puzzle,” she’s not impressed with his attitude.

“It should be easy then, just introduce me to Nombuso.”

He really does this for a living, nc!

“I’m Nombuso, 35 years old, I’m a divorced mother of one and a sister of...I don’t know how many they are, it’s boys,” she waves her hand, she’s not going to count all MaVilakazi’s kids.

“So you’re the only girl in the family?” Freedom asks.

“Yes,” she nods.

“How is that like? Is it easy to bond with them or you feel left out?”

“I was a bit close to the one who comes after me. Urgh, I don’t know the sequence now, but I have one who I was close to before he got in a relationship. Then others I just coexist with. I don’t care to be let in or left out.”

“So you wouldn’t change anything in that structure?” he asks.

“I’d get rid of Malibongwe’s girlfriend of course and maybe just move out and live alone because they overwhelm me,” she says.

“I can understand that, being surrounded by a different gender, people you can’t relate to on all levels.”

“No, it’s not about gender, I don’t like people a lot,” she says.

Freedom nods.

He doesn't say anything.

She feels the need to justify herself. "I get misunderstood a lot wena Nkululeko, when I say things people always think I'm evil and insensitive, whereas I just say what I see and think."

"Okay, let's say you and I had lunch plans and I come one hour later without notifying you. How would you express your grievance to me?"

"I wouldn't," she says.

"You'd just let it go without asking for an explanation?"

"I wouldn't be there when your ass finally decides to show up."

Freedom raises his eyebrow. One, her tone; two, the delivery.

"Understandable. So that would be the end of our friendship?"

"I'm friends with nobody, it was just lunch and you didn't come."

They're completely missing each other.

"Let's say you and I..."

Nah, she's tired of examples.

"What do you want to know?" she asks.

"I want to know why people misunderstand you. Is it because you don't have the best delivery or they choose not to understand," he says.

"Do you understand me?" she asks.

"Absolutely. I think you just have a complicated personality that needs patience and understanding, I'm glad you mentioned being misunderstood. Now I want to hear from you, do you think people who misunderstand you appreciate your tone and delivery?"

“I don’t care, I say what I say, I don’t say things to be appreciated,” she says.

“Do you ever think what if I say something and it hurts the other person?”

“No,” she shakes her head.

“Let’s say it does hurt them and they express that to you, do you feel remorseful?”

“No,” she says.

“Have you ever been hurt by someone’s words?”

She thinks for a second and nods. “But I always hurt them back.”

“As revenge?” Freedom enquires.

“No, defense. I always defend myself.”

“I see a lot of anger in you. I know it’s not who you are, something made you very angry, and the only way you deal with it is by not exercising any sympathy and turning cold towards everything.”

This analysis doesn’t sit well with her; she doesn’t like Judge Judys.

“So you’re a sangoma now, you see things?” she asks.

“I observe. I know that’s not what you want to hear from a stranger but I’m not your enemy, your brother asked me to talk with you and help if I see that you need it. I’ve met people with unmanageable anger issues before, those who confronted them learned how to tolerate situations and coexist with people without feeling the need to unnecessarily defend themselves and be cold.”

“Well, I do have things that made me upset like my parents’ marriage, how they treated each other and how my mother had

cheated and risked us not having a home because of her beloved son, Sphakamiso. Many times I overheard my father threatening to kick all of us out, all because of her. And my own marriage, I was blamed for things I didn't do and I got cheated on and divorced. But I've always been the same person, even when I was young. That's why I'm not cool with my siblings, I didn't like them more when they were younger."

"Have you ever thought that your attitude towards life wasn't normal?" Freedom asks.

"I don't have to be normal," she argues.

"I think it can be rooted somewhere . There are people who find it hard to sympathize and socialize because of mental struggles. Some diagnosed, some not. Have you ever spoken to someone professional before?"

"No, I don't really like people who make professions out of people's personal lives."

"Oh, I already understood that," he smiles. "So we are going to start from your parents' marriage, you've mentioned that you witnessed things and heard your father threatening to kick you all out at times. Have you ever talked to your mother about it?"

"Yeah, I told her that she wasn't a good wife to my father. She recently admitted that she was in love with another man, I guess that's why she kept cheating on him. I don't care anymore, they're all dead," she shrugs.

"Were you more close to your father?"

She nods, "Yes, he was the only person who understood me."

"Have you made peace with his death?"

"Yeah, I'm okay now," she says.

"It's good to hear that you've learned to live without him. It's unfortunate that in life we have to say goodbye to people we

love. I'm sure that wasn't the only time you lost a loved one, your ex-husband as well, you lost him to divorce."

She inhales sharply and nods.

"I'm sure it wasn't easy, you had a perfect marriage you pictured for yourself, especially after witnessing how painful it is to have two broken parents. Surely you didn't want that for your child," Freedom says.

"No, I didn't."

"How have you been after the divorce? How has it changed you?"

"He still supports our daughter, I'm grateful for that. I'm figuring everything else as I go."

"Have you moved on from that pain?"

"I don't know. I'm not sad that we are no longer together, I'm just angry that he painted a picture of me that wasn't truthful and I let him get away with it. I don't know how many times I've thought about going to his house and pouring petrol over the room and set him alight with his whole family. The only reason I stop myself is because my daughter still needs him." She's never shared these thoughts with anyone. Just like she's never told anyone about her suicidal thoughts in the past. It's a part of who she is, when she's too sad or angry she always end up thinking about the most harmful measures of dealing with the pain.

"Have you ever thought about confronting him for the lies?" Freedom asks.

"I've confronted him many times...in my head. I can't do it in person because he will get his family involved, they know and believe his side of the story. I'm not close like that with my brothers, people who can defend me. There are things I can't talk to them about, simply because we are not open like that.

So I don't want to keep going in the same circle with his family. It's all good, one day his lies will catch up with him."

"Your daughter will be proud of you one day," Freedom says.

"For raising her away from her family?" she asks.

"For choosing peace for the sake of her relationship with her father. Not everyone can do that, you're a good mother. There's something special about you, a bit of unresolved issues here and there and an underlying issue that needs to be dealt with and managed."

"What underlying issue?" she raises her eyebrow.

"I think there's more to your cold attitude and lack of sympathy. It doesn't mean that you're not a good human being, we just need to work around that issue and define what is it. Without revealing anything about the conversation we just had I will talk to your brother, I think you need intense therapy."

"Okay, I don't have a problem with that. Are we done? I'm tired." She does look tired.

"Yes, thank you for coming and opening up to me. How do you feel about the experience?"

"It's something I wouldn't have decided to do, especially because I have revived a lot of things. But I think it was okay, I don't feel guilty about saying anything," she says.

"You don't have to feel guilty about saying what you feel, ever."

Exactly why she always say what she thinks or feels!

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Mapholoba waited for her, she walks out with tears burning her eyes. Isn't therapy supposed to be healing? It feels like she came here to relive everything she'd moved past from.

"I want to go to the salon," she says to Mapholoba.

His eyelashes flutter, it's been days now but he still look shocked everytime she talks.

"I need to do my hair," she says.

He nods, "Please make your way to the car."

His gentleness got to be fake. Malibongwe is the softest in the family but he's lost it with her a few times. This man hasn't flipped even once, not even when she intentionally becomes harsh on him.

He takes her to the salon close by. He doesn't enter, he does better on his feet keeping an eye on the surroundings. She takes a seat and requests a haircut. She's got declining patience for everything, maintaining hair is the last thing she wants to do.

When Mapholoba comes in she's already paid, she's looking like Malibongwe now.

A lady walked in, now a man is coming out.

"Heyyy!" he looks unnecessarily shocked.

"Let's go," she says.

"Why did you cut your hair?" He usually knows his lane, he never questions anyone, he sticks to his job.

But not today!

"Why do you cut yours?" Nombuso glares at him.

He brushes his bald head and says no reason.

“Exactly! Let’s go,” she turns and angrily walks away.

He’s tried his best not to look at her and thinks of how it would be like having that body close to his. Her back fascinates him, especially when he walks fast and bouncing her behind. He’s never touched her, not even a finger.

Her next stop is Fishaways. Again, he stands on the opposite, facing the entrance. Every time she turns her head she always find his eyes on her. It’s funny how he always finds the right spot and nobody ever blocks his line of sight, even in crowded places.

She doesn’t ask if he wants to eat because just from the way he stares at things you can tell that he enjoys very less in public, that’s if there’s anything he enjoys at all. He doesn’t swim, he doesn’t watch movies, he doesn’t like outdoor activities, and the hotel management. He doesn’t like hotel beds too, he sleeps when his body fails, otherwise he stands on his feet.

Nombuso comes out with a take-away and hands it to him.

“I don’t eat fish,” he says.

She could’ve guessed this! She takes it back, they head back to the hotel in silence.

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Maybe staring is a part of his job because this man can stare until you feel the hair at the back of your neck standing up. He’s quiet most of the time; he just drives her wherever she needs to be, stands at the corner watching her and does what he does the best, staring.

As she lies in bed engulfed in her sorrows she can still feel his stare. He's standing at the door, waiting for God knows what, she needs privacy.

She lifts her head...he's overstayed his welcome.

"I need you to promise me that you will be okay," he says, there's concern in his voice, a genuine one.

She wants to lash out but everything Freedom talked to her about comes back.

"I will be fine," she says.

He's not convinced, probably just sticking to Mpatho's rules.

"I promise Mapholoba," she says, this is the first time she's never called him yey wena.

He nods, she's gaining his trust but he's still standing. His stare is never too tense or too soft, you can't read him. Is he a good or bad person?

"Your phone is ringing," he says, pointing at it on the bedside cabinet.

She takes it.

Mkhuleko, what does this ass want?

"Ya!" she answers.

"Hi my sister, how are you?" Mkhuleko is not this humble.

"Are you on drugs?" She's confused.

"No, but if you don't come I will start using them. I can't find anything in the house, I just looked for washing powder for 15 minutes, 27 seconds and 1.5 milliseconds."

She looks at Mapholoba, "Do they have fireworks here?"

“I’m not sure but I can organize...” Yoh, does he have to take everything seriously?

She goes back to the caller, “So you miss me, empty-head?”

“Yes, please come back, I will be nice,” -Mkhuleko.

This call is here to uplift her mood, because what kind of happiness is this?

“So I’m important after all?” She’s sitting up, smiling from ear to ear.

“You are. Yoli wants to say hi.”

Her smile broadens, she chats up a storm with her daughter. This is probably the first peaceful conversation she’s had with Mkhuleko in years.

Mapholoba is still here, on his phone. When he realizes that she’s done with the family call he pockets his.

“You will have to get permission for fireworks,” he says.

What the hell!

“I was celebrating my brother missing me, I’m not really looking for them.”

“Alright, I will cancel.” He types quickly on his phone and puts it back inside his pocket again.

Is he still not leaving her room even when she’s got a smile on her face?

“So you are here to get everything I want?” It’s ridiculous, Mpatho overdid this trip, she didn’t even think she’d need a bodyguard.

“I’m here to protect you,” he says.

Something about the way he says it makes it sound like he's doing more than his job. More than chasing away criminals away from her.

"Protect me from what? I don't have enemies, everyone loves me," she asks.

She's weird and fun, there's no way she's the most loved human being with her attitude.

"Lovely women face threatening situations too. They have people who have eyes on them, who'd use any opportunity to have a piece of them and at least run the tip of their fingers on their skin..." Nombuso looks at his finger tip moving up her left arm. He removes it, leaving a wave of chills on her skin. He turns towards the window and pockets his hands, he can still feel the burn on her finger tip where he touched her skin.

"Your brother wants to keep you in a bubble wrap," he says.

Now that he's putting it like that she feels babied. Doesn't Mpatho understand that she's older than him and can fight for herself? He's going to collect sweet and sour tomorrow.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 88

PHUMELELE

He's home, I heard his car pulling up. I don't understand why he's not coming inside, I've been bored the whole day. I pause the TV and stand up to go fetch him. Boom, he's standing by the wall in the kitchen passage.

"What's going on?" I don't understand why he's standing here like an orphan.

“Is it late?” he asks.

I’m more confused.

“Your ass always come home late, there’s nothing new there.”

“Oh, so you’re not mad?”

Hhayi-bo, have I ever showed any signs of having anger issues?

He takes his jacket off and makes his way to the couch. He grabs the remote and changes my channel. Someone is getting too comfortable.

“What’s for dinner? By the way I bought you a new set of salad bowls,” he says.

I have bowls, a lot of them. He took that specific one and fed Ruby on it. I don’t care if he buys me shares at Tupperware, the bottom line is that he took my bowl and gave it to Ruby.

“I didn’t cook today, Sis’ Theh did, I was tired,” I say.

“Are you still tired?”

“No, I took a nap.”

“Okay, put something warm on, I want us to go somewhere.”

“I thought you wanted dinner,” I say.

“No, I will eat when we come back.”

I don’ like surprises. If he did something he must just tell me instead of trying to be Mr Mysterious. But I get my jacket and wear my long socks- can’t stand cold feet.

He looks at me coming back and I can see him releasing a sharp sigh.

“Why are you wearing pink socks?”

Is this man trying to control my looks now? I’m not going to freeze my legs for a surprise.

“I’m not taking them off,” I say.

He surrenders before I lose it and stay home. We make our way out, this person planned this. I’m finding a bouquet of flowers in the car. He says they’re mine. I don’t know what happened to his romantic sense, he couldn’t even carry them inside the house and say ta-da.

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We are heading town, maybe I shouldn’t have worn pink socks with a midi floral dress, I look like a cartoon. He drives towards the outer areas, just after exiting the main shopping center. I see a new building I have never noticed before.

“That’s Malibongwe's car repair shop,” he says.

“Wow!” I’m surprised, he backstabbed Beauty for a good course.

“How is he going to run it now that he’s in prison?”

“He’s in a holding cell, coming out soon,” he says.

He’s got too much confidence, you’d swear he knows the judge.

“What if he doesn’t come out?” I ask, I’m not being negative, just realistic.

“Sphakamiso will do what’s needed to be done.”

I know Sphakamis can turn that business into a multimillion business. He’s into everything cars.

We drive around and enter from the south, just opposite Main Road he pulls up. I still don't know what we are doing here. He takes my hand as I climb out of the car.

"We are going that side," he leads me across the road. I realize there's construction happening outside what used to be Zen Clothing. Ntombi and I used to shop like crazy here, they used to have all the teen trends at affordable prices.

"Are they operating again?" I ask Mpatho.

"Just come," he's pulling my arm.

We are going right inside, I can hear voices. Is it not late for construction workers to be still inside buildings? I see they've repainted the walls and tiled the floors.

"She's here," he announces for the people inside.

One lady emerges, she's in black and white, I relax.

"Welcome Mrs Mshazi," her smile brightens the whole place.

"I'm Nozi, your husband hired me as your interior designer but he told me that you want to be involved in everything," she says and turns around on her heels and starts telling me about what she thinks should in what space.

I'm still in shock. I only told him to help me find a place, I would've paid from my own pocket and got my boutique off the ground. He pulls me for a kiss, I'm not cold, it's shock.

"So you bought this place for me?"

"Yeah, I just want you to know that I love you."

"I know, but buying it for me!" I take out a deep breath and look around.

It's big, I wanted to start small first and see how it's welcomed by the community.

But I'm grateful.

“Ngiyabonga,” I say to him and follow Nozi around. She already have everything planned, she just wants my approval. She’s talking about a lot of things, my mind is just blank.

I look at the designs she has, I can’t make any decisions for now.

“Maybe we should schedule a meeting for this, I wasn’t expecting anything like this.”

“Okay, let me contact you tomorrow morning.” She takes my cellphone number and email.

“Congratulations once again, you’re blessed with a husband who support your dreams and vision like this.”

I stretch a thin smile, “He’s one in a million.”

She takes her belongings and her two assistant friends leave.

I close the doors and return back inside. I know I didn’t have the best reaction to the surprise. I feel like he did too much, I only asked for presence from him. I don’t think he got it.

“You don’t like it, do you?”

“I can afford this myself,” I say.

“Wow Phume! Do you know how many affording women appreciate good gestures from their husbands?” He’s offended. He wanted me to jump and scream like a child getting a new barbie doll.

“Still, I can afford it myself. Do you know what I can’t afford to buy, no matter how much money I have? My husband taking me out on weekly date nights that he promised me. Doing what you did for Mkhuleko; sparing your two work hours, if possible, to have breakfast with me. Planning a solo vacation for me to go and distress, like Nombuso. And just showing me affection

and caring towards us. You've missed three doctor's appointment Mpatho."

"So it's a competition?" He doesn't get it.

I'm just making examples, I'm not competing with them at all.

"Let's drop it, thank you for the place, Nozi and I will talk tomorrow. Was this all?" I'm ready to go back home. I was in the middle of something when he came.

He stands where he.

"Let's go home, it's late," I say.

"Ng'yazama Phume. And I know that I'm not a bad father, I'm just going through a rough patch."

I didn't call him a bad father, I said he's missed three appointments, which is a fact.

"But I'm sorry if I've hurt you that much," he says.

"That much?" I don't think he's sorry at all.

He can't even put himself in my shoes without thinking about his own problems.

"However I've hurt you to the point of you not seeing any of my efforts."

"Okay, can we go?"

"Phume,"

Oh gosh!

He takes something out of his jacket.

"I gave you this and you never wore it."

It's the ring he gave me after we got married at Home Affairs. It just reminds me of how much we haven't seen eye to eye in our marriage. He's the reason I didn't wear it.

He comes and takes my left hand, I let him put it on my ring finger. I'm a married woman, there's a diamond for everyone to see it. But he's not wearing any ring.

"I love you, my wife." He brings my hand to his lips and kisses my finger.

"This was supposed to be romantic, I thought you'd be happy and smiling, but things don't always go how I planned," he says.

"I'm happy," this is one lie I'm going to heaven for.

"We talked the other day, I thought we had ironed things out. I've even put my differences aside with Sphakamiso, I'm attending lawyer meetings with him and communicating right. I wish you can give me a bit of patience, I'm pulling through."

"Mpatho..."

"Babe?"

Babe? Mmm, okay.

"I appreciate you buying me my boutique and putting a ring on my finger. Can we now go home before other people see me in pink socks?"

"I told you about the socks," he chuckles.

We finally leave, hand in hand like a happy couple.

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He goes straight to the shower when we get home. Maybe I was too hard with my truth. I don't want him to be sad, I just wanted him to acknowledge that buying me a boutique and hiring people to do things for me, not only takes away the

happiness I had for finally planning my first project and chasing my dreams, but it also won't solve our problems.

I dish for him and make a cup of tea for myself.

I will take a bath after him, for now I'm going to stay in bed with my cup of tea and digest everything that happened. I need to have a conversation with myself.

I don't know Nozi, I don't know the people in her circle. I can wake tomorrow and the whole town knows that Mpatho bought his will-housewife a boutique. I can never be one of those girls who empower others. I'm a bad example in the community. I married 'my brother' for money, I have never done anything for myself, I've been spoonfed my whole life. Mpatho is still a sweetheart, he gives back to the community, he was in the army people think he's untouchable, and he runs multiple businesses.

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He come back, his waist wrapped in a towel. His skin looks smooth, he smells good, but he looks empty. I feel empty. I take off to the bathroom and have a long bubble bath. When I finally walk out he's dimmed the lights. Maybe he wanted to sleep.

"Mpatho did you eat?" I ask.

"I'm not hungry." He's not asleep.

"Okay, why are the lights dim? What are you up to?" I'm trying to break the ice, I don't want us to sleep with heavy hearts.

"No more surprises from me," he says.

Could be funny. Somehow I knew that a surprise was going to mess us up.

“Well, I have a surprise for you, it needs the light to be bright.”

“What kind of a surprise is that?”

“Ummm, it’s wet and soft,” I say.

He takes only two steps and reaches to the light.

Of course I’m talking about my hair.

“I just washed it, please help me dry,” I say.

To say he’s disappointed would be an understatement.

“Stay in one place so that the thunder can locate you fast,” he returns to the bed with his horny black ass.

I’m finally having an honest good laugh.

I plug the hairdryer and do it myself. After a few minute he feels sorry for me and comes to help me. I only asked him to dry, I don’t trust his hairdressing skills one bit. But at least he moisturized the hair before plaiting it. I’m sitting in front of the mirror, I don’t know if this thing he’s done even qualifies for knots.

“I’m good at this!” he’s blowing his own horn.

“Yes, you should open a salon.”

He laughs and opens his hands in front of me.

“Blow,” he says.

I blow on them, he blows too, then he pats them on my head.

This is what you get for marrying someone who is older than you. He’s got all the 90s tricks.

“You’re so old!” I tease.

“Whatever they say about ingubo endala elala izingane. Where is my food?”

I though he said he’s not hungry. Mood swings!

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 89

MPATHO

He didn't think he'd ever do this again but it's the only therapy he knew when he was younger. It helped him a lot, that's why he kept writing even when there was no response. It's the middle of the night, he leaves the bed and takes a notebook and a pen and disappears in the bathroom. It was his safe place then, it's his safe place now.

He squats on the floor, puts the notebook against his knees and takes a deep breath. He can just drive to where she is but they'll probably never have a relationship like that. He will stick to what he knows; bleeding on a piece of paper.

Is it Mommy, or MaVilakazi, or Ma as he's called her his whole life?

By blood she's his mother, but he'll probably never feel the same way about her. If Phume didn't insist she wouldn't have claimed him.

~Dear MaVilakazi

I needed to offload, I didn't know how to, except doing this. I'm not expecting any response, I just want to give you an update since my last letter. I'm not happy in my marriage. My wife is not happy either. Maybe we've been only happy for two weeks ever since we tied our lives together. Is it a curse? I don't know. Maybe we were not meant to be, we kinda forced our way through because of what was at stake. We really need support but both of us now don't have what we can call real family.

There's love but there's no peace. I don't think I was equipped enough for this. I know how to love her, the way I know how to love, but I don't know how to love myself. I was taught to pour from an empty cup, maybe I broke the cup along the way. I'm disappointed in myself for failing one thing I fought hard for the most. Right now my biggest fear is 'flopping' as a father and losing my family. We are doing therapy, it has helped us a bit. But we need love and support. When we push each other we fall back to nothing. This is not what I thought settling down was, I feel so overwhelmed, by everything that's going on. I'm scared to talk to her about some other things because we always end up fighting.

She wanted me to find my mother, you. We both thought it would lessen some of my burdens. But now everything has changed, she doesn't want me to have a relationship with 'my siblings' unless I go and apologize to Sphakamiso. It's so unfair on me, she really liked them when they were Sphakamiso's siblings. When we found out that Malibongwe stole the cars, she wanted to protect him because she didn't want Sphakamiso to be hurt. Now that I'm also in the picture and there's a chance that Malibongwe will go to jail and maybe have me investigated as well, she doesn't want him to be protected. When I sent lobola for her, which wasn't successful by the way, she was thinking about Sphakamiso and wanting me to go and apologize to him, then discuss their relationship skeletons. I'm stressed, I'm low-key competing against someone. I don't want him to be a part of our lives. I don't want to always doubt myself and my capability. My wife isn't helping, it's getting hard everyday to make her happy.

If Sphakamiso wasn't in the picture I know that we'd be happy, as stupid as that may sound. I had to buy her a new phone and beg her to block his number. Who lives like that? I don't understand what is it that he has...~

No, he's not doing this!

He squashes the piece of paper and goes to the sink and opens water on it.

Phume stands at the door in her black silky nightie, looking at him.

He turns around, his other hand holding the pen and notebook.

"Why are you up?" he's surprised.

"I woke up and you weren't in bed. What's wrong? Why are you writing letters again?"

He stutters, the water is still running and flooding away the letter he'd half written.

"Come, let's go," she doesn't drag the issue as he feared.

He wipes his hands and follows her back to bed. It's midnight, most couples are in their sleep or indulging in love deeds. He can't look at his wife in the eyes, he knows she has questions, but if she asks and he answers there will be a fight.

"Is this about the boutique?" she asks.

"No, I just wanted to update her on what's been happening in my life since the last letter," he says.

"Why didn't you just go there and talk to her face to face?"

"I'm comfortable writing to her and not getting any response."

She nods and lifts the covers over her head and sleeps on her side.

"Where do you want to go?" he asks.

She takes a minute, then she uncovers her head.

"What do you mean?" she asks.

"You said you want a vacation. Where do you want to go?"

“I don’t want a vacation, I said I want you to notice what I want, like you notice with others. I want attention from you, not money, not property,” she says.

“Okay,” he takes a deep breath and shifts closer. He puts his hand on her waist and rests his head over her shoulder. “Can we start over?”

“Start over?” she raises her eyes to him.

How is that possible?

“Let’s leave the past behind, forgive me for what I’ve done wrong, let’s turn a new positive leaf. I want this to be a happy place for us, I want you to smile when you see me.”

“If that’s going to make you happy, okay,” she says.

“Do you still care?” He’s concerned.

“Do I look like I don’t care Mpatho? If so, why am I still begging you to love me right?”

“I don’t feel good,” he says.

“About what?” she asks.

“Everything. I’m exhausted, mentally. I just want to be happy and you to be happy as well. I don’t care about anything else, I want to focus on us,” he says.

“Focus on us while Malibongwe’s trial is coming up and you’re busy everyday?”

“I will go to jail too Phume, Sphakamiso won’t blink twice before throwing me in the fire. I’ve done a lot of shit, more than you think. I don’t want to have any investigation being launched against me, I’ve wronged way too many people, I will inherit even our parents’ crimes.”

She didn’t think that far.

“Do you want me to go to prison?”

She shakes her head, “No.”

“Then let me be involved in this case as much as I can. Then I will cut ties with the Mcinekas if that’s what you want,” he says.

“But I want you to have a family. I always have. What I don’t like is losing you to the pain they’ve caused you. If you knowing them means that I have to endure moods and being neglected then I don’t want them.”

“Ngiyakuzwa,” he says.

“You’re not going to turn this around and fight tomorrow?”

“No, I hear you,” he says.

“Good, let’s sleep and wake up a new Mr and Mrs Mshazi.”

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PHUMELELE

I feel hands on my tummy but I’m still half asleep. I can feel that it’s him, he didn’t wake up to exercise this morning, he’s in bed with me. I open my eyes when I feel kisses on my face. I still remember everything we talked about last night, all the promises he made. We’ve tried to resolve our issues in the past and it hasn’t really worked. I’m not going to put all my trust now but I know that if he tries I will definitely cut him some slack as well.

“Are you awake?” he asks, breathing close to my neck.

I can feel the pulsating middle leg on my thigh.

“No,” I close my eyes again.

“Hhayi-bo vuka, sek’sile.” He plants soft kisses on the side of my face.

I give up and open my eyes again and turn to face him. His eyes are red-rimmed, I wonder if he slept at all.

“Niyaphila?” he asks, putting his hand over my tummy.

It’s weird, I wanted it but it feels so abnormal.

I smile, “Yeah, we are fine.”

“How did you sleep?”

He’s trying too hard.

“I slept well, you?” I ask.

“I had a wet dream,” he says.

I didn’t expect that.

“Do you want to know what it was?”

Can’t people wake up and pray in the morning? Like, just focus on God.

“Tell me,” I say.

“I dreamed of my wife...” Why are his hands on my butt? His erection is getting harder, I know when his voice gets this rough. He continues; “...in all her beauty, naked with me and giving me the kind of pleasure I’ve never experienced before.”

“Mmmm!” I’m getting warm in places, he’s rubbing himself against my thigh.

“Then I woke up like this, kuqine yonke into,” he says.

I look at him, one thing that’s always remained the same no matter how much we fight is that we are sexually compatible. There’s always a strong connection and yearning for each other. I wrap my arm around him, he tucks his face on my neck and smooches me.

“Phume,” he’s talking just an inch away from my ear.

I inhale sharply, “Mpatho?”

“How far are you willing to go?”

“With what?” I’m confused.

“Experiencing your body with me.”

I’m still lost.

“Is there a no-go area?” he asks.

“Ummmm, I don’t know...no.” I don’t know what the right answer is.

“Anal?” he says.

My chest almost becomes a desert.

I freeze, he gets off me and looks at me with a relaxing smile.

“Why would you want that? Am I a fridge down there?” I ask.

“Ah, Phume! Why would you say that? You know that’s my little heaven, but it doesn’t mean I don’t want to explore more of you,” he says.

“Isn’t that gay though?”

He chuckles, “Ang’fune zibunu eziqinile, I only find your butt sexually appealing. And you’re my wife phela, I don’t want to be restricted, I want all of you.”

I’ve seen reviews of anal sex, it’s not just a ball of fun.

“I don’t like pain,” I tell him.

I still remember how painful it was having my hymen popped.

“I will never hurt you, it’s not a one-day thing, and I’m not saying be ready today. Whenever you are ready I will introduce you to it, bit by bit. I swear I won’t hurt you,” he says.

I don't know, anal sex sounds like the most immoral form of sex.

But I trust him, I agree to let him know when I'm ready.

"You will love it, I promise. But for now..." he pushes his hand between my thighs.

Then he locks eyes with me. "Please bless me with my muffin, my dick is aching, mommy underfeeds him."

I'm flooded with embarrassment, this is where my shy character comes out.

"Didn't you miss me?" He's rubbing his finger between my folds.

"I missed you," I say, my eyes kept on his chest rather than his face.

"Why didn't you tell me then?" He's lifting my nightie up. He knows very well that it takes a lot for me to initiate things. He turns my chin up, forcing our eyes to meet.

"You're the only woman in my heart," he says.

His finger slides into my opening, I hold my breath for a few seconds and then say something back. I think I'm saying I love him but he has my head around his dick. He closes his eyes and adjusts his hips on my waist, positioning himself directly to my opening. My body feels him before he even gets inside me.

He pushes himself in, when he's fully inserted he opens his eyes, they're full of lust.

"Please touch my nipples," I beg. My nipples itch a lot lately, with the arousal they're worse. He grabs both and gently squeezes them. I bite my lip, I can scream like crazy and it's so early in the morning.

He looks at me and spits a low curse. I'm about to fall apart but trying so hard to keep my screams low. My hands have left his

waist, I'm scratching his back. It feels like love, that's what we are making. He's not rushing, he wants me to feel every stroke, there's passion with each.

"Deeper baby, please!" I don't know how deep I want him to be but I want more.

He tucks his head between my head and shoulder and breathes warmly on my skin. Then he goes deeper, he's pressing into my cervix, I think we are receiving the equal amount of pleasure.

I hear him dragging his breath through his teeth and cursing. "Mommy, siyashisa les'bumbu!"

I can feel my legs becoming stiff. I thought I'd hold in a bit longer. He doesn't help me, he increases his pace, smacking his balls against my wet taint.

I let go, he lets go.

My body shudders against his. He's howling a deep-throated groan while emptying his balls inside me.

He slides to the side, holds my hand tightly and catches his breath.

I'm soaking in his sperms, for some reason I feel proud to be.

When he looks at me I'm smiling, I'm confident. Life has to be enjoyed like this than to be spent fixing.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 90

SIS NOMBUSO

Unfortunately all good things come to an end. It was a good vacation, she had her low moments but it was definitely one for the books. She hardly had an argument with anyone here

except the receptionist, two cleaners, Mapholoba, that white woman, another white woman, and a security guard. As much as she enjoyed her stay she can't wait to get home to her wicked mother, stupid brothers and lovely daughter.

She bought a waist belt because most of her dresses no longer fit perfectly because of the belly. Her floral dress fits perfectly today, the belt helps her look shapely. But she regrets cutting her hair, maybe if she'd gone for a cute female cut instead of a chiskop. Now she looks like a fat version of Malibongwe.

There's a knock at the door, that's obviously Mapholoba. Their energy has been weird since yesterday, gladly today they're separating ways and hopefully will never see each other again.

She opens the door and pretends to be nice. "I was about to call you, my bags are ready."

She walks towards them on the bed, he's right behind her.

"I'm Mnelisi Ngcobo," he says.

She turns with a frown. Why is he introducing himself?

"Everyone calls you Mapholoba," she says.

"My name is Mnelisi," he repeats, like it's of any importance.

"Ohho! What must I do with the information?" Everyone calls him Mapholoba. That's what actually suits him, Mnelisi sounds too personal and she doesn't know him like that.

"Keep it in your heart," he says.

Someone is getting out of line here. Her heart is not that big, she's not accommodating any strange names.

"You're my bodyguard, I'd rather have Nkosiyazi keeping it in his paybook," she says.

She's stubborn, quick to overreact and not scared to voice out her bad opinions. He knows that, he's studied her, he knows everything about her, even ex-husband's date of birth. The frightening hotel nights he spent mostly on his feet and chair didn't go in vain. He was working...or rather digging around.

"I won't be in that book for long, I have broken the rules," he says.

"What did you do?" She's not sympathizing with him, she's just curious.

"I didn't execute my job properly. Instead of protecting you, I fell for you, uyithathile inhliziyo yami MaMcineka. I don't know how many times I've fought it."

Are the windows closed? She can feel a droplet of sweat rolling down her spine. She's short of words, puzzled and scared at the same time. They're in a room, just the two of them, there's no one else.

"I want to know you better, as Mnelisi. So this is my last day, I will call my headquarters and have them switch me with someone else," he says.

Hhayi-bo this man! He's already quitting his job for her.

"I don't like you, I'm not going to know you as anything, you're just Mapholoba," she furiously walks over the window and takes in long, deep breaths. This got to be madness! She's not getting in any relationship, not knowing any bodyguard better, and certainly not calling him Mnelisi.

"You don't know me, that's why you don't like me," he says.

This man is crazy! She turns and looks at him. Doesn't he see how old she is to corner her like a maiden?

"I don't like how you look, you're not my type," she clarifies, hopefully he gets it this time.

“I have a personality to compensate for the looks you don’t like, when you know it you will excuse me for not being your type.”
There’s stubborn, then there’s this man.

She thought she was too old for this but he’s leaving her no choice.

“I will tell Nkosiyazi,” she threatens.

It doesn’t compute right away; who is Nkosiyazi.

“Oh, uzongiceba?” His eyes twinkle with humor. Yesterday he said she’s in a bubble wrap, this just proves that. “What are you going to report me for? I’m just saying what I feel.”

“Well, I’m married.”

“Was married,” he rectifies.

Bustard!

He makes his way towards her, she keeps her eyes on his long legs as they swallow up the distance between them. When he stands next to her he’s tall like a tower, she feels short in front of him.

“I know this is inappropriate but the heart eats what it wants. And mine wants you, ntofontofo.”

She blinks twice, that’s how she raises a flag for danger to her opponents.

“Don’t call me names, I’m Nombuso Loveness Mcineka,” she’s flippin’ angry.

“I wasn’t insulting you, I see a soft woman in you, in and out.”
Men are liars but he takes the cup. She’s everything but soft, especially in the inside. He’s seen and experienced it.

“I don’t care, don’t call me ntofontofo,” she says.

He nods, follows her furious face as she starts avoiding his eyes.

“So ntofontofo...” he only says the two words and she swiftly turns with her hand up.

He almost earned a slap, but now her hand is in his and it's soft as he thought.

Yes, she's livid, but she's standing an inch away from him. Her face is closer to his, their eyes are locked and her anger is slowly substituted with uncertainty. He doesn't let go of her hand, she doesn't ask him to.

“You don't scare me, le nkani onayo kwaNgcobo izophela.” Arrogant, rural Zulu man who thinks women are moody toys that can be controlled. Now more than ever, he's not her type.

“You won't change me,” she says and pulls her hand by force, clicking her tongue while at it. She's into soft, romantic men...not that she's ever been with any before.

“Do you know what they call us, oNgcobo?”

Can he stop with the bullshit already?

She's going to carry out these bags herself.

“Mafuzafulele! Mavulankungu kuvel' ilanga!” he recites himself.

All arrogant people love the sound of their voices, don't they?

“Anywhere, no matter how foggy it is, the Ngcobos will unveil the sun.”

Yeah, yeah, the Ngcobos are this, the Ngcobos are that. At this big age she's actually never met a smart Ngcobo person. Mavulankungu in hell, maybe.

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She's officially not talking to him. It doesn't look like he's affected that much about it. He's softly turned on the radio, when they stop at the garage to fill up he asks if she wants 'marshmallows'. Out of all sweets he chose them.

"I'm not ntofontofo," she stresses it out for the zillionth time.

"What did I say? I only asked if you want marshmallows."

"Why them? Because they're spongy and ntofontofo?" She's angry again.

It's one of those moments when he broadly stretches his grin.

She's not laughing with his stupid ass.

"I want Mint Imperials," she says.

"Oh, but they're hard candies."

God help her! Nkululeko said she's a good person, she doesn't want to ruin that reputation over this man. Because if she says anything, God forbid someone is going to write his own obituary before shopping for a rope!

Guess what he comes back with? Her Mint Imperials and unwanted marshmallows.

"They're mine," he says quickly.

She just gives him a side eye and looks outside the window, at the sane good-looking petrol attendants.

"I love soft, spongy sweets- izinto ezintofontofo," he says.

This man has been sent by the devil, he's here to test her. It's confusing because he wasn't like this the past days.

"How come you weren't annoying the other days?" she's confused.

“Aw, ngaze ngaphoxeka,” he’s still being sarcastic and annoying.

He drives out of the garage, they’re an hour away from home. It’s going to feel like a year. If Mpatho asks her to rate his service she’s definitely giving him a 1 star review.

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He doesn’t ask if she wants to start at the mall, he just takes her there. She still has some money from the transfer Mpatho made, she has to buy some goodies for Yoli and Mkhuleko, even though he hardly behaves like a child. Then she will buy Sphakamiso a packet of cigarettes, God bless her heart!

In public Mapholoba is still a bodyguard that he was. He walks a distance behind her, towering over people and staring. She fills her trolley and heads towards the till with her shoulders up.

The cashier scans all the items and turns the speed-point towards her. She inserts her Capitec card and punches her pin and waits.

“It’s declining,” says the cashier.

“Why? The pin is correct, it’s my daughter’s year of birth.” Oh fuck, it’s supposed to be a secret.

The cashier reads the receipt and tells her there’s no sufficient funds. She looks at the total of her purchased items and recalls what was on her bank account. No, there’s got to be a mistake.

“Wait, I’m calling Capitec,” she says to the cashier.

“I’m sorry, there are people behind you, they can’t wait for you to make a call to the bank.”

“So what is your solution?” she asks.

“My solution?”- the cashier.

Mapholoba squeezes his way through the queue and appears behind her.

“I will take care of it,” he tells the cashier and takes out his own wallet.

He pays and apologizes to the people on the queue.

Maybe he’s not that bad, she thanks him before they drive off.

She will see Mpatho later, right now she wants to see her daughter and show everyone pictures from her vacation. Seeing Mapholoba’s face for the last is another thing to celebrate.

“I will call you,” he says after offloading her bags.

“Don’t, I won’t answer,” she says.

“Then I will come here, ngifole la.”

“My brothers will chase you away.”

He smiles....

No, she doesn’t care for his smile and how he looks at her.

“I’m serious,” she says.

“We are still going to see each other Nombuso, not just once. By the way you looked beautiful in the pool the other day,” he says.

Now she can’t talk him down, he’s complimented her.

“I will switch with someone, lest it starts looking like mixing business with pleasure and disloyalty. I don’t work well when distracted, and you always have my mind roaming in the gardens of Eden.”

She’s trying to resist the smile, she turns her face away.

He takes something from the car, it's the marshmallows.

"I'm sure Yoli will love them," he says.

"Okay thanks," she takes a deep breath and looks at him like she isn't affected by anything.

He holds her stare, she can hate him but she won't forget what she sees in his eyes. She breaks the stare and looks away. It's time to go, they'll see each other again, soon.

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"Ay shame lay'khaya!" she's dragging her bags inside the house. She intentionally didn't ask them to come and help her so that she can have something to complain about. Mkhuleko gets up with a smile on his face.

"Finally, you're back!" he's happy.

Yoli runs behind him and overtakes and throws herself on her mother.

"Sthandwa sami, are you okay?" Nombuso kisses her all over her little face.

"Did you bring me the beach?" Yoli asks, her uncle promised her.

"No, but I bought you a barbie doll and marshmallows," she says.

Yoli jumps down and goes through the shopping bags for her doll and marshmallows.

"Who did you annoy while I was gone?" Nombuso asks Mkhuleko.

"I'm always on my best behavior. You look beautiful without that steelwool hair."

“I don’t look like a man?” she asks.

Mkhuleko laughs, “No, you look like a beautiful woman.”

Compliments make her take out roasted full-chicken, bread rolls and Coke.

“Where is Sphakamiso?” she asks looking around.

“He’s at Unified working. Malibongwe was arrested,” he says.

“Whaaaat?” She drops everything she had in her hands.

“Don’t panic, everything is handled by professionals, he’s coming home soon. Mpatho is involved, he’s standing with him against the murder accusations.”

“Why didn’t anyone tell me?” she’s devastated.

“It’s not that deep, you deserved to be in your trip without stress.”

“You’re right, I’m glad I got to enjoy my vacation. I’m going to show you all the pictures, let me go and greet your mother first. Is she sleeping?”

“No, she’s sewing,” Mkhuleko says.

She rolls her eyes, they both laugh.

Yoli is stuffing her face with marshmallows while Mkhuleko cuts the chicken and distributes it on plates. It’s been a long week of beans, cabbage and tasteless potato curry. He takes a Coke break, Yoli is watching him. They’ve been best friends the whole week but Yoli is ready to call it quits.

“That’s my mother’s cold drink,” she points out.

“Yes and I’m drinking it,” he says and pours more Coke.

“I will tell her you’re finishing it,” Yoli says.

He's a good uncle to both Yoli and Aphelele. He generally loves kids. But sometimes they're annoying, especially Yoli when she sees her mother.

"Sweetheart go and take sweets from strangers on the main road," he advises Yoli.

Yoli's thin brows furrow, "But mommy said I mustn't take sweets from strangers."

"Isdala leso, your mother is old, good kids take sweets from strangers," he says and goes back to the chicken. He's done everyone's plate, now it's time to sit and feast.

Yoli has ran to her grandmother's bedroom, she's looking for her shoes.

"Ayy Yoli, can't you see that elders are talking?" MaVilakazi says, irritated. She's busy hearing all the good things her son did for his sister and this child is running around looking for God knows what.

"What are you looking for?" Nombuso asks.

"My shoes, malume said I can go and take sweets from strangers on the road."

"What? Is Mkhuleko crazy?" Nombuso stands and drags her black pumps out of MaVilakazi's bedroom.

MaVilakazi follows behind, she's already exhausted before they even start.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 91

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I had to come home two days before the Mcinekas come. My father knows me more than anyone in this world, it didn't take him a day to notice that something wasn't right. He sat me down and asked. I wanted to lie, I didn't want to ruin Bonga's name, even though we have a criminal at home Nyambose is still allergic to crime. I already knew the disappointment I was bringing to him. People want to know who made me pregnant and where he is. To make matters worse, the Mcinekas aren't just here to pay inhlawulo, they've asked for my hand in marriage as well.

Now we are having an immediate family meeting; Nyambose, Mam' Zonke, Bab' Thwala and Njabulo.

"There's no guarantee that he will be released, they're yet to have a court hearing," Nyambose says. The fondness he had of Bonga is over. It doesn't help that police are treating him like a hardcore criminal who is a threat to the community, keeping him in a cell before his hearing.

"He has money, he will come out," Njabulo says.

He's been very supportive, he's the first person I told and didn't get judgment from.

Nyambose shakes his head, "No, I can't allow this to happen. I cannot give my daughter to a boy who is behind bars."

"He's not behind bars," I say.

"Where is he? Do you see him or you're only seeing his brother and uncles?"

My face drops. Is it crazy that I believe he's going to come home and we will live happily ever after?

"I agree with you, Nyambose. You cannot accept this proposal," Bab' Thwala says, he's Nyambose's best friend. "It's enough that she's already tied to this family through pregnancy. What if

you accept their cows then their son gets sentenced to life in prison? You will be indebted to them forever.”

Okay, they have to know.

I take it out from my pocket.

“I already accepted Bonga’s proposal,” I show them the ring.

The silence! You can hear a pin drop.

“It was before the police came, he’d already made plans of sending his uncles and marrying me after I give birth,” I say.

“And the ring?” Njabulo asks.

“He proposed with it.”

“No, I’m asking how much is it worth. Is it a real diamond?”

“I’m not going to sell it,” I say.

He must not even think about taking it and selling it behind my back.

“Who blessed that ring? What gave him the right to put a ring on your finger?” Nyambose is angry. I knew he wouldn’t understand the ring proposal, it’s not our thing this side.

“It’s a western thing, he was just being romantic, he wasn’t disrespecting you. What I’m trying to say is that I love Bonga, I have hope that he’s going to come out, so I’m saying yes to his uncles,” I say.

Nyambose wants to oppose but Mam’ Zonke brushes her hand over his arm, I see him taking a deep breath.

“If it happens that he doesn’t come out, what then? Do you know that his family will forever have a hold over you, you won’t even be able to move on and be with someone else unless you pay them back everything?” Bab’ Thwala.

I know I’m taking a risk, maybe that’s why they say love is blind.

“I will see when I cross that bridge,” I say.

My father releases a sigh...there's literally nothing anyone can say to change my mind. They have to go back to the Mcinekas and name their price.

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My phone rings, I don't recognize the number.

I answer thinking it's Bonga. We've spoken on the phone a few times, I haven't told him that I've moved back home permanently. I hired a bakkie and had everything brought home. There's no need for me to stay emjondolo, I'm no longer working, I'm pregnant. Maybe I didn't make the smartest choices in life. If I wasn't this grown Nyambose could've taken a belt and given me a few lashes.

“How are you Ms Miyanda?” the person asks, sounding very formal.

“I'm okay, thank you.” I will wait for him to introducing himself.

“I'm Sihle from Shaun Florist with your delivery. May I kindly have the directions from the primary school after the tar road?”

I have a flower delivery? God let this not be one of my ex's trying to ruin my day.

“Okay, come straight until you reach a church building then take right, drive straight for about five minutes then ask anyone you see on the road to show you kubo kwaMiyanda olotsholwayo.”

“Okay thank you, I will call if I need more help,” he drops the call.

I'm anxious to find out where the special delivery came from.

The negotiations are continuing, I'm sure Nyambose is giving the Mcinekas a hard time, he's against this. The cow has been slaughtered outside the yard, I'm not allowed to eat its meat, Mam' Zonke took it upon herself to buy me a tray of red meat from Chester yesterday. She's not all over my face but she's definitely worming her way into my heart.

Sihle from Shaun Florist arrives, I make my way to the company car outside. We exchange greetings, then he tells me the delivery is from Malibongwe Mcineka. I don't know how he's able to make flower purchases but this is definitely something I needed. My tummy is filled with butterflies, I don't regret Bonga, with all his imperfections and crimes. He's the hill I'm willing to die on.

Sihle takes another parcel from the car. "This one isn't from our company, he asked for a favor and gave a little something to break my company rules."

Man was bribed and he's not ashamed to admit it.

It's a box of assorted biscuits, it's like he knew that I've returned to my village and there are shops around where I can feed my sweet cravings. I get back inside the yard with my bouquet of flowers and box of goodies.

"Where did that come from?" Mam' Zonke asks.

"It was brought by a delivery company." I'm still blushing, Bonga is my king.

"Wow, siyakubongela ntombi," she says.

I avoid passing through the crowd that's camping for meat and go straight to my room. Now I miss talking to him, I want to talk to him and tell him how crazy today was and how happy I am about the flowers. But I can't reach him, I have to wait until he calls.

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MPATHO

He proposed they work together to get Malibongwe out to prove his innocence. But it's harder than he thought, especially when they have to travel together. Everything is off, they don't talk unless they have to.

Today is hopefully the last day. He's picking him and MaVilakazi, they're going to attend the court hearing. He's confident, there's no evidence that Malibongwe killed Nomusa. Even caller who gave the police information is not coming forward to testify.

MaVilakazi sits at the front, Sphakamiso is behind.

"How is makoti?" MaVilakazi asks after greeting. Sphakamiso didn't bother, he's on his phone.

"She's fine," he says.

"Who do you leave her with when you're not home? A pregnant woman always need someone by her side," MaVilakazi again.

"We have a helper. Who is looking after Miyanda?"

"She has her family," she says.

Sphakamiso raises his head, "It's her father and cousin, both males."

There's a moment of silence.

"Malibongwe is coming out today, he will be with her, after all they were staying together." She's still not fond of Miyanda but she's accepted that getting rid of her won't be easy. What angers her the most is how she made Malibongwe behave shortly after he asked her out. But she overreacted, she wishes

she can undo what she did. She's been praying every night that God is keeping him warm in those cold cells.

"Do you know the gender?" she asks Mpatho.

She wants to be a good grandmother and make up for the past.

"We want to know when he or she arrives," he says.

"Oh, I heard that Malibongwe is having a boy," she says.

Sphakamiso at the back frowns, "Who told you?"

"I heard it from Mkhuleko, I don't know if it was one of his stories. If makoti gets a boy too they'll be like twins," she says.

Mpatho doesn't say anything. He's not bothered by the baby's gender, whatever he gets will make him a father. He's working on himself as a husband, things aren't perfect but there's been some peace ever since he decided to withdraw from arguing and pointing out things that aren't right in their marriage.

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PHUMELELE

I just got a call from Mpatho giving me 'the good news'.

Malibongwe is in his shop right now, he's no longer a suspect in Aunt Nomusa's murder case. There's no enough evidence, he's walked out free, Aunt Nomusa is six feet underground. It's not fair but I have to understand because Mpatho is not a saint too. So Aunt Nomusa took a bullet for him, she's still being sacrificed to keep peace between the two of them. Sphakamiso vowed to take Mpatho down if Malibongwe goes to jail. I cannot fault him for saying that, in his perspective that's the right thing to do.

I'm not happy but I have to live with it.

Sis' Theh is in the kitchen, I join her and sit on the chair.

"I'm craving vanilla cake," I say and unlock my phone to see if I can contact anyone.

"There's one in the fridge but it looks like chocolate," she says.

I don't remember buying it. I check the fridge, there's a cake, Mpatho must've baked it. My heart melts, I don't care that it's not vanilla, just that he baked it. For this he's getting the sex he wants before the end of this week. Ntombi advised that I clean my stomach during the day and have water based lubricant. I will give it a chance, if I don't like it then he'd have to make peace with the my hand, cookie and mouth.

My phone rings again, this time it's Aunt Brandi.

"Long time!" I answer.

"How are you doing my child?"

I take my slice of cake and go to the lounge.

"I'm fine aunty," I say.

"Are you still treating your husband right?"

"Is he treating me right should be your concern. Anyway we are fine, how is yours treating you?"

"Ayy it's not good, I'm not going to lie," she says.

I'm not surprised, Mzimela made me on her wedding night, that was 24 years ago, he's not going to change in his 100s.

"Is he beating you again?" I ask.

"He's inviting his girlfriend to our home when I'm not here. This thing is embarrassing, everyone is talking about me behind my back," she sounds really broken.

“He’s not going to change, grandma’s house is still there, you can always take your children and go back home,” I say.

“No, I’m married.”

So she just wants to stress me for nothing.

“Why are you telling me pho?” I ask.

“I need you to borrow me some money, I was referred to by another friend of mine to someone who can tame him for me,” she says.

“Tame him with muthi?” Just when I thought I’ve heard it all!

“Something like that,” she says.

I don’t judge anyone, each to their own. But I always wonder how people get happy receiving fake love and treatment they had to use muthi to receive.

“How much?” I ask.

“R600,” she says.

“Okay, I will send it.”

I roll my eyes after the call.

Mpatho texts me saying he’s at Malibongwe’s shop, there’s some things they’re still sorting out. I think they’re celebrating, not sorting out anything. I wonder if Sphakamiso is still with them and how the mood is. It’s cold, Mpatho left in a golf T-shirt, he’s freezing where he is.

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MPATHO

It's Malibongwe's lawyer that looks like a thug, himself and the two brothers. He wasn't interested in 'having drinks' coming from the court. Things are awkward between him and Sphakamiso. But Mavuso, the lawyer, insisted. They bought meat at the taxi rank and loaded drinks, now two Unified workers have joined them.

"Have you called Sis' Miyanda?" Sphakamiso asks.

"No, I will go and see her face to face tomorrow morning."

"What about her father?" -Sphakamiso.

"I will take the punches, I know I stressed his daughter and disappointed him. I just want to see the mother of my child and tell her how sorry I am for the stress I've given her," Malibongwe says .

"She's not mad at you, she just misses you. I sent her flowers and a box of biscuits and pretended like it was you," Sphakamiso confesses.

"You could've told her it was you," -Malibongwe.

"No, I wanted her to be happy. I knew her family was going to be hard on her for accepting your marriage proposal," he says.

"Thanks bafo, you held it down for me." He stands up, they bump fists and hug.

Mpatho watches with his glass of fruit juice, today is not the day for him to drink any alcohol. He probably won't ever have a relationship with them, at least not this genuine and close one. MaVilakazi deprived him of having siblings, just like his father denied him siblingship with Phume. He was meant to be isolated. He's not having any of these small talks, he's just here out of respect.

"So wena mbhemu you're not going to apologize for accusing me of having Malibongwe arrested?" he asks Sphakamiso.

Despite being sick, in whatever way that he is, he's still puffing cigarettes.

"No," Sphakamiso says.

"But you heard that the caller was a woman."

"I don't care Mpatho, I will never apologize to you for anything."

Malibongwe takes a beer and stands between them.

"Let's not do this today, I just got out of Robben Island," he says.

"I'm not fighting, I just want to know what he has to say now that he knows that he was talking kak," -Mpatho.

"Kak is what's in your big head," Sphakamiso says.

This is turning uglier.

"Please bafethu," Malibongwe begs.

"Warn him," -Mpatho.

"But you're older than him, let it go."

"Is this a gang-up?" -Mpatho.

"Can we talk at the side?" It's getting dramatic, there are other people with him.

Mpatho refuses to step outside with him, there's nothing he's going to say except that if Sphakamiso keeps running his mouth he will get his three ribs broken.

Malibongwe taps his shoulder, "Relax bafo."

Being called bafo feels weird, not in a bad way. He remains on his seat and tries to relax. Malibongwe walks his lawyer out as he leaves them to what they call a celebration.

He's having a few words with Mavuso, Phume's car pulls up in front of Unified. She steps out in tight white pants, long fur coat and leather boots. They haven't been on good terms ever since she broke up with Sphakamiso, the encounters they've had were all terrible. Now she must be hating him for killing their helper whom she was close to.

"Sanibona," she greets them. There's a folded black jacket over her arm.

"Hi Phume, how are you?"

"I'm fine. Congratulations on your victory."

It's fake but he smiles. "Thank you, you look like someone from overseas. "

"If people from overseas are beautiful, then thanks. Is Mpatho inside here?"

"Yes, he's with a girl." Just for peace.

She chuckles, she's not bothered, cheating is hardly something she can worry about. She's not going to beat Mpatho, something Malibongwe badly wanted to see. She enters the shop, looking at it from the outside you'd think not much has been done. The place looks ready for business just after a week of Sphakamiso holding the reigns.

She didn't tell Mpatho that she's coming. He's sitting with a glass of juice in his hand. It doesn't look like he's having fun here. Well, well, Sphakamiso is still here as well. When Mpatho sees her walking in he panics. It can't be three of them in one place, especially because there are other people around. He doesn't want people seeing his insecurities and that Sphakamiso's presence shakes his marriage.

Phume greets, before her eyes go anywhere else they run to Sphakamiso. His heart breaks, this is going to be

embarrassing, Sphakamiso will know that she's not with him but she will forever be his.

"Hey," she turns her eyes to Mpatho.

"Why did you leave your jacket behind?"

He shrugs, "It wasn't cold in the morning."

She rolls her eyes and puts the jacket over his shoulder.

"You have a smartphone, that's where the weather is," she says and wraps her arm around his shoulder. A kiss he didn't expect lands on his cheek. "You look bored as a fuck, come home," she whispers in his ear and then turns around and leaves.

She's leaving a grin stuck on his face. This is all he's ever wanted from her.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 92

MALIBONGWE

MaVilakazi calls them for breakfast, they all have bowls of hot porridge except him because he doesn't like porridge. She woke up by dawn and steamed bread for him. It feels good to be home but he's in a hurry, before the sun goes up he has to be at the Mthethwas.

"Your uncle said he's asked for a meeting with Nkosiyazi, they will be doing his ceremony on Wednesday," MaVilakazi says.

Sphakamiso clears his throat, "I'm going to see my son on Wednesday."

"But you all have to be there," -MaVilakazi.

“I’m going to see my son,” he says, his word is final.

MaVilakazi looks disappointed, but maybe it’s too soon for her to expect them to warm up to Mpatho as a brother.

“I’d like to bring Miyanda with us,” Malibongwe says.

Silence....

“She’s my fiance now, not just a girlfriend,” he says, looking at his mother.

MaVilakazi forces a smile, “She’s welcome to come and meet your cousins and her sister-wife.”

“And Ruby,” Mkhuleko adds.

Everyone laughs except Nombuso, she’s not mentally present on this table. It’s a good thing that she’s distracted, they are enjoying breakfast without any arguments.

“When is your shop starting to bring money in?” Mkhuleko asks.

“When you go and fit your overall and start working,” Malibongwe says.

“But I’m 21!” he’s shocked.

“Your peers are working. It’s either that or you go back to school and rewrite your matric.”

This is getting serious, he was just kidding.

“I’m not going back to school, I will fail anyway. How do I apply for a position that doesn’t need me to wear overalls?” he asks.

MaVilakazi gives him a look, “Just go and help your brothers. You and Ruby have to eat and nobody is going to provide for you forever.”

“I will go after April,” he says and laughs.

They know they can’t force him to do anything once he’s set his mind on not doing it.

“I have to get ready and go to the Mthethwas,” Malibongwe stands up and stretches his arms. Miyanda moved out of her rented room, his house is still not ready. He’s not happy about it because it means he has to stay at home with his family. It’s chaotic at home, this little peace this morning won’t last even three hours. He doesn’t want to be depressed, he wants to love his family from a distance.

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He’s scared, Nyambose will ask questions, but he’s got to do this. He’s got to apologize to Nyambose and mostly, Miyanda. He parks at the side of the road and calls Miyanda. She’s not picking up, after three attempts he stops and finds a tree shade to stand under. He can see her walking on the yard, clearly she left her phone somewhere.

There’s a little boy passing on the street. He checks his pockets for coins and then calls the boy. He asks the boy to go and tell Miyanda that there’s a guy with a car looking for her. It doesn’t take long after the boy got inside the Mthethwas, his phone rings.

It’s her, his heart smiles.

“Hey, is that you?” she asks.

“Yes, it’s me sthandwa sami, I’m outside.”

“Bonga don't lie!” She stands outside the door with her phone against her ear.

Why is he smiling like a fool?

She wastes no time coming to where he is. If her father is home he won't be happy about them standing under the trees. She stands in front of him, biting her lower lip with her eyelashes fluttering rapidly.

"I'm sorry," he says and wraps his arms around her.

Hers are folded, she lets tears roll down. She's strong but that doesn't mean she doesn't hurt.

"I know I stressed you out and embarrassed you to your family." He wipes her tears and lifts her chin up and kisses her on the lips. "How are you and my little peanut?"

"We are fine," she fights back tears and exhales deeply.

"I heard you permanently moved out. What did your father say?"

"He's disappointed Bonga," she says.

"Is he home?" he asks.

"No, he's attending a village meeting with Njabulo. Are you back for good or still being investigated?"

"I'm back for good, for you and my family." He kisses her again.

"I missed you," she says.

"All I thought about was you. But now I'm worried because you are here, hours away from me. We are basically in a long distance relationship, I don't know if I'm going to cope without you close to me."

"I needed my family, otherwise I was going to drown in depression," she says.

"Let's go to the car, I want to kiss you." He grabs her hand and leads her down where he parked the car.

It's so weird seeing each other like this, with limited time and no good privacy. All the months that they've been in a relationship they've been together, sharing everything.

"Next month we are opening, I don't know if you still want the job," he says. He's hoping she will say no, she's already five months pregnant, in four months time she will have a baby to look after.

"I want the job, you promised that you'd let me work after giving birth," she says, giving him a narrowed look.

"6 months after giving birth?"

"Bonga don't piss me off," she says.

He sighs heavily, "Fine. Are you free next Wednesday? My mother wants you to go to the Vilakazis with us for Mpatho's ceremony."

"Your mother?" she chuckles and looks away.

"Trust me, she's remorseful about everything that she did to you. Yesterday we talked about you, she doesn't have any ill feelings towards you, she's even excited about the baby."

"What has possibly changed her opinion about me?" Miyanda asks.

"Because everyone has seen how genuine and beautiful your heart is." He grabs her face and kisses her, deeper this time. They moan at each other as their lips and tongues collide in a steamy kiss.

"Did you take care of yourself for me?" he asks, whispering.

She blushes, dropping her eyes, "Of course."

"When am I going to see you properly and show you how much I missed you?"

“When we go to that Vilakazi ceremony,” she says, her lips quivering.

He caresses her cheek, flashing his dimpled smile at her.

“You’re going to let me show you kamnandi, angithi?”

Her chest feels so tight, this man is doing too much, she needs to get a grip before her panty turns moist.

“Stop being horny. You didn’t bring me anything?” She looks around the car and spots a Checkers shopping bag. What’s in here? She opens and takes a packet of potato chips.

“Why didn’t you bring me gizzards?” she asks with her mouth full.

“I couldn’t buy gizzards and drive two hours with them. But I bought raw ones and hopefully with the right sauces,” he says.

“Mustard? Hot sauce?”

“Both,” he says.

No doubt, he is the one!

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NOMBUSO

She’s been anxious since morning after receiving a call from Mapholoba. He said he wants to see her today, she said no with her full chest. He said, “I will see you today ntofontofo,” then dropped the call. That was a promise and she knows that he’s going to come.

She took a bath right after the call and wore her white shirt dress and elegantly tied her headwrap. Bad dress choice for

someone who's mothering a 4 year old. She's been shouting at Yoli all morning.

Even now she just got back from her mud houses outside, she wants to sit on her lap.

"Can't you see I'm wearing a white dress?"

Mkhuleko looks up, he's going to open his loose mouth like he always does.

"Why are you wearing a white dress just to sit at home and tell everyone not to touch you?" Yeap, he opens his big mouth everywhere.

"You can't tell me what to wear," she gives him a glare.

Isn't he the most annoying?

"You have a child," he says and calls Yoli to come and sit on his lap instead.

Nombuso checks her phone that just rang, she doesn't answer it in front of them. She walks out and answers outside the door.

It's Mapholoba.

"What do you want?" she asks.

"I want to see you, if you step out of the house and look behind you will see my car."

Holy crap!

"I said don't come, I don't want to see you Mnelisi." Right now calling him Mapholoba would sound like an honor. She prepared herself, just in case he comes, but she was hoping for the opposite.

"I drove all the way from Inkandla, have some sympathy," he begs.

Ay, cha! She takes a deep breath and then lowers her voice. "I'm coming, but only for five minutes. If you ever pull a stunt like this again I will chase you away with Ruby, she's a pitbull."

"Noma ngingadliwa yi-pitbull MaMcinika, uma lingidlela uthando lwakho nje akunankinga." (if the pitbull bites me because of the love I have for you then it doesn't matter) He has a smooth tongue, he'd say anything to sound like a Romeo who just met his Juliet.

Nombuso drops the call and returns inside the house. Mkhuleko is playing with Yoli on the couch. This should be easy; she will sneak out, they won't notice that she's not in the house for five minutes. But she needs to check the mirror and lotion her hands, just in case he wants to touch her hands again.

"Mama where are you going?" the little voice startles her.

Whose child is this?

Oh, hers.

"I'm going to buy bread and sugar-sugar for you," she says.

Yoli jumps in excitement and informs her uncle that her mother is going to the shop and she's getting sugar-sugar.

Mkhuleko looks at her swiping roll-on under her armpits while staring at her reflection in the mirror. Something has been off since morning. No offence, but Nombuso woke up and decided to bath early in the morning and put on a new dress.

"Yoli, we are going with mama, put your shoes on."

In hell they are! She grabs back Yoli as she attempts to run to her shoes.

"No, you two have to stay here just in case MaVilakazi wants to send you for something," she says.

"Gogo is sleeping," Yoli argues.

This is all Mkhuleko's fault.

"I'm going to start at the Mbuthus where there's a big dog that bite Luyanda last month. I'm sure my baby doesn't want to have her leg eaten by a dog. Do you want to have one leg?"

"That dog died," -Mkhuleko.

Deep breath, Nombuso.

"I'm going to meet with someone, a friend that I don't want Yoli to meet yet. Stop encouraging her to cry for me." The fact that she has to explain herself to a 21 year old proves how less respected she is in this house.

"Do I know the friend?"

Lord have mercy. Or just fetch this child.

"None of your business," she says.

"But you want me to look after your child and you're not even promising me anything from the shop."

Another deep breath!

"Okay, what do you want?" she asks.

"R12 airtime," he says with a grin spreading on his face.

One slap can wipe it off. But she doesn't have much of choice, it's either Yoli cries and wants to tag along then come back and spread her business everywhere, or she buys R12 airtime. Stokvel money will definitely be short if she doesn't watch out.

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He's in a parked red Polo, dressed in blacks, it surely is his favorite color now. He gets out of the car when she closely

approaches with an irritated but well-glammed face. She looks good in her knee-length dress, showing her thick legs. He opens the door for her.

She folds her arms, "I'm not getting inside."

"We are not going far, I just don't want to disrespect your family and neighbors."

He makes sense but....

"No," she puts down her foot.

"Fine, we'll just sit inside and talk for five minutes."

Sounds better. She gets inside, he closes the door and returns to his seat.

And now? Why is he starting the car?

"Yey..."

He's driving off. Is this a kidnap?

He stops five houses away, parking at the side of the road.

"See, I'm safe from your brothers here," he says, smiling like he didn't just kidnap her.

"You kidnapped me," she's angry. She's always an angry bee, it doesn't affect him anymore.

"If I did we'd be on our way to Inkandla. I only want us to talk, I think you already know what my heart desires," he's looking at her.

"I already told you that I don't love you," she shrugs and looks outside the window.

"I know but I don't believe you." He's so foolishly stubborn.

How can he not believe her own words?

“So I will not leave you alone until I believe that you really don’t love me,” he says.

She frowns, this is confusing.

“I will keep coming here, the best thing is that Mshazi and I are no longer in business together, I don’t have to tiptoe around,” he says, very boldly.

“How do I make you believe that I don’t love you?” Whatever he says, she will do it.

He smiles, this is exactly what he wanted to hear.

“Have a date with me, just one,” he says.

No, this is a trap!

She shakes her head, “You think you’re smart. I’ve been around, I know men like you. When I come to that date you will have new conditions. I’m not going to dance to your tune, never!”

“I won’t have new conditions. If you believe in yourself and what you’re saying about not loving me then you will come and prove it to me,” he says.

She’s seen it all but not this. He’s a big bully.

“I’m not attracted to unemployed people,” she says.

That sends him to a fit of laughter. He didn’t resign, he switched places, and even if he did it would’ve been very twisted of her to turn him down based on it.

“Your five minutes is up, take me back where you took me,” she says.

“Ntofo,”

“Who is Ntofo?”

“Listen to what I want to say first...” She takes a deep breath and looks at him.

He continues; “Thank you for coming to see me and looking this beautiful.”

She clears her throat and looks away. She didn’t dress up for him, she just wanted to look good.

“How is Yoliswa?” he asks.

He’s distracting her and it’s working because now she’s smiling and narrating how Yoli wanted to tag along because of her youngest spoilt-brat of a brother.

“So you owe them sweets and airtime for being here?” He thinks it’s funny. He’s old-school, he didn’t come to see her empty handed. She can turn it down though, with her you never know.

“What is this?” she asks.

“Izinto ezintofontofo.”

Right? She’s giving him a cold glare.

“I’m kidding, it’s just sweets, I know women love-,” Eating, but he just realized that he can’t say the word because it can go sideways.

“Being fat doesn’t mean I want to binge in all this,” she says looking at the bag full of chocolate bars, marshmallows and biscuits. Looks yummy though.

“You will them to Yoliswa if you don’t want them, tell her usenoMalume kaSwidi,” he’s poking her on purpose.

She doesn’t react the way he thought, she just closes the bag and thanks him.

“So, weekend?” he asks.

“You said one date, not the whole weekend.” He always tries to trap her with every question, not knowing that she actually came in the 26th place in Standard 9 before she called it quits.

“That’s what I mean. Saturday evening?” he asks, rephrasing his question.

“Fine, we will talk over the phone. Take me back before they worry at home,” she says.

As much as she’s not into the idea of dating because of her fears and insecurities, it does feel good to have someone noticing her and pestering her with his love. On Saturday she will prove to him how much she doesn’t love him, however he wants her to prove. No matter how flattering this makes her feel she can’t open herself to a relationship with a man who doesn’t know her struggles with her emotions, body and sexual engagement.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 93

PHUMELELE

It’s been a while since I last saw Beauty’s crush, Maps. I intend to ask why he’s no longer around from his employer. Not that I need a bodyguard, life has been good without him. I think he took his job way too seriously, maybe he’s used to guarding politicians and other high-profiled people. I didn’t like him, I’m glad he’s gone, because he didn’t listen or care what I wanted as long as Mpatho instructed him to do something. He’s the type that don’t care about women’s voice, that’s why I ended up spraying doom on his face and getting a scolding from Mpatho.

Anyway, today is the day. I cleaned my stomach during the day, Ntombi recommended a few glasses of wine, she said the baby will be okay. But that’s just her nature, not mine. I don’t take risks, so I’m having my anal penetrated while I’m sober. From what I’ve read it hurts more than hymen breaking. But I’ve made up my mind, I will tell him to stop if it gets unbearable.

I'm wearing my silky pyjamas waiting for him to come home. I hear a car pulling up outside the house. I'm excited more than I'm nervous. I'm excited for him because I know for him the more adventurous, the more pleasure. I gave a blowjob a shot, now I enjoy giving him one when I feel like he deserves it. He hasn't been an asshole for three days, he comes home and helps me with dinner and bakes for me. That deserves a reward, I can put my hair down for him and let him 'explore' my body as he wants.

I hear the door opening, that's my husband. I hope he bought me something spicy on his way home.

"Bonjour!"

Wtf! Beauty?

She's wearing a sun hat, long floral dress and sandals. Dragging her Louis Vuitton bags, looking like a divorced real housewife of a foreign land.

"You're back," I'm quite shocked.

I thought she'd buy a house and live wherever she's been forever.

"Back in my house, darling. You don't look good, your nose is two times bigger."

Oh wow, that's good to know.

"And you look fat," she adds.

"I'm pregnant, Beauty." I had forgotten how toxic the environment I call a home is. This is like a kick back to reality.

"Right, I got you a present."

God protect me against all evil!

"What present," I ask.

“It’s a purse, I bought it in dollars.” Of course, it wasn’t going to be in Rands.

“But let me settle in before I show you, come,” she says, passing me one bad.

Now I have to help her with the bags. I must say her skin looks good, the vacation must’ve been good.

She takes out her sandals and sits on the bed.

“They were 12 dollars,” she says.

It looks like her new obsession is the word “dollars”.

“They’re cute. Where’s my present?” That’s the only reason I’m still in this bedroom, I have anal sex to prepare for.

“Wait, I heard that you’ve never set your foot at the dealership.”

“You assaulted my husband, Beauty.” Has she forgotten how she left?

She attacked Mpatho with her cousin, there’s no way I was going to wake up and go look after her business. She wasn’t even paying me.

“So what? I was beating him for his crimes. Do you know that he slept with Noxolo?”

She’s back with her bullshit again.

“He paid her for her services, there was no sex involved.” I don’t know why she’s always stirring things against him. Even though most turned out to be true, but this particular one I know didn’t happen.

“He’s wicked and he’s a pervert. He wanted my sister to help him orchestrate my murder. What have I done to him that he hasn’t done to others?” She’s asking the wrong person.

I wasn't there when Noxolo and him made plans. Did I tell him it was wrong? Yes, I told him that Beauty is family, whatever happens blood doesn't need to be spilled.

"Do I get the present or not?" I ask.

She opens the bag and takes it out. It's a round, black purse. I love it.

"This is gorgeous, thanks," I say admiring it.

"It was 51 dollars but I will give you for R880."

What the fuck! Does she know the meaning of present? And why does she make it sound like 51 dollars is not equal to R880?

"I'm not going to buy a purse from you? If it's not a gift then take it back."

"Are you broke? Is he still controlling your money?" She's laughing.

Broke and my name shouldn't be in one sentence, not at this present moment.

"You both co-own Mshazi Enterprises, right? And the properties you're all renting out? Do you know how much money comes in and goes out a month?"

"I get my fair share, I don't need to know everything."

"How do you know it's fair?"

Seriously, I'm not having this conversation, she can have her purse back.

"Why are you walking out?" she asks like she doesn't know that she's annoying.

"I'm telling you to not open only your legs, but your eyes as well. You never request any report and account from him

because he's good in bed, now you think the only thing he can do behind your back is dogging you."

I close the door, leaving her talking to herself. I need to have a glass of warm milk and calm my tits down before Mpatho comes home. I don't want Beauty to take us back to a place we've fought so hard to come out from.

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Mpatho has his own priorities before this marriage, that's why I'm not pushing for us to move out. But now that Beauty has come back I'm wondering how long we are going to live like this. He arrives, I'm no longer hype.

"Mmmm, someone has been waiting." He wraps his arm around my waist and looks at the cleavage I popped out intentionally. I was trying to be sexy, but Beauty is here we can't be free and do everything we want.

"Your grandmother is home," I tell him.

He removes his face from my neck and looks at me, eyebrow raised.

"Beauty?" he asks.

"Yeap, and she's already started with bullshit."

I don't swallow my words before she appears singing coming from her bedroom.

"What's for dinner?"

Mpatho turn and looks at her. They hold each other's stare...ex-fuckbuddies.

I clear my throat to get back his attention.

He briefly looks at me before turning back to her.

“Where’s your cousin?” he asks.

Beauty flips her hair and folds her arms. She ain’t scared of Mr Muscles.

“Do you want to hook up with her?” she asks.

Nothing grits my tits like her trying to make me insecure.

“I want to know what made you two think you can put your hands on me.”

“You want to kill me, Phume is not doing anything about it. You had a PI on my back, and you bribed my sister, turning her against me. And you’re here complaining about the scratches we gave you.”

I have to say something, I don’t know how many times I have to tell her I’m not supporting what Mpatho wanted to do.

“I told him not to kill you,” I defend myself.

She looks at me with disbelief and sympathy.

“You make that sound so normal Phume. What is wrong with you? Your so-called husband wanted to kill a woman and you’re holding his hand saying, with pride, that you told him not to do it. It’s murder, attempted murder!”

Since when is having someone followed an attempted murder? He didn’t kill her, that’s the bottom line.

“You killed my grandfather,” Mpatho says.

I nod, “Exactly! You’re not different from him, can we move on?”

“Hhayi-bo, I didn’t kill that grandpa. What weapon did I use?”

That grandpa? It was her fuckin’ husband for crying out loud.

“Your actions led him to death,” Mpatho says.

“I concur with my husband.” This woman and Malibongwe drove mkhulu to death.

“Your husband who killed your mother?”

What?!

She looks at Mpatho, “Natural death, right? Just like my miscarriage that was natural. Your father’s death that was natural. Must I continue?”

What is she talking about? I look at Mpatho, why is he not mad?

“What are you talking about?” I’m trying to make sense all of this.

“She’s lying,” he finally says.

“Then why her mother died a month after raising concerns about her husband’s natural death?”

“I didn’t even know she had concerns and I don’t care what you say. I wanted us to make peace but clearly you’re the same old Beauty.” He turns to me, “Let’s go to our room.”

I follow him, I know Beauty will call me stupid for it.

We get inside the bedroom, I close the door.

Now, the truth!

“Did you kill them?” I ask.

“Phume, how can you believe...”

“Yes or no,” I say.

“I wouldn’t kill my own father, my blood. That should tell you that she’s crazy.”

“But you killed her baby, maybe it was your little uncle, your blood.”

“Mkhulu was no longer able to make babies. It wasn't his.”

Maybe I'm endorsing the devil, he knows he can look at me in the eyes and admit to murder and I will understand, as long as the victim isn't related to us.

“But you had a motive to kill them, they had done things to you.”

“I have a motive to kill a lot of people but I don't,” he says.

“Am I on the list?” I have to know.

“Wow, so I'm a serial killer now?”

I need to take a deep breath and calm down. There's no proof, just Beauty's word, I don't have to let her get to me again.

“We are going to eat here,” I say.

“No, we will go to the dining room. Beauty's hatred will not hold me hostage in my own home. I'm not going to let her do what was done to me by your mother. I'm not going to be scared and hide in the bedroom.” He takes off his blazer and throws it on the bed, and unbuckles his belt. He's angry at me for triggering him, not at Beauty for accusing him.

“I don't want to keep hearing things about you. Beauty thinks I'm stupid, even me not keeping tabs with our finances and sitting at home waiting for you to come home, she uses that to insult me.” He won't understand, everything he does is used to torture me. I have feelings, I'm human.

“You can wake up tomorrow and go to the office and check everything, if Beauty is that important to you. I have nothing to hide in the bedroom for, I'm too old and too wise to let another woman abuse me. I'm not everyone's cup of tea, especially women who are supposed to be family to me. As long as you love me, I'm good.”

“Okay, I will set the table,” I need to give him space.

I walk out, leaving him undressing and getting ready for a shower. We are going to sit on the table with Beauty. I know she will say things and I will be sad and questioning Mpatho again.

I didn't cook everything by myself but there's no lawsuit I can get for claiming that I made everything by myself, from scratch. I set the table, luckily there's enough food for three people.

"Need help?" Gog' tshitshi comes in.

"No, I'm almost done," I say.

"Mpatho has groomed you to be domestic and evil. I believed in you, I thought you had a strong character." She's at it again. I don't agree with what she's saying, the same way she accepted Mvimbeni's perverted ways, is the same way I accept Mpatho's dark nature and past.

"Do you really want to keep fighting with him knowing very well what he's capable of?" I ask.

"One thing about me Phume, I'm not scared of the things I don't know. I've never died before, so I cannot be threatened with death," she says. Right after disappearing with no trace because Mpatho wanted to kill her.

"Is it hard for you to forgive him for whatever he did to you? At some point we need to reconcile and move forward as a family. You're mkhulu's wife, this is your house and a home to us. Clearly you're not going anywhere, neither is Mpatho, and neither am I divorcing him. It's a no-win situation for everyone."

"He must say sorry first, he attempted murder on me," she won't let this term rest.

"Okay, I will talk to him, please don't poison the food," I say before walking away.

“Wow, Phume!” She’s offended, like it’s not something she’s capable of.

I wait for him to come out of the shower. He puts his shorts and T-shirt on, then stands in front of the mirror brushing his beard. His energy is already off.

“Beauty wants you to apologize for what you did. Please do it, for peace sake,” I say.

He doesn’t say anything.

I wait...still he’s focused on his beard.

“Dinner is ready, you will find me on the table.” My heart is broken as I walk out. I just want peace, I’m not on Beauty’s side. We have bigger things to focus on than beefing with Beauty. Beauty can drag this for ten years, she will keep coming for him. One has to take a step down, we can’t continue like this.

My phone rings just as I sit on the table. It’s Aunt Brandi.

I answer, “Aunty.”

“Phume, I killed him.”

My heart stops beating for a second. But I have to act normal, I don’t want to panic and make her do something crazy.

“Who?” I ask, my voice lowered.

“Mzimela...I didn’t buy love portion with the money.”

I don’t understand, did she change her mind or that was her initial plan?

“Who else knows beside you and I?” I ask.

“Nobody,” her voice is shaking.

“Is he in the room with you?”

“Yes,”

“Okay, clear the evidence first and then start crying loud and screaming for help.”

I see Beauty coming and tell Aunt Brandi to stick to the plan and drop the call.

Mpatho joins us after a few minutes. My mind is not here, I want to call Aunt Brandi and find out what’s happening.

“Beauty,” Mpatho breaks the silence.

“Oui?” Beauty, she’s sipping a glass of fruit juice.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

It’s soulless, the coldest apology I’ve ever heard.

“For what?” she wants to drag this.

“For not respecting you,” he says. It’s more rehearsed than it is realistic. He should be apologizing for the attempted murder, not disrespecting Beauty because he’s never disrespected her.

Beauty laughs, “It breaks your heart doing this, right? Apologizing on a dinner table?”

His breath deepens. Beauty is provoking him instead of accepting the apology.

“At least you attempted murder on me, you’re not apologizing for disrespect, like you did to her mama,” she says, still laughing.

Mpatho ups and leaves the table. He’s angry.

“You’re doing the same shit again. You said we will move on if he apologizes, why are you mentioning what my mother did to him?”

“Hhayi-bo, he attempted murder on me. Is he going to pay for the purse?”

“Enjoy your dinner!” I’m done.

She laughs behind me.

“Go shorty, it’s your birthday! Go shorty!”

I click my tongue and head to the bedroom. Mpatho is sitting on the bed, he’s justifiably angry.

“I’m sorry about that, I didn’t think she’d turn the situation into a mockery of your childhood,” I say.

“I hate her,” he says.

“Me too.” Not really, I just think Beauty is awful but I don’t hate her.

He sits facing me, he’s calmed down a bit.

“The accusations she made are not true at all,” he says.

My phone rings before I can respond and put him at ease.

It’s Aunt Brandi.

“Aunty tell me what’s going on.”

“We are waiting for the police,” she says.

“Okay, is there anything suspicious?”

“No, he just has blood coming out of his nose.”

“As long as he has no injuries, you have nothing to worry about. Act broken, cry every now and then,” I advise before dropping the call.

Where were we?

“Oh, are we eating here?” I ask.

Why is he looking at me like that?

“What is going on?” he asks.

“Mzimela is dead,” I say.

“Phumelele, what did you do?”

Sigh! I’m not a Mshazi, I don’t kill people, I don’t know why he’s looking at me like that.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 94

PHUMELELE

We had our dinner in the bedroom. He’s still dramatic about the Mzimela incident. I have nothing to worry about, the police have taken his body, Aunt Brandi is an inconsolable widow.

“If they find out that you gave her the money it will look like you are behind all of this?”

He’s pacing up and down in front of me. I don’t know how many times he’s told me that he’s disappointed in me.

He stops, hands on the waist. “Why the fuck did you send her money to perform witchcraft on someone?”

“You gave Nombuso money and sent her on a vacation,” I remind him. It looks like his memory is short at times. How is it not okay for me to look after my relatives but his can even come here with dogs for breakfast?

“Don’t compare apples and oranges. I have never funded something that puts someone’s life in danger.” Says Mpatho Mshazi; wonders shall never end.

He releases a deep sigh, “Okay, maybe I have. But I’m a man, I don’t do things like that unless I’m protecting my family and my legacy. And the fact that you’re acting so normal freaks me out. It’s your father who just died.”

“Sperm donor,” I correct him.

I don't know why he thinks I'm going to cry for Mzimela.

"He abused her, that man was beating Aunt Brandi," I say.

"But killing him, Phume? That's extreme," he says.

"It's not extreme, he had it coming." I don't feel anything for him. I'm not even going to attend the funeral, he attended none of my birthdays.

"So you can kill me too?" he asks.

I don't know how this concerns him but...

"If you abuse me Mpatho, I will make a plan."

"And make me leave my child?"

"If you beat me I can also leave my child, dying from injurie. Hhayi-bo! If you ever put your hand on me make sure that you finish me off because it would be the first and last time. There are men who are still not found today and their wives are helping the police look for them."

His eyes widen. I said it as a joke because he's on my case but his face tells me he took it seriously.

"I don't like this topic, let's sleep." He stands up and goes to switch off the light.

He gets under the covers and puts my leg over his hip. I welcome his cold lips on me and run my hands on his chest as I kiss him back. I was looking forward to a different kind of sex but we'd need time for that, won't we?

"Uright?" he asks grabbing my boob out.

"I was ready for what you asked," I say.

"What did I ask konje?" He's rubbing my nipple. As he presses harder I feel something watery coming out.

"Is this my baby's milk?" he asks, squeezing my nipple harder.

“It’s colostrum,” I say.

“Can I taste it?”

“No,” I don’t want saggy boobs.

He goes back to switch the light on. Is this excitement all for the colostrum?

He sits on his legs and squeezes my boob, applying pressure to get the moist out.

“Nothing is coming out now. Must I suck?”

My baby is going to compete with a father for milk?

“That’s weird and disgusting,” I say.

He doesn’t care, he swipes the tip of his tongue on my nipple and looks at me with a smile. Then he latches on and even rests his big head on my chest. He has 32 teeth, his lips have been everywhere on my body, I’m turned on.

“Stop, you are...” I take a deep breath.

He stops, grinning widely. “What am I doing? Turning you on? You are my wife.”

He brushes my neck and shifts up.

“Why did you wear these sexy pyjamas?”

“For anal sex,” I say.

He frowns, he looks a bit shocked.

“Today?” he asks.

“It was before Beauty arrived, I wanted us to do it.”

“God Phume, you should’ve said something. I was going to buy the material.”

“I have lubricant,” I say.

“Ohhhh?”

He didn't expect that.

"Ntombi told me to buy it." It's weird that I'm giving him details.

"Did you buy butt plug too or you want finger training?" he asks.

"What is that?" I'm confused, thinking of electric plugs being put on my butt.

"Anal toy that we are going to play with to train you. I can't stretch you with my dick before you're ready. I don't want to hurt you," he says.

I feel stupid, I thought we'd get right on it tonight.

"But I'm flattered that you've been planning all day and even wore this for me. We will make time and be away from the house, then you can wear your plug while I'm at work, then we will have fun."

It sounds fun even though I don't really understand everything. But I'm looking forward to it. He kisses my lips and tenderly rubs my nipple.

"But I won't let all of this go to waist," he says.

I laugh, "So we are not sleeping?"

"Not before I give you your first rim job and have you squirting on my face."

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My alarm goes off, I'm late in turning it off he's already woken up. I wanted to surprise him with full breakfast, after last night I'm convinced that even if we had to divorce I'd be coming back to him just for sex.

"Where are you running to?" he asks pulling me back.

“I have to iron your clothes and get your breakfast ready.”

“Huh-uh, come back, I will order something at the office.”

I want to cuddle, trust me, it’s a cold morning.

“But I got to wake up, handsome.” I kiss his forehead twice and slip off his embrace.

“Please don’t put me in formal,” he yawns and sits up.

“Why?” I feel like casual makes him look sexier, which I don’t need in the office. Lord forgive, I read a lot of American romance books.

“I want to look good,” he says.

I turn and look at him...more like glare.

“I’m the only person you need to look good for.”

He smiles, “Yet you sit in the house with your cornrows and wear beautiful wigs when you’re going out.”

Oh that! I hate that he has a point.

But I still have the upper hand, I’m choosing his outfit.

I wash my face and brush my teeth then go to the kitchen to set up for breakfast first. I leave my ingredients on the table and go to Beauty’s grande bedroom. The door is closed but not locked. I knock once, when I get no reply I push it open and walk in.

“Beauty!” I call out her name.

She’s on the floor, not moving. There’s a half bottle of wine, broken glass and one shoe next to her. I notice that she’s still not moving. I feel her pulse, it’s there.

I run out to call Mpatho.

He’s doing his push-ups in the bedroom.

“Come, Beauty is lying on the floor,” I say and turn around, not waiting for him to ask questions.

Beauty fell from the bed, I'm not sure how injured she is, I hope she won't die.

Mpatho walks in after me, he looks around with shock.

"What happened? Is she alive?" He bends down and feels her pulse.

"Let's call the ambulance," I suggest.

"No, go and get the car keys, ambulance will delay." He's trying to sprinkle water on her face, there's no motion from Beauty.

I stay behind and call her family, Mpatho has rushed her to the hospital. I need to finish my morning chores, even though Mpatho may no longer go to work.

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It's around 11am when he comes back. Beauty is not with him, I guess she got admitted.

"Should I bring your breakfast to the bedroom?" I ask.

"I had a sandwich while waiting for the doctors to tell us what happened. She sustained some internal bleeding in her head but she's going to be fine," he says.

That's a relief, we can't afford another death scandal.

"Her cousin wants to open a case against us, she thinks we did something to her," he says.

"But we didn't do anything," I look at him and tilt my head back.

"Wait, you didn't do anything to her, right?"

"No, I was with you all night," he says.

“Okay, then she fell off the bed, there was a bottle of wine half drunk next to her. I took pictures for evidence,” I say.

“And you saw her first?”

I turn and take his breakfast from the microwave, I will eat it since he says he’s full.

“Any new update from your aunt?” he asks.

“No, I’m not keeping up, she will call me if she needs something.” I get the fork and sit down and eat.

He’s no longer going to the office, I guess. His ceremony is after this weekend, but I don’t think the lobola process will restart anytime soon since Aunt Brandi is now mourning her husband.

I hear footsteps and look up. I didn’t even realize that he’d walked out. He doesn’t look okay, I don’t know why Beauty’s situation is stressing him out like this. It’s not like she was going to make this morning peaceful for us.

“Someone hit Beauty and put her on the floor,” he says.

I’m shocked!!!

“For real?”

“Yeah, for real.” He has my phone in his hand. I thought we had boundaries, I never touch his phone.

“What are you doing with my phone?” I ask.

“I wanted Ntombi’s new number, I wanted us to plan your surprise babyshower.”

Surprise and I’m being told about it?

“What did you hit her with?”

Damn, he’s on my Google search history.

“Who?” I raise my eyebrow.

“You were busy researching about head injuries and memory loss while I was asleep next to you, thinking my wife is resting as well.”

“I didn’t hit her, she was already on the floor when...”

“On my forehead, do you see FOOL written?” He’s not going to listen to anything I say.

I keep my eyes on the plate and choose peace. It’s not like I killed her, I’m also the one who found her and called for help.

“What if she died?” he asks.

“I called for help when I saw her.”

“You can’t be an attacker and a saviour at the same time. She’s going to wake up, there’s no guarantee that she’s going to lose her memory. If she remembers and comes after you, then what?”

That would be the worst outcome for me.

“You’re going to let her come after me?” I thought husbands are protectors, why would he let that happen.

“Seriously?” He turns around and storms out.

I finish my breakfast and go unlock the gate for Sis’ Theh who is coming back from the clinic. I don’t feel guilty, just a little messed up.

“How is Beauty?” Sis’ Theh asks, she’s closer to her than me.

“She’s going to be fine, she’s in best hands.”

The kitchen is a bit messed up, I was too lazy to wash dishes.

“Sorry about the mess, I’m tired, I didn’t have much sleep last night.” Oh fuck, I shouldn’t be saying things like this. “Mpatho was all over me,” I say.

She laughs, “You’re both young, it’s expected.”

I need to take a nap before I say a whole lot of bullshit.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 95

PHUMELELE

Oh, he's going to work.

"I thought you're no longer going, I mean you had a family emergency."

"I have an important meeting at 1pm," he says.

"Okay," I get in bed and watch him.

To some extent I understand why the Beauty incident upsets him.

"I want to move out," I say.

He looks at me, "Beauty will get you, no matter where you are."

"What makes you think she will suspect me over you?" I mean, I have a better reputation than him.

"So you did it because nobody will suspect you?" he asks.

"Because I want her to stop torturing us. You act strong when people do things to you, only I get to deal with the mood swings and tears," I say.

He sits with his belt unbuckled and takes a deep breath.

"I love you Phumelele, with my body and all my heart. I believe that we were made for each other, life wasn't going to make any sense if our marriage wasn't arranged, I don't even know where I'd be in life. Maybe back to the army with a bachelor flat somewhere in Pretoria, eating burgers everyday. But I have a

life because of what our parents did. I have a wife to come home to, I'm going to be a father soon, I'm happy."

"Where is all this going?" I know he's not showering me with love to assure me.

"It's going to my fear of losing you," he says.

"You're not going to lose me though, I love you just as much."

"I don't want you to be a Mshazi wife," he says.

I don't understand, I'm already a Mshazi wife, he changed my surname.

"I don't want you to be dirty. I'm already dirty, one of us got to be a good example and go to heaven. Imagine if we both go to hell, who will be a good ancestor to our children?"

"Their grandparents, isn't it always oGogo protecting their living generations?"

"Phume your mother and MaVilakazi are our future children's grandmothers."

Oh fuck, our children will be fucked up in the ancestor department.

"So please sthandwa senhliziyo yami, do not act on anger and fear. Rather talk to me, I will make a plan. And one thing you must know is that I will protect you with my soul. The only reason I've let Beauty get away with everything she does and says about me is because you told me to tolerate her," he says.

I actually regret saying that, had I allowed him to kill her I'd have nothing to worry about.

"Right now we have to be supportive of her because her cousin is already suspecting foul play. When she comes back we will ask for her permission to move out," he says.

"Okay," I say.

“You agree to visit her at the hospital and getting along with her family?”

I have never been a problem, they provoked me most of the times.

“Yeah, I will be innocent and supportive,” I say.

He exhales, relieved.

I get a lip peck. “You stressed me out but I love you.”

“So you call me ‘sthandwa senhliziyo’ when you’re stressed?”

He laughs, “I’m getting used to it.”

I wish he can stay with me and postpone his meeting. We have the privacy we were robbed of yesterday back. My heart is aching as he continues dressing up.

“Nozi is still waiting for your call,” he says.

“I will set up a virtual meeting,” I say.

I lie in bed and pull covers over my head.

I wish my mother was still alive, for this hour only. I know she would’ve gone out of her way and above to make sure that I have the best pregnancy. This is my first pregnancy and it’s horrible.

Why am I forgetting about Ntombi?

I blindly search for my phone with my hand. I find it and scroll down to Ntombi’s number.

I put her on loudspeaker.

“Babe,” she answers.

“Where are you?” I’m shaky.

“I’m home, rotating with the sun. Are you crying?”

“Can you get me unripe mangos, please?”

“Phume, I’m across the village. Tell Mpatho to get them from your neighbor who used to make us clean her yard before giving us.”

I don’t know who told her that she’s a good problem solver.

“He’s not in the picture,” I say.

“You’re divorced? Oh my gosh, when? Why?”

I hear a cough.

“He’s going to work,” I say.

“Okay, I will take a taxi and you will refund me the traveling costs and tree climbing costs.” She’s a sister’s keeper, even though I will be paying tree climbing costs too.

“I love you,” I end the call.

Air blows my head, he’s pulled the covers.

I look up, “You’re still here?”

“Thanks for making me sound like a good father to your friend.”

“You’re welcome,” I pull up the covers again.

I need to go to the mall, I want Ntombi and I to have a little indoor picnic. Come to think about it, we haven’t hung out, without any plotting or emergency.

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I decided that I’m going to pick Ntombi then both of us will go to the mall. She has to enter the sex toy shop with me. I don’t have courage to go alone and I don’t know anything about butt plugs. I dress up and get my bag and walk out.

“I’m going out,” I yell for Sis Theh.

“Okay sisi, I’m in the laundry,” she answers.

I grab a bottle of water in the kitchen and notice that there’s a bowl filled with water and mangos. This is a surprise. I take out my phone and call Mpatho.

“Hey, did you get me these mangos?”

“I’m in a meeting,” he drops the call.

I guess he’s still holding a grudge over that one silly moment. I grab two for the road, I will eat the rest when I come back and make the curry powder & vinegar mixture.

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I find Ntombi ready, I get inside and greet her mother before we hit the road. We have two destinations, Checkers and Adult shop. The first one is Checkers, we buy snacks and drinks.

“I want wine,” she says.

“Your mother is home. I don’t want her calling me and shouting. We are drinking juice.”

“Fine, I will have cigarettes,” she says.

She wants to be unruly by all means. But we are young, we need to feed our curiosity before it’s time to really get it together.

We are hype, joking around and courageous as we head to the adult store. But once I park outside and wear my shades, it’s hard to go in.

“I think buying online is better,” I say.

Ntombi laughs, “What if our high school mates see us?”

“This is fucked up!”

“Wait, face masks.”

She grabs face masks. Why didn't I think of this? Now I'm hardly recognizable.

This is it, we are going inside.

It's just me and her who look like robbers, other people are shopping freely. We don't ask for help, we are wandering around.

“Here they are,” Ntombi hisses.

I turn and walk back to her. My eyes land on the gigantic size, I almost faint.

“You will buy a small size, not that one,” Ntombi says and picks a small one.

This one is not a big deal, I can fit it in.

“How big is Mpatho?”

“Hah! That's private.”

“I'm asking for your own benefit. Buy three sizes; small, medium and big. Once you're used to small, practice with medium then big. Otherwise you won't be able to sit down the day he finally pound your ass.”

This anal thing seems like a lot of work. But I'm looking forward to the experience, Mpatho wouldn't want it so much if it wasn't special.

“I'm getting a vibrator,” Ntombi says.

“Your boyfriend?” I ask.

“Do I live with him and get it everyday like you?”

“I don't do it everyday.” Most people think this way.

Sometimes we just cuddle and sleep.

“You need to get one, when Mpatho is not at home you will videocall him and play with yourself while he watches,” Ntombi.

“I’m not freaky like that,” I whisper.

“Yet you’re giving a man your last virginity that could’ve helped you open the gates of heaven.”

She’s right, let me get everything, if I never use it then fine. I’m not planning to be a regular customer here.

From a vibrator we get cuffs, all Ntombi’s idea.

“Enough sins for the day, let’s go,” I drag her to the till before she buys the whole shop.

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We didn’t even have the indoor picnic we planned, we ate on the kitchen table with Sis’ Theh. I’m excited about seeing the toys and holding them in my hand. Crazy, I want to try the plug now.

We go to my bedroom, the old one, it’s more private. I close the door, we unpack the toys on the bed.

Ntombi plugs her vibrator...the thing has some noise.

It won’t work for her.

“Your mom will hear this thing vibrating,” I say.

“That’s why white kids move out when they turn 18. Imagine booking a night so that you can use a vibrator,” she’s disappointed.

She’s killing me! Being an orphan has its advantages. I have no mother to worry about.

“I’m going to try fitting the small plug,” I pick it up.

“You need to lubricate,” -Ntombi.

The lubricants are in Mpatho’s bedroom. I put my jacket on and innocently go to fetch it.

Luckily Sis’ Theh is not around, she’s probably outside.

And then here?

“Why are you naked?” I ask.

“I’m testing my vibrator, close the door.”

She’s my best friend, we’ve done things in front of each other, there’s no trainsmash. But I will do my fitting in the bathroom, I don’t want her laughing at me.

I lubricate the plug and my ass. Bending and inserting this into myself is not easy. I only get an inch in, I cannot take it. Imagine having the whole thing in my butt for the recommended two hours. No, maybe Mpatho has a better strategy.

I walk back to Ntombi under the covers with a vibrating device between her legs.

“Let me see,” I have never seen these things.

I want to learn, for when I need to use mine.

“This is better than my ex’s,” she says.

Clearly she’s had bad ones.

I need to see how mine works. I’m not going to put it on my clit like her, I’m still wearing my underwear.

Gosh, she’s moaning like she’s being pounded by a man.

“I don’t need a man,” she says, her legs trembling.

“Fuck all men. Oh my god, oh my god!”

I'm laughing my tight ass out. I sit closer for a better view, her face is the funniest.

If I knew about all these things I would've experienced a lot in my teens. It's better than sleeping around. I mean, young girls can orgasm without losing their virginity, that's the power of technology.

Amidst laughter, vibrational sounds and moans, I smell his cologne. I turn my head around the door is wide open. My eyes almost pop out. But the first instinct I act on is to protect my friend's dignity. I cover her and jump off the bed.

"Hey," I'm not sure what's happening.

Is he angry? Disappointed? When did he come home? What did he hear?

"We bought the toys and..." Fuck, this looks creepy.

"It's just Ntombi and I, there's no one here," I say.

He looks at me and for the first time I'm counting my breaths, silently praying that I don't die a painful death and that at least have a decent funeral.

He looks at my tummy, his chest bounces.

"Get out, both of you!"

He walks out and slams the door.

We need to leave, he's not going to hear anything I say. I saw evil in his eyes, I don't know the man I saw.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 96

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Today I'm going to the Mcinekas, in a few days we are traveling to Bonga's uncle's house. It's my first time visiting and I'm having mixed feelings. I know that Nombuso and MaVilakazi haven't changed how they feel about me. Bonga believes them, he's excited to have me over, he even got here an hour earlier than the time we agreed on.

As Njabulo takes my bag to the car down the road, out of the goodness of his heart, my father asks to have a word with. I hold my breath that he doesn't want to address Bonga's arrest one more time. I already told him that Bonga wasn't found guilty of anything.

"Ngoba kwahamba unyoko nje kunzima kimi," he starts.

I sense a lecture coming, I sit with my phone buzzing on my hand.

"I know that you don't see eye to eye with the paternal grandmother of this baby. But our culture puts respect first; when going to someone's house you respect even the cat you find at the door. You're a representative of all the Mthethwas, carry yourself with respect and be humble at all times. If someone says something you don't like report to the father of this baby, for now awuqulisi amacala emzini."

Iyoooooh!

"Ngiyezwa baba," I nod.

"I don't want to hear stories, you said yes to their cows."

So I cannot complain to my own father? What if I take my complaints to Njabulo then?

"One more thing..."

I look up, it seems like I'm never going to leave.

"Ang'kambathi ngisho ijazi kwaMcineka, you're not there to perform wife duties, you're a guest to their son," he says.

This one makes me happy, I'm definitely not going to slave for anybody.

He finally lets me go.

Njabulo is on his way back, he's walking like a happy person.

"Gazi!" he gives me a thumb up.

"Thank you for carrying my bag." I know he did it so that Bonga can compensate him.

"You're welcome, I hope you're not fetching a second baby there."

I roll my eyes and walk away laughing. I haven't pushed the one I'm carrying out, how can I get pregnant while I'm pregnant?

Bonga climbs out and opens the door for me. He's in a white turtleneck T-shirt and jeans. He looks good, he always does. I know he's probably the cuter one, it doesn't make me feel insecure, I'm proud of myself for getting a snack.

Not only that, he's a gentleman too. Well, with me, out there he's something different.

I get off his hug and release a sigh of relief.

"You look beautiful," he says, smiling down at me.

"Thanks. What did you get me?"

"Pizza," he says.

He knows his assignment...bringing me something to eat.

The pizza makes me forget that I'm going to MaVilakazi. It might be the worst week of my life. I'm not mentally prepared for the insults, but I will try my best not to disappoint my father and just take it.

“Should I drive or you want to eat first?” he asks.

“Don’t worry, I don’t mind, drive,” I say.

It’s going to be a very long week.

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Getting here I didn’t know what was waiting for me. I got out of the car, Bonga took me to his rondavel with my bags. The only person I’ve seen so far is Yoli, she’s entered six times to greet. I text Njabulo to tell them that I arrived safely. Hopefully this safety lasts, there’s a dog here and I don’t mix with dogs. I once had a dog chasing me for straight ten minutes, I know they don’t like humans they don’t know.

“Welcome home, my love.”

I smile, “Thank you.”

He goes and pushes the door close.

I hope he’s not thinking about....

“Don’t worry, I just want to kiss you properly.”

I have missed him. Everything about him. When he wraps his hand around my neck and starts kissing me I feel that he missed me just as much. His lips feels like home, I’ve longed for him, in his wholeness. He drops his hand to my waist and grabs on it.

“Babe,” he opens his eyes, looking at me.

“Thank you for understanding,” he says.

I nod and kiss him again. We’d stay locked in a kiss like this, only if we were in our own space.

He has to go to the main house and leave me alone.

My body isn't the only one aching, he's walking out with a third leg standing up.

"Sawubona aunty!" someone is at the door again.

I smile, "Yebo sawubona."

She's happy that I greeted her back for the seventh time now she's running back outside.

Ummm, nope, she's back again.

She walks in and sits in front of me, legs crossed. She has blue lips and tongue, I guess she's been indulging into some sweets.

"What's in your stomach?"

Yoh, I didn't expect that.

"A baby," I say.

"A baby?" She repeats to herself, looking very confused.

Bonga walks in with some bags. I'm not sure where he got them because we didn't pass through the mall.

"Malume," Yoli.

She's going to ask about the baby.

"Ya Yoli,"

"How is the baby going to come out?"

He looks at me, I'm already cracking into laughter.

"The nurse will take it out," he says.

"Oh, the nurse put the baby inside." She thinks she's cracking the puzzle.

We could've just let her be with her wrong assumptions. But nope, the jailbird had to be inappropriate.

"No, I put the baby inside," he says.

Yoli is now confused more than ever.

He unpacks the bags in his hands and loads everything inside the cupboard. It's all the treats that I like and might crave for. But I feel uncomfortable because I already know that his mother thinks I use all his money.

"Did you buy for everyone?" I ask.

"Hhayi-bo, why are you asking me that?"

"Because I don't want you to treat me like I'm more special."

"Well, you are." He doesn't foresee things, he doesn't take everything that has happened between me and his family into consideration.

"Your mother..." Shit, I almost said things in front of her talkative granddaughter.

"Chill," that's all he says before walking out.

I look at Yoli and ask, out of guilt, if she wants biscuits. I open the cupboard and take a packet of chocolate Toppers and give her.

Nombuso walks in, I was starting to wonder why nobody is coming to greet me. I get that they don't like me, but they can pretend bakithi.

"I'm here to fetch le ngane."

Oops, I thought wrong, she's here for her child.

Towel wrapped over her chest, she's dragging slippers, looking shiny-shiny like she just overdosed Clere on her skin.

“Wena ke, how are you?”

Oh, me???

“I’m fine,” I say.

“Don’t give her anything, she’s had enough sugar for the day. I’m not going to be home, if she gets fever who will look after her?”

Now I feel bad.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know,” I say.

“Whatever!” she chases Yoli out and proceeds in to stand in front of Bonga’s mirror.

She’s doing some twirls and popping things off her face.

Then she drags a deep breath. “Does my tummy look too big?”

“Yes,” I cannot travel all the way across villages to disappoint my father and lie.

“Like I’m pregnant?” she asks.

I don’t know why she’s putting me in a position to analyze her tummy. We don’t even get along.

“No, not pregnant big, just big,” I say

She sighs, stressfully.

“Maybe a high waist skirt, uyabona?”

I’m confused, maybe in her head we’ve had a conversation prior this moment.

“I don’t even know why I agreed to this thing,” she vents out.

I keep quiet and just watch. She takes a few more looks on the mirror and then walks out.

I don’t know what to call that. I think she’s caught up in her own world, me being here doesn’t make any difference in her life.

But I don't know why she chased Yoli out because now I'm all alone and bored.

There's no TV, no radio here. All I have is my phone, I can't lie in the bed because MaVilakazi will define it somehow.

Bonga is at the door with someone.

It's time to face hell. I can feel my spirit just dropping.

They make their way in, I keep my eyes dropped.

Bonga rolls a grass-mat for, she sits down. He sits next to me on the bed.

"I know you've already met but I feel like things weren't done appropriately," he says and takes my hand, holding it tightly.

"This is the grandmother of our children, MaVilakazi. Ma, this is the mother of your grandchildren, MaMthethwa."

"Sawubona MaMthethwa," she says.

That humbleness and smile is fake.

"Yebo," I say, mildly.

I pull my hand off his, I'm sweating.

"Ma, I know you didn't like the way I did things. I'm not a mother, I cannot understand some of your worries when it comes to us. But I can assure you one thing, Miyanda and I love each other. She's not going to hurt me, she will never disrespect you or make me turn my back on you. You know that I love you, you're my mother, I will never love someone who doesn't like you."

I laugh in Swahili!

"Please accept her. Make my peace a priority. Even if I die tomorrow I won't rest knowing that I'm leaving her and our child alone, you're not going to take care of them for me."

“Why are you talking about death?” It’s alarming and annoying at the same time.

“I’m trying to explain that...”

“No, explain without including death.”

He takes a deep breath, “Please make peace with each other, I’m in a difficult position, two women I love more than life are not on good terms.”

“I’m sorry,” she says.

I lift my head. What was that?

“I should’ve taken a chance to know you and talk with you about that living arrangement I didn’t like in a civil manner,” she says.

I’d be lying if I said I’m not happy to finally get this apology.

“But I can’t say I’m not proud of him for knowing how to love and how to love right. For protecting you and his baby, choosing you and fighting for you until everyone is forced to accept and love you,” she says.

If she’s proud of him then why did she try to stop him? Anyway, we move!

Bonga is happy, that’s all that matters.

I’m still going to sleep with one eye open.

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“Qo!” Mkhuleko is at the door.

He’s wearing a doek and apron.

To add to my confusion and shock, Sphakamiso follows behind him wearing the same.

Mkhuleko is carrying a plate of food, Sphakamiso a drink.

“What’s going on with the outfits?” I ask.

“It’s how we serve,” Sphakamiso says.

They’re such clowns. My mood just brightens with these two.

“Whose aprons are these?” I ask.

“MaVilakazi’s, she borrows us if Malibongwe has a guest that needs to be served in a special way,” -Sphakamiso.

I cross my legs, looking at them.

This is interesting, isn’t?

“So you often do this?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says.

I look at Mkhuleko, for some reason I trust him more than Sphakamiso.

“Is it true?” I ask.

Before he can answer the chairman of WASA comes in, Whore Association South Africa.

“What is true?” he asks.

If looks could kill mine would’ve sent him to Avbob.

“That you are a good man,” Sphakamiso says.

He looks at Mkhuleko. It doesn’t look like Sphakamiso has much credibility.

“Well, he was saying that you often host girls that we serve in aprons, just like we did for Sis’ Miyanda today,” Mkhuleko says nothing but the truth.

Sphakamiso doesn't look impressed, but neither is Bonga impressed with him.

"Congratulations, now go and take your danone!" Sphakamiso says to Mkhuleko.

It's supposed to be a shade.

Bonga brushes Mkhuleko's head, "You will get it boy-boy."

Both him and Sphakamiso burst into laughter. I don't know why he's turning against Mkhuleko because he's the one being honest. Maybe he did something to piss them off earlier.

The joke doesn't get to him though, he doesn't look shaken.

Both Bonga and Sphakamiso step outside, leaving the two of us alone.

"Why are they ganging up on you?" I ask.

"Because I'm not over 25 and bad looking. And I don't have a criminal record."

That's harsh.

"Anyway, I want to say I'm sorry," he says.

"For what?" I ask.

"For causing what happened that day. I didn't want it to happen but sometimes things have to happen so that things can happen for other things to happen." He's a confusing human being.

"I didn't hold anything against you, you didn't insult me, you were just respecting your mother."

"I respect you too," he says.

Confusing and sweet at the same time.

"Please don't tell him," he says.

"Don't tell him what?" I'm confused.

“When you know, don’t tell him.” He’s not explaining anything to me, just telling me not to tell ‘him’

I guess ‘him’ is Malibongwe.

He walks out. I know we just talked, but I have no clue what we just talked about.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 97

PHUMELELE

I lock myself in Ntombi’s room and cry. First it was the kiss with Sphakamiso, now this. What makes me sad is that in both incidents I wasn’t cheating, it just looked like I was. I can’t blame Ntombi, she didn’t do anything wrong. She was in her friend’s space and having fun. I was there when she had her first pubic hair, neither one of us is lesbian. I’ve tried to call him over twenty times, he drops my calls.

“Phumelele vula!” that’s Ntombi’s mother.

I don’t even know how we are going to explain what happened to her.

I wipe my face and open. Ntombi is with her, she’s also a mess.

“Sit with her,” her mother points her on the bed.

I’m trying to look calm and collected, but tears are just rolling out.

“How am I supposed to help if no one tells me what happened? All I’m seeing is tears.” She looks at Ntombi, nothing. Then at me, I can’t say it.

“Give me Mpatho’s number, maybe he will know how to deal with this. Wena Ntombi, I’m calling your father.” She’s taking things way too far.

I clear the fog in my throat. “Mpatho kicked me out.”

“Did you have a fight?” she asks.

I shake my head. We didn’t really fight, he saw something and concluded.

“Then why did he kick you out?” she asks.

“I was having a picnic with Ntombi inside the house and he got mad.”

“Just for a picnic?” She unties the scarf on her head.

“Wena go and get my navy scarf,” she sends Ntombi.

“You can stay here if he no longer wants you in his grandfather’s house. But we have to go and get your clothes, and I will give him a piece of my mind. Being a man doesn’t mean he can throw you out when he’s mad, you’re pregnant. Why didn’t he leave instead?”

I know he won’t do anything if Ntombi’s mother is there, he will calm down and listen, he cares way too much about his public image. Ntombi comes back and helps her mother wrap her head.

“I have a headache, I want to sleep,” she says.

It’s her trying to dodge the situation and facing Mpatho.

“No, you’re coming,” her mother insists.

“But Ma...”

“Ntombi now you’re going back and forth with me? If you go and drink Grandpa that headache will disappear,” she’s having none of it.

She walks out, saying we will be leaving in two minutes.

I look at Ntombi, “What if he doesn’t forgive me?”

“What if he tells my mother? You just lied to her, damn Phume.”

“I know Mpatho, he won’t put you in trouble. Only I have a dilemma here, he’s never going to trust our friendship.” I’m stressed, I know that Ntombi is about to become the new Sphakamiso. And unfortunately, this is my bestie, I will never cut her off.

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I’m still embarrassed, I’m just glad that Beauty wasn’t home, otherwise I’d be all over the village right now and she’d be trying to find ways to end my marriage with this. I strongly believe that he’s not to allow me back home but once Ntombi’s mother is gone it will be a court trial.

Ntombi climbs out and opens the door for her mother. I need a few breathing exercises.

We head to the front door, my chest is pounding. We make our way in, Sis’ Theh has left. His car is outside, I know that he’s home.

I offer them seats in the lounge and give Ntombi’s mother his number to call. I’m scared of looking for him alone. His phone rings on the TV stand.

He heard it from wherever he was, he comes out. He heard me driving in. He still looks livid. His eyes are bloodshot, he doesn’t look my way more than a second.

For a minute I thought he wasn’t going to greet Ntombi’s mother.

But he does, on his feet though.

“Phume says you threw her out of the house because she had a picnic with Ntombi. Why couldn’t you talk to her in a civil manner if you didn’t approve of the picnic?”

I’m looking at him, signally begging. This is between him and I, he must let me in and let Ntombi go without shame.

“Picnic?” he asks, sternly looking at Ntombi’s mother.

“That’s what they said.” She looks at me.

I confirm with a nod.

“Your picnic with your friend is in the bed with the door closed and both of you naked?”

If there’s ever been a moment where one temporarily dies, I would’ve paid any amount to do so right now.

“What is he taking about?” -Ntombi’s mother.

I don’t know what to say, words can’t form and come out of my mouth.

“They were naked in the bedroom playing with vibrators after having a romantic lunch.” He read the situation wrong. Our lunch was messy, not even close to romantic.

“Vibrators? I hope it’s not something illegal, you know how your father is Ntombi.”

My hands are sweating. Unlike me, Ntombi comes from a strict home, both her parents are religious.

“Sex toys,” -Mpatho. He’s leaving no stone unturned.

“Huh? I don’t understand.” She turns to Ntombi. They had the sex talk after umemulo, Ntombi made promises, and it’s just a taboo.

Mpatho leaves, I don’t know where he’s going.

I feel like I need to step in for my friend.

“We were just playing, it’s not that serious,” I say.

“Playing with sex toys?” She looks at Ntombi.

“Sex toys? So you never outgrew toys, after barbies it’s sex toys. What is even sex toys? Sex is not a game, it produces babies, you know that you have to get married before having babies.”

It’s toys! Fuckin’ toys.

“You can’t get pregnant from toys, they’re plastic,” I explain.

“Wena shut up, you brought me here knowing very well that you’ve embarrassed your husband.”

I shush it.

Mpatho comes back with a black bin bag. He turns it upside down on the floor, our toys roll out, even my different sizes of butt plugs.

“What is all this?”- Ntombi’s mother.

I can’t believe Mpatho is doing this. He told me about these kind of things, I didn’t know anything about butt plugs, if it wasn’t for him we wouldn’t have gotten here.

“This is what they were using, on each other.” He’s pointing at the vibrator.

He’s got it all wrong, I wasn’t helping Ntombi, I was just watching.

“All this I thought Ntombi was her friend, kanti ungidla izithende. In my grandfather’s house, ma!”

“Ntombi?” She’s on her feet.

“Ma, I swear Phume and I didn’t do anything together. I was testing the vibrator and she was in the room,” -Ntombi.

“I don’t understand, what were you vibrating?”

“My...errr...it’s used on the...”

No, she can’t say that.

“Speak!” her mother roars.

“On the vagina...to get an orgasm,” she says it.

“Aww lafa elikaMthaniya!” she turns around with her hands on her head.

If there’s one similarity between her and my mother it’s that she refuses to let Ntombi grow and experience life.

“I’m calling your father, I don’t know what you need anymore. Sakumisela amagobongo Ntombi, sawaphothula. Where must we fix now?”

“Ma, I’m 23,” Ntombi says.

I’m sure her mother forgets this.

“23 and demonic, complete the sentence,” she says.

I’m trying my best not to laugh and it’s hard.

“You’re supposed to be a good example to your friends. And a good wife,” she says to me.

Now it’s my turn.

“Respect your husbands space. I don’t know what wife leaves the house when she’s told to, you didn’t even try to mend the situation njengomfazi,” she says.

Mpatho releases a sigh, “It’s okay Ma, I’m sorry if I raised my voice in your presence. We will sort this out.”

What did I say about him and protecting his image at all costs?

“Let’s sort it now, when Ntombi is still here. Do you honestly think Ntombi and I touched each other?” I ask.

“It’s getting late, let Ntombi and Ma go, we will talk.”

More like we will fight.

I stand up to walk them out.

Ntombi doesn't move, she clears her throat and looks at the floor.

"Must I leave my vibrator here?"

She's not drunk, I don't know where she found courage to ask her mother that.

"If your father finds out about this thing who is going to pay inhlawulo and bride price? The founder of Plastic?"

I look at Ntombi, she looks at me, we can't laugh right now but when we get the chance I will be rolling on the floor. I walk them out, they're going to take a taxi back home. I leave them outside the gate and return inside.

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He's put the toys back inside the bin bag. I still don't know why he went so low.

"Are you attracted to girls?" he asks.

I haven't even sat down.

"No," I say.

"Do you have a woman to woman fantasy?" he asks.

It's question after question.

"What makes you angry? I don't understand because I was just watching. Yes, I was in my underwear but it was because I was coming from the bathroom after trying the butt plug."

“What makes me angry is that I never thought I’d find my wife in that kind of situation. I didn’t say we need to buy butt plugs for you to experiment with another girl. I have a dick, I cannot compete with a girl. It was better when you were kissing Sphakamiso.”

I thought we had moved past that, I don’t see how the two situation relate to one another.

“Ntombi is my friend, my second comfortable place after you. I can do anything in front of her, vice versa. But that doesn’t mean we are sexually attracted to each other,” I say.

“Why were you watching? What did you find interesting?” he asks.

I’ve never seen a girl masturbate before, let alone using a vibrator.

“I find you interesting,” I say.

“You’re not answering my question.”

I step over the bin bag and stand in front of him.

Why is he wearing a shirt buttoned all the way up?

I need to see the chest; I undo two buttons.

“What are you doing?” He’s still disgusted by me.

“I’m looking at my man’s chest. Am I not allowed to?”

“Phume, we are still talking,” he says.

“Okay, talk I’m listening.” I drop my hands to his waist.

“I tell you what I like and what my fantasies are. But you never say anything, if you had told me that you wish to watch a girl having fun with herself I would’ve understood.”

“No, my fantasy is watching you on top of me, your stick buried deeply inside me and calling me mommy,” I say.

“That’s...Phume you know what I’m trying to ask,” he’s stuttering.

“I know and I answered you. My fantasy is all of this.” I grab the front of his pants.

He’s holding his breath in his chest.

I let go, he breathes.

“So no girl fantasy, no other man for me, just you alone.” I stand on my toes and kiss his lips.

I can’t believe I’m wearing his pants right now and he’s wearing my skirt- blushing like a high school girl.

“But I’m sorry for allowing a situation that could’ve been easily misunderstood to happen. It won’t happen again. Am I forgiven?”

“Yeah you’re forgiven,” he says softly.

Nazo-ke, we can move on now.

“So you’re throwing away the toys?” I turn to the bin bag on the floor.

The butt plugs are inside, does it mean no more anal?

“Let’s get rid of the two vibrators, they’re not necessary,” he says.

“Ntombi will come back for hers,” I say.

“Who will pay inhlawulo to her father?”

We both laugh.

Nothing is going away, his dramatic black ass takes them out of the bin bag to our bedroom drawer.

“So how did your meeting go?” I ask.

“Not good, but you don’t have to worry about it, focus on keeping the house and feeding my baby.”

Because I know nothing about business, only wife duties and pregnancy.

“Have you spoken to Nozi?”

“Not yet,” I say.

“I can set the meeting if you want.”

Here he goes again, making my business his.

“No, you’ve done enough already. Your job is to run the company so that you can give me money, and making sure that I cum.”

He looks at me and frowns. It’s not so nice when the tables are turned, right?

“I hope I will get you back once I’ve fixed the lobola issue because you’re losing it,” he says.

I’m not losing anything, the sangoma only said that to milk money from him.

“I hope we’ll go there on the ceremony day and come back.” My ex will be there, so will be Nombuso, maybe Malibongwe’s girlfriend too.

“We have to sleep two nights,” he says.

It’s going to be a nightmare!

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 98

SIS’ NOMBUSO

There was no need to pack everything she's packed in her bag. She's not going to a date. No, she can't call it that. She's going there to prove to Mapholoba how much she doesn't like him so that he will leave her alone. She's wearing the new underwear set she got for sale at Mr Price because, what if she falls?

"You look beautiful, where are you going?"

Yeap, that's Mkhuleko walking inside her room without knocking.

"Thank you, now get out," she says.

"I'm just here to borrow a charger."

Every phon comes with a charger from the shop.

"No, you have lost two of my chargers and burnt my cable."

"That was ages ago, you were still married and had a flat tummy when it happened."

This is exactly why he's not going to get the charger. She opens the door wide and points him out. These kids lack respect, maybe she should be grateful that Mapholoba is taking her away from these people for a few hours, or night.

She's done glamouring herself up, her bag is packed, Mapholoba is on his way.

If she didn't have Yoli she was just going to leave. But now it's a different story.

She looks for MaVilakazi and finds her ironing her dress in her bedroom.

"Ma, I'm going somewhere, I'm not sure if I'm coming back today late or tomorrow morning."

MaVilakazi frowns, "Hhayi-bo, why are you only telling me now? Where are you going?"

“I’m going to see a new friend. Please make sure that Yoli eat and change into her pyjamas, then sleep with her in your bed,” she says.

“I’m asking you why you’re only telling me now because I have to go to the Xaba’s night vigil.”

This is a disaster!

“Can’t you cancel?” she asks.

“No, the Xabas always support us. Ask your sister-in-law to sleep with her, she can put Yoli on the floor,” MaVilakazi says.

It sounds like a good idea, Miyanda have to prove her worth and that she loves them as a family of her unborn baby. Once the baby comes she will also return the favor and babysit.

Malibongwe is outside, taking something from his car. Their relationship hasn’t been the same after their fight. Yes, she misses him but she’s not going to grovel. He answers what she asks and never really talk to her the way he used to.

“Is Miyanda inside the rondavel?” she’s testing his mood.

“Yes,” – one word answer.

“Alright,” she proceeds and walks inside.

Miyanda and her aren’t best friends, or even friends. They’re more than that, they’re family, she was babysitting her man when their mother wasn’t home.

“Hey,” she stands with her hands on the waist.

“Ummm, hey.” Miyanda looks surprised because she hasn’t been nice, she didn’t even greet her or spend five minutes with her as a sister.

“I need a favor...family favor,” she says.

“Oh, what favor?” Miyanda asks.

“I’m going somewhere, can Yoli come and sleep with you and Malibongwe? MaVilakazi is going to a night vigil. You will put her on the floor,” she says.

“Errrr, okay, I don’t mind. But can I ask Bonga if he’s okay with it first?”

“If you’re okay with it, I doubt he’d mind,” she says.

But the man in question walks in, he will speak for himself now.

“Bonga, do you have a minute?” Miyanda asks.

“Yeah babe, what’s going on?” He sits on the bed next to her.

“Sis’ Nombuso is going somewhere and she was asking if I can look after Yoli over the night.”

“What about me?” he asks.

Miyanda looks confused. Anyone would be.

“You’re 30, you don’t need a nanny,” Nombuso tells him.

Maybe Miyanda has never been bad, this one is the influence on her. How can he compete with a 4 year old?

“I don’t need a nanny but I need to spend time with her, that’s why I asked her to visit. Tell whoever you’re going to that you’re a mother,” -Malibongwe.

“Why do you hate me?” She doesn’t understand. She’s apologized for the fight. She wasn’t the first to have a disagreement with him, he always argues with Sphakamiso and forgives him the next day.

“How is that hating you? I can’t not spend time with my woman because you have to spend time with whoever you’re going to, that’s not fair.”

“Yoli won’t stop you from spending time with Miyanda, she will sleep on the floor.”

“If it’s that easy, take her with you and make her sleep on the floor,” Malibongwe says.

“No,” she refuses.

“I’m sorry, she can’t sleep here but I can give her a bath and...”

“Mxm, leave it!” He thinks he’s better than everyone because of the money he robbed.

He’s a thug, she regrets the tears she cried for him when he was in jail.

Sphakamiso is sitting under the verandah with a bottle of water. She can’t ask him to look after Yoli. Anything she says and does is labeled ‘abusive’, and rumours are saying he took Aphelele to Durban because of her. They’re now okay as siblings but not as parents.

“Wachopha dade. What’s the occasion?” Sphakamiso asks.

This compliment makes her happy. This dress is beautiful, isn’t? She actually bought it from Mr Price, it came with a belt.

“I’m going to see a friend, nothing much,” she says, smiling.

“We have to know the friend’s name and his number, just to be on the safe side.”

“I’m not dating him and I won’t,” she says.

“Good. But I still need his name and number.”

Seriously?!

“Are you the new Mkhuleko?” she asks.

Sphakamiso laughs and hands her the phone to save the name and number.

She puts the number and saves it as Mnelisi kaNombuso, to differentiate between him and the other Mnelisi on the contact list.

Sphakamiso looks at the name and chuckles. “So he has a potential of becoming a boyfriend?”

Maybe, maybe not.

“You know that I can’t date,” she says.

They talked about it, weirdly she told him everything despite him being a brother. Only him and MaVilakazi know the story.

“Didn’t you talk to Mkhuleko?” Sphakamiso asks.

“No, he’s a clown,” she says.

“Then you either seek help on your own or tell this Mnelisi why you can’t date him even after saving his number like this. If he loves you, you’re both going to check if the problem is still there and figure things out together.” He’s different from others...other two morons.

“I can’t do that, that thing is embarrassing. I don’t want to be shamed by another man, Yoli’s father did enough, I can’t have my last strip of confidence crushed,” she says.

“I dated a virgin for four years. When you’re in love you understand and accept your partner with all that they come with. Not all men are like Yoli’s father.”

“Yeah, but you cheated and had a baby with a prostitute,” she says.

He shrugs, “We all make mistakes and learn from them.”

“I don’t know Sphakamiso, I don’t know if I’m willing to put my mental health in the hands of a man. But thank you for the advice,” she says.

Yoli still doesn't have a sitter for the night. Right now she's left with one option. A scary one, she doesn't even know where and how she's going to start. Maybe he was the only option from the beginning but she wanted to try her luck elsewhere before groveling to him.

He's playing a game on his phone, it's connected to a charger. Yoli is watching cartoons, she hasn't realized that she's dressed to go yet.

"Here is the charger you wanted," she puts it in front of him.

"I already got it from Sis' Miyanda," he says.

What now? Giving him the charger was how she planned to start a conversation.

He's not even looking at her, just playing the game.

She clears her throat, "Why don't you come and sleep here today?"

"I don't want to," he says.

But he always wants to sleep here if there's a late soccer match to watch.

"Did you drink Coke in the fridge?" she asks.

He sighs and puts the phone on his lap and looks at her.

"Do you have cancer?" he asks.

She frowns, "No, are you crazy?"

"If you're not sick or dying then why are you being nice to me?"

Time to go straight to the point...

"Can you sleep here? Yoli has no one who's going to look after her if I don't come back where I'm going. I will leave her pyjamas on the bed, all you have to do is make sure she eats

her dinner and put her next to wherever you're sleeping," she says.

Mkhuleko locks the phone screen and sits up straight. Haters really turn into beggars at some point in life.

"Come again?" he says.

"Can you look after Yoli for me? Even if you charge me money, it's okay."

He chuckles, "Do you know my rates? How much I charge per hour?"

Maybe she shouldn't have promised the money she doesn't have.

"She will be asleep, I'm not asking you to put her on your back, just look if she kicks her blanket or wants to pee," she says.

"I will be using my eyes to do all that, right?"

He's going to drag this till the sun sets and the new one rises.

"Just say yes or no," she says.

"If I say no what's your other option?"

Sigh!

"I don't have another option," she says.

"Exactly! Now please get me a glass of Coke while I continue with this game. Make sure you dish her food and leave everything she will need prepared," he says, throwing one leg on the coffee table.

She's going to the kitchen to get him Coke, only because she needs a favor from him.

"Wait, what's for dinner?" -him.

If she had hair she'd pull it out one by one.

"Cabbage with usinyaka and phuthu," she says.

He turns to Yoli, she can't hear what he's whispering to the child.

He lifts his head, "Don't worry, we will eat Cornflakes."

"They're for breakfast, only for Yoli." Is he crazy?

"We've agreed to eat them now," he says with a smug look on his face. He will finish the whole box.

"Yoli will get hungry, she can't sleep on Cornflakes," she says.

"Okay, then we will eat both." He's a devil's incarnate, he knows that she's not rich enough to buy Cornflakes twice a month yet he wants his share, which won't be small by the way.

Mapholoba better come with gifts because she's sacrificing a lot for him.

"I want my Coke with ices," he yells behind her.

Coke with nyasiz, bloody idiot!

"Okay, coming!" she says.

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He's here, in his dark green tracksuit smiling. He has no idea what took for her to be able to make it.

"Sawubona," he says.

"Yebo," she has her bag on her arm.

"You look so beautiful, like you're going to the Ngcobos already."

She looks away before he thinks she's happy to see him.

"Let's get inside, I know you will refuse to hug me even if I ask."

He's damn right, she will refuse.

They get inside the car, she doesn't know where he's taking her.

"So you're not curious about me?" he asks.

She glances at him, her eyebrows furrowed.

"You've never asked me any questions. Normally women want to know a man's family structure and his marital status," he says.

Oh hell, no!

"You're married?" she asks.

"Are you against polygamy?"

"Answer the damn question!" she snaps.

"Okay don't beat me, I'm not married. But I have kids, quite a few of them."

How many is quite a few?

"Three?" she asks.

"Six," he says.

Half of the South African population, WTF.

"Can you drive me back home, please?" she asks.

He expected this reaction because she only has one kid.

"Three are my late brother's, then two are mine, plus yours; that's six."

Now he's making sense, she thought all six belonged him alone.

Wait, Yoli is there? This man is forward.

"My first born is turning 17 next month, he's already in college. His brother is in Grade 9. Then my three other children are in primary school; grade 7, 4 and 1," he says.

“Your brother left them young?” she asks.

“Yeah, the youngest was only 3,” he says.

“Who help you with them?” The real question is where are their mothers?

Are the baby-making machines still around?

“I have two sisters, we help each other out,” he says.

So far, there’s nothing to make a U-turn for.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 99

SIS’ NOMBUSO

He’d already booked their table, this is the second time she’s ever been to a restaurant on a date with a man. Yoli’s father took her to one at Eshowe when he found out that she was carrying a baby. He thought it was a boy, he was happy, very happy. Only for her to be a girl, she could see the disappointment on everyone’s face. But Yoli grew on him, now he loves her and supports her every month.

“You’ve been quiet,” he notices.

She shrugs, “What must I say?”

“Anything, tell me about your family.”

Wait, she has a family?

“I know you’re Mshazi’s sister, Malibongwe is your brother too.”

She frowns, “How do you know Malibongwe?”

“I worked for Mshazi,” he says.

“Yeah, he’s my brother too. There are two others. Then my mother and my daughter and nephew. It’s quite a big family, with girlfriends too.”

“I also come from a big family, even though two of my siblings passed and our parents. But there’s still three of us left and our children,” he says.

It doesn’t mean they’re compatible.

“Why are you not married?” she asks.

“I almost got married five years ago, then I got caught on some messy situation, she dumped me. But everything happens for a reason and God’s timing is always the best.”

“So you cheated?” He’s just another Yoli’s father.

“A little bit. But I’ve grown since then, I’m 42 years old now, soon I will be having grandchildren. I want to settle down...with you,” he says.

It’s time...

“I don’t like you, Mnelisi. You have way too many children. You have siblings, I don’t like siblings. You have a beard, I don’t like men with beard...”

“I can shave,,” he says.

Makes no difference.

“I’m not done. I don’t like anything about you. I don’t feel anything for you. In fact, I look at you as a cousin,” she says.

Mapholoba laughs.

“Cousin?” he asks.

“Yes, from a mother’s side of the family. But I wish you luck, I hope you find a woman who’s going to love you and settle down with you and your big family,” she says.

“Okay, are you enjoying your meal though?” He’s weird.

“Yes,” she says.

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Maybe now he’s convinced that she doesn’t like him. It’s around 7pm when they leave, he gets them drinks for the road. This is it, he’s taking her back home.

They get inside the car, it’s very warm.

“I’m cold,” he says.

“But it’s warm inside and you’re wearing a jacket.”

“I need a jersey,” he says.

This is the first time he’s honestly turned her off. What man cries because of cold?

“My sister’s apartment is five minutes away from here. Can we start there, I need my jersey?”

This man supposedly gets hired to protect people, yet he’s so weak.

“Okay,” she agrees.

“Thank you.” He starts the car, they leave.

She didn’t mind because she’s going to sit in the car and wait for him.

But when they park in front of the dull apartment, he wants her to come inside too.

“My sister moved back home, there’s no one here,” he says.

“Did you see the time?” She’s annoyed.

“Yeah, it’s late, that’s why I don’t want to leave you in the car alone. It’s not safe around here, there are hijackers everywhere. Last week they took a car with...”

“Fine, I don’t need crime details,” she opens the door and gets out.

When they enter he switches the lights on. It looks like someone lives here, it’s not just a sister’s old apartment. He leads her to a small living room and offers her a seat.

“If you need a bathroom it’s this side, kitchen by the door,” he shows her before he disappears in another room.

She won’t need any of that, she will sit and wait for him to wear his jersey.

It’s taking him ages, she’s starting to wonder if he’s not a ritualist that takes people’s heads.

Oh, finally!

But why is he not wearing a jersey? He’s still wearing his jacket.

“I can’t find it,” he says with a smile on his face.

Something is off.

“Let’s go then,” she says, standing up.

“I’m still cold. Can I get a hug? You look like you give warm hugs.”

Here he goes, being a typical man with lame tricks.

“Mnelisi, I don’t have time for jokes. My daughter is waiting for me at home.”

“Just one hug, please.” He’s getting closer.

For some reason she’s having a hard time breathing.

“Please Ntofo,” he’s an inch away from her face.

She doesn’t like hugging people and...he’s wrapped his arms around her. His cologne blocks her nose, with each second his embrace gets tighter.

“Just give me a chance Ntofo, please. One chance to prove myself to you. I gave you a chance to prove that you don’t like me, you have to give me a chance to prove myself too.”

“That...that’s not what we agreed on,” she says, still with her arms dropped on her sides.

“We seem not to agree to anything. That’s why I’m asking you to let me play my part, I will let you say and prove how much you don’t like me too. Give me the same courtesy,” he says.

“I don’t understand what you want.” She’s confused.

This is not 1993 where a girl was tricked into a relationship. Yes, he’s old-school but times and rules have changed.

“I want to show you how much I love you.” His hand is on her face.

He turns her chin up and stares at her in the eyes.

“If you win, there’s no relationship. If I win, then you will be a Ngcobo.”

“This is not a game,” she says.

She’s calm, he leans closer and closer until his face is touching hers.

“I know, it’s not a game.” He brushes his lips against hers.

His right hand holds the back of her neck, then he takes full control of her lips.

It feels good...the way he’s holding her and how hungrily he’s smooching her.

She responds and enjoys it for a minute. Then she remembers that she can't do this, not when she has all these fears.

"What's wrong?" His voice is low and husky, he wants her badly.

"I don't want to do this, I'm not comfortable," she says.

He releases a sharp sigh. "How can I make you comfortable?"

"By taking me home and leaving me alone," she says.

"You came with an overnight bag, why?" When he saw it he knew that he has a chance. Yes, he listens when she says she doesn't like him, but he doesn't hear her.

"I always carry it with me," she's lying with a straight face.

He's getting worried, not because she says she doesn't like him and wants to go home, but because her body language shows that she feels something but there's this thing she won't tell him.

"Are you seeing someone else beside me?" he asks.

"No," she says.

"Then what is it, ntofontofo yami." He's kissing her again. Why she's kissing him back again is beyond her.

This time a phone call disturbs them. He grunts, irritated as he pulls away from her lips. He doesn't even know this number.

"Who is this?" He's beyond irritated.

"I want to talk to my sister," the person says.

He frowns and looks at Nombuso.

"Okay, she's here." He gives her the phone.

Nombuso is confused to. Who could be demanding her like this?

“Hello,” she answers.

“Hey, I’m just checking if you don’t need a rescue.”

Sphakamiso, phewww! Do they know that she’s going to turn 36?

“I’m okay. I didn’t give you the number to call it. Anyway where is Mkhuleko?”

“He’s cooking the rooster with Yoli.” he says.

At this time Yoli is not in bed? She trusted Mkhuleko.

“Who bought it?” she asks.

“Ruby chased Ma’s rooster until it fell inside a hole and broke both legs. So he’s wiping the evidence before she comes back from the night vigil and ask questions.”

She needs to sit down for this. She did say Ruby must go.

Mapholoba with his erection stands behind the couch and waits.

“So you’re all now eating the rooster without permission?” she asks.

“No, Malibongwe is with Miyanda. He waited until they closed the door before fetching the rooster and finishing it with a knife. I’m not a part of it but if the meat is given to me I won’t say no.”

“You know what, I’m glad I’m not there, please don’t give my daughter any meat, I don’t want any trouble “ she says.

“Yoli has already eaten the intestines,” Sphakamiso says.

“What the hell? Mkhuleko is a demon yazi, I’m not attending any chicken trial. Mkhuleko will be her attorney, ang’hlangani. Please beg him for me to put her in bed before 10pm, it’s already late.” This is unbelievable, she thought she’d find peace being away from them.

After a long chat Sphakamiso finally ends the call.

She turns and gives Mapholoba his phone. Fuck, she was demanding to go home?

He doesn't ask her any questions, he comes around and sits next to her.

"Your brother thought I had done something to you," he says.

"No, he's just overprotective," she says.

"Your brothers love you, don't they?"

Well, kind of. The newbie, Mpatho, financially spoils her, Malibongwe makes sure that everyone has their basic needs, Sphakamiso offers the emotional support when needed, and Mkhuleko is a headache but special in his own way.

"I've never thought about it," she says.

"Because you still have them. I only realized how much my brother meant to me when he passed. We weren't on speaking terms when he died. I hadn't spoken to him in three years, I hadn't met his last born, I met her on his funeral. I'm trying to make up to him through his children but that wound will never heal."

This is sad to hear. It makes her question her relationship with her whole family. Maybe she's taken life for granted.

"I'm sorry for your loss. I lost my father, I know how painful it is," she says.

"I lost both my parents, my eldest sister and my brother. I appreciate life more, I try by all means to show love to my loved ones." He takes her hand and looks at it.

Then he looks at her, "I want to show you love too."

"It's complicated Mnelisi, you won't understand."

"Try me," he says.

“I can’t, it’s a private issue.”

“Okay,” he nods.

She thinks they’re in agreement only for him to shift closer. He must’ve noticed that she can’t resist his kisses and now he’s exploiting her weakness. He’s passionate with his lips, demanding with his hands, and irresistible with his energy.

When he finally pulls away she’s feeling all kind of bubbles and warmth in secret places. He’s just as affected, his eyes have so much hunger. It’s been years since she felt this way because of a man. Maybe it was only a year into her marriage, after that she was full of fear than passion.

“You still don’t want to hug me?” he asks.

“I hugged you,” she’s blushing like a teenage girl.

“Come on,” he pulls her arms around him, pressing her breasts against his chest. Again, his lips lock into hers. He grabs her waist, dipping his fingers into her fleshy parts and bringing his hand up to her breasts. It’s them more than everything, his hands have ached to touch and squeeze them.

She starts holding her breath, looking uncomfortable.

“I’m not going to do it,” he whispers.

His heavy breaths and roaming hands say otherwise.

“I will calm Mapholoba down until you’re ready. But that doesn’t mean I can’t touch you, does it?”

Why can’t she say something? His hands are all over her breasts.

He pecks her lips, “Ntofo?”

“I told you not to call me that,” she doesn’t sound angry like she was the first time.

“It’s how you feel, everywhere your body is just soft and warm, which makes me wonder if...” He smiles.

No, she’s not going to engage him on that.

“Should I go and get your bag?” he asks.

He’s just asking to nurse his pride, he already knows that she’s not leaving.

“Yes,” she says.

“Mapholoba 1, Ntofo 0. May the best man win!”

She laughs.

This is not a fair game.

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They went out for breakfast, went back to his sister’s apartment and spent some time together. He’s totally bullied her; he gets more time to show his love than she gets time to show him how much she doesn’t like him. The current score is; Mapholoba 4, her 0. Yeap, she hasn’t scored one point according to him.

When he dropped her off the only thing she looked forward to was her bed. They shared a bed, he respected her and didn’t do anything to her, but she’s still tired. Not sleeping at home makes her tired.

Yoli sees her first and runs towards her. Luckily, she got a chance to buy some things when they went for breakfast.

“Hey sthandwa sami, how did you sleep?”

Yoli is more interested in the shopping bag she’s seeing.

“Did Malum’ Mkhuleko feed you?”

“Yes,” she nods and grabs a packet of chips from the bag.

“Must I give Ruby?”

Oh, hell no!

“Ruby is a dog, you mustn’t give her chips that I bought with my hard-earned money.” It’s Mapholoba’s money, which makes it hers.

MaVilakazi is standing with her hands on the hips. Malibongwe is sitting on the ground with his arms folded over his knees. Sphakamiso must’ve gone to work because the Tazz is not on the yard. He loves Unified more than the owner, it’s where he forgets about everything.

“I thought you’d come back with lobola delegates,” MaVilakazi says.

“I wasn’t gone to get married, good morning everyone,” she says.

She doesn’t hear Malibongwe greeting him back. She wants to talk to him later, what Mapholoba said still rings in her head.

“Did you see my black rooster? I’ve called all chickens to eat, it’s only that rooster that hasn’t come. It’s strange because they know their feeding times,” MaVilakazi says.

Yoli runs off with her chips. She doesn’t normally leave when elders are talking until she’s told to. Obviously someone told her to do this. She doesn’t want to be part of this conversation.

“Have you asked Mkhuleko?” Nombuso asks.

MaVilakazi doesn’t answer, the boy in question appears with his T-shirt lifted to his chest. He’s drenching in sweat.

“Ma, I’ve looked everywhere,” he says.

MaVilakazi sighs, “This is strange, I hope that my rooster is still alive. But thank you, my boy, for your efforts. Take R20 from my drawer and go buy yourself cold drink, you’re the only one

who bothered to search for me, others are too proud to help their mother.”

Malibongwe didn't help, he must catch that sub.

Mkhuleko has no conscience, no fear of God, or whatsoever. He's fetching the R20 knowing very well that he ate the rooster. Malibongwe doesn't know, she knows but her hands are tied because the same Mkhuleko did her a favor and she might need more favors because Mapholoba refused to leave her alone.

“How is Miyanda?” she asks Malibongwe.

He looks at her with a frown. They all get surprised when she's being nice.

“She's fine,” he says hesitantly.

“I have some maternity dresses she can use when indoors, they're more comfortable than those skirts and shirts she wears. I will bring them to her later.” She leaves confusion stuck on Malibongwe's face.

What is happening? Where is Nombuso?

LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 100

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Today we are going to the Vilakazis, I'm still not sure about the traveling arrangements because the Tazz went for service and we can't all fit in one car. Mpatho's ceremony is tomorrow but we have to sleep over, the goat slaughtering will be happening today. I have to pack for both Bonga and I. I brought enough decent clothes, I don't know where the dresses Nombuso gave

me will be. She surprised me with a bunch of hideous maternity dresses that are two times my size. I still don't know what the kind gesture was for, Bonga had just refused me to look after her daughter.

There's someone at the door, MaVilakazi.

"Hey makoti," she's walking in.

Another one I don't understand.

"Yebo Ma," I stop what I'm doing and sit down.

She takes the grass-mat leaning on the wall and rolls it on the floor to sit.

"Why is Malibongwe not packing? You're pregnant, he is not," she asks.

"I wanted to do it myself to make that I don't leave anything I might need behind," I say.

"Okay, but don't spoil him too much, he will be lazy." She seems to be in a good mood.

I haven't seen the evil side I was expecting.

She opens the plastic bag she came with, there are baby clothes inside.

"These clothes were Mkhuleko's, I know it's old styles and you, young people, want brands for your babies. But I thought it would be great if your boy wears them," she says.

My doctor hasn't revealed the gender yet but Mkhuleko has convinced everybody that I'm having a boy and they believe him. I'm looking at the clothes as she lays them in front of her. I don't come from a good background, I wasn't rich, I'm still not rich. But there's no way in hell my son is going to wear those rompas.

“Thank you, I will ask Bonga to buy a bag where I can keep them,” I say.

“You call him exactly how his father used to call him. They got along, he was the heir he dreamed of. I think he turned out okay than others,” she says.

Really, he’s robbed and killed people. How is that being okay?

“He wanted him, really wanted him. I prayed for him to be a boy, my marriage depended on it, I had to give Mcineka a boy. He didn’t disappoint, he came and saved me. He’s been there for me since birth, that’s why I panicked when you came out of nowhere and took him away.”

Oh, that’s where we are going with this.

“I didn’t take him away, he asked to stay with me and I agreed.” I don’t know how many times I’ve tried to explain this. Bonga is not a sack of potatoes, how did I TAKE him?

“He left home to be with you. That’s my son, Mcineka’s heir, he’s the reason why I’m still home. But I understand that he loves you, he’d do anything to be with you. That’s why I want you to encourage him to do what’s best for this family, all the time.”

“I will. He also has the responsibility to do what’s right for my family,” I say.

“He’s paying your lobola in full, even though you’ve been somewhere else before him. I love what he’s doing but I don’t want him to be exploited.” Mxm!

I’m tired of hearing this. She’s still the old, cold hearted hag.

I knew her new behavior was too good to be true.

“Did you have someone that you wanted for him?” At this point it’s clear that she doesn’t like me not because of what I’ve done, simply because I’m me.

Bonga walks in before I get my answer. He has a towel over his shoulder, he's topless. I notice that he has a soap container and washing sponge in his hand.

"Did you all go to bath in the river knowing about the snake that lives there?" his mother asks.

He chuckles, "There's no snake, Mkhuleko is always there and he's never seen it."

"One day he will go there and never come. It can't be that everyone in this village is lying." She reverses on her knees to stand up. "I handed down Mkhuleko's clothes, your baby will wear them."

"Thank you, MaVee. Please tell Nombuso to hurry up, Mpatho will be picking her and Mkhuleko and Yoli. You will travel with us," Bonga says.

I wish he'd swap Mkhuleko with his mother, I'm sure she will be judging everything I do.

Bonga picks the clothes and puts them next to me on the bed.

"Uright?" he asks me.

"Yeah, I'm good."

"I see you're now friends with my mother. It's a dream come true for me, thank you." He kisses my cheek then goes to the door and closes it. I already put aside his clothes, he strips naked and lotions his body.

My eyes are on him but my mind is somewhere else. Funnily he thinks I'm looking for him and salivating.

"Ufuna sishaye kancane yini?" he asks.

"No, I'm good." I laugh.

I love Bonga, but I'm not sure about his family. I want to ask about the house, if we are still moving in together as initially

planned. I don't see him getting approval from his mother, which is going to put us back to square one.

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I'm not in a good mood, traveling with his mother and sitting at the back made everything worse. I'm nauseous, I want to take a bath and sleep. But it's only 12pm and I just arrived at Bonga's uncle's house.

Bonga takes the bags, I follow MaVilakazi. Luckily there aren't a lot of people here, just the uncle and his wife. The uncle goes outside to meet the nephews.

I follow MaVilakazi and sit next to her, I pray that Bonga is out there arranging a room for me.

"Is this Bonga?" the wife asks, pointing at me.

MaVilakazi smiles and gives me a hand squeeze.

"Yes, it's my second daughter-in-law," she says.

"I see that she's expecting as well, your family is growing."

"Yes, she's due on the same month as Nkosiyazi's wife."

"Congratulations ntombi, I hope they won't disappoint you. Eyy, these young girls of today, they cannot keep husbands."

They're just going on and on as if I'm not here.

"Oh, makoti what's your surname?" the aunt finally recognizes my presence.

"She's a Mthethwa, uMaMthethwa," MaVilakazi answers for me.

"Welcome to your uncle's home MaMthethwa. The kitchen is right behind us, please make your mother-in-law tea and bread. You need to move and work so that your labor will be smooth."

I look at MaVilakazii, she knows that I haven't entered the kitchen at the Mcinekas. Why would I disobey my father and act like a wife here?

"Err, who's going to show her around?" That's what she's asking instead of telling this woman to leave me alone.

"Let me go and show her because these girls didn't bother coming back from Durban," the aunt stands up.

I'm a Mthethwa, my head can turn 360 in a second. But I follow her, as tired as I am. She shows me around her kitchen, she wants to be included in the tea as well. She leaves shortly, I can't even see a chair here. I make bread while waiting for the water to boil.

"Miyanda?"

That's his voice.

I turn around, he's standing with a frown looking at me.

There's so much heat, I'm sweating.

"What the fuck? Who said you must do that?" His face tells me that hell is about to drop down to this house. I don't want any drama around my name, not for now.

"Let it be, we'll talk about it," I say.

"Your father is going to fine me." At least he still remembers Nyambose's conditions.

"Let it be," I say.

He stares at me for a minute then go. I pour boiled water in a teapot and put plates on the tray and go serve.

"So much sweat from making tea? How much more when MaVilakazi introduces you to her madumbe garden?" she's laughing.

I'm actually sweating because her miserable kitchen is small and I'm pregnant.

"These ones wear long nails, they can never do gardens," MaVilakazi says.

"Are you not eating?" she looks at me.

"No, I had pizza on the way," I say.

"How is that healthy for the baby? You need to eat traditional food so that the baby will come out big and strong," the aunt is yapping again. She looks at MaVilakazi, "Have you seen MaMngadi's granddaughter, her legs are thin like a stick, that baby is not healthy at all."

"But isn't it the one they were searching a father for? Knocking at everyone's door," -MaVilakazi.

"I waiting for them to come and say my husband is the father," the aunt.

I'm sure the husband always cheats on her.

MaVilakazi laughs out loud. This is the happiest I've ever seen of her. Gossip make her happy, at least now I know that.

Bonga walks in.

"Miyanda, a minute please."

I stand up and go to him at the door. He signals that I follow him. There's unpainted house built at the side, we are heading there. It's divided into two rooms. Our bags are on the right one.

"This is where we are going to sleep. I'm sorry about the bed, Sphakamiso will get us new sheets and pillowcases," he says.

He's already filled a basin with cold water. I don't care about the bed, I strip naked and get inside the basin and freshen up. It's all I needed, maybe now my mood can improve.

"Want me to wipe your back?" he asks.

I squeeze the towel and hand it to him.

"I can see that you're angry, I'm sorry baby. Are you going to tell your father?"

If he thinks wiping my back will soften me up then he's wrong.

"I'm not an orphan, I cannot be treated like one," I say.

"I know, but you said I must let it be when I wanted to confront them."

"Because I don't want any drama Bonga, not today."

"Okay," he plants a soft kiss on my back.

There's a car outside. I'm sure it's other relatives, I need to dress up quickly.

Bonga is watching me like a hawk.

There's no mirror, I'm blindly wrapping my head.

"How do I look?" I turn around for him to see.

"Beautiful," he says.

I will take his word.

He opens the door and goes to throw my water outside.

When he comes back he's not alone, there are two voices with him.

They appear, my eyes meet with hers. It's going to be looooong two days.

She's not wearing any headwrap, she's bouncing her weave and flapping her long eyelashes. She's carrying nothing, just her purse. Her artificial nails have studs on them. This is not a person who came here to make tea, yet it's her husband's ceremony. So MaVilakazi wants to turn me into what they call 'umkhovu wasemzini'. Now, she has another thing coming.

"You're here?" Mpatho comes to me smiling.

He extends his hand to shake mine.

"I was invited by your brother," I say.

"Oh wow, thank you for coming. You could've just left him behind."

Bonga chuckles behind him.

They're next to us. The girl and I only look at each other, we don't have anything to say to each other, really.

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PHUMELELE

Mpatho still has unanswered questions for this family. But the way they're so excited to see him you'd swear he's a nephew they've been looking for, for years. I know things are yet to become sour. He's outside with his uncle and the Mcineka boys. I haven't seen Sphakamiso, not that I'm hoping for it. His presence is likely to make things awkward for me even in the bedroom. I'm in a very difficult situation here. Given that Malibongwe's girlfriend is going to be nextdoor to me for two days as well. I pray we don't step on each other's toes like the last time.

There's a MaNhleko person who can't keep her mouth shut here. She's married to MaVilakazi's cousin, the uncle. I don't know how many lectures and questions I've received from her.

"Where is MaMthethwa?" MaVilakazi asks.

"I saw her with Malibongwe," I say.

"Hhayi-bo she must come, you two need to cook lunch."

I cook for my husband, with the help of YouTube. I'm not going to cook for half a village.

"Don't you have restaurants that do deliveries around?" I ask.

The aunt cracks up laughing.

"Stop playing, there's a kitchen and cupboard full of groceries. If you don't know MaMthethwa will teach you," she says.

MaMthethwa and I don't even like each other to start with.

"Nombuso will be there with you too."

Nombuso and her little squirrel are here. I expected her to be the headache but she's focused on her Whatsapp instead. I foresee disaster and arguments in the kitchen.

After waiting for her for more than ten minutes MaMthethwa comes in. I thought she was doing make-up or something. Her tummy is bigger than mine, maybe she's carrying twins.

"You and Malibongwe!" MaVilakazi shakes her head.

"Leave them, they're young," -MaNhleko.

They crack into laughter.

MaMthethwa seemingly didn't share the joke.

"Malume will buy Aphelele and me big cars too," Yoli announces.

How rich is Malibongwe?

Before anyone congratulate her, she starts threatening.

“If he doesn’t Gogo and I will tell the police,” she says.

Everyone laughs. But it doesn’t look like Yoli is playing.

“We will call them, angithi Gogo? We will tell them that he has a big gun.”

The laughter stops immediately. Nombuso looks up from her Whatsapp with a frown.

Right now you can hear a pin drop.

“UGogo wami uyakwazi ukufonela amaphoyisa,” Yoli goes on. (My grandmother knows how to call the police)

Right now the only faces I want to see are MaVilakazi’s and Miyanda’s.

MaVilakazi is frozen.

Miyanda, I don’t know. She has the face she had walking in. No shock, no anger, just plain staring.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 101

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I stand on the table chopping veges. Nombuso was supposed to come here and show us everything and cook with us. But she’s with her mother having a secret meeting. Yoli followed us, me and Phume. She likes me, she’s turned into my little friend, always calling me and telling me stories. But today is different, I feel different about everything and everyone I thought I knew.

Nobody has said anything to me. They wouldn't have the nerve to say it. My heart is broken, I have a lot of questions in my head. MaVilakazi didn't deny anything, she's a police caller, when Yoli said it she froze and didn't say a word. Yoli didn't make it up, that's why none of them can look at me in the eyes right now.

"I don't like intentional inconvenience, what is this?" It's Mpatho's wife, she hasn't done anything, just standing and looking around the kitchen.

"Why would someone buy a head of butternut whereas there are packets of peeled and chopped ones for sale? I didn't come here to suffer." She's everything I thought she was.

I do my part, I don't know who will help her with hers.

She leans against the table and focuses on her phone. All she had to do was peel butternut and chop red meat. The rice is in front of her, sealed in a packet.

"Are you going to wash it?" This is the first time I'm speaking to her today.

She glances over, "Yeah."

Then she goes back to her phone.

Nombuso walks in, Yoli goes to her and asks for something.

"Go outside wena, which child do you see here? You want to record again."

Yoli runs outside, I don't think she deeply understands what her mother is angry at her for.

"Miyanda, MaVilakazi wants to talk to you," she says.

"About what?" I have nothing to talk to her about.

"Just come and hear her out," she insists.

I dry my hands and head out.

She's still with MaNhleko. I can't bear seeing her face, such a vile human being.

"You're probably wondering why Yoli said what she said. And by the look on your face I can tell that you've concluded," she's going through the corners.

I don't have time.

"Did you do it or not?" I ask.

"I did, it was out of anger and I regretted it because he returned home. I thought he was turning his back on me," she says. I don't see enough remorse on her face.

"So you did it because you thought he was coming to stay with me and disobeying you?" It's unbelievable.

"Yes, that's what I thought," she admits.

I don't understand where it's all coming from, what got her to this point.

"What did I do to you exactly? You don't know me, you hated me before you even met me." She needs to clarify this for me because I'm lost.

"I don't hate you, I hate your behavior," she says.

"What behavior? Woman, you don't know me from anywhere. How do you know how I behave? Please don't tell me through Bonga because he makes his own decisions, which I either contest or support. Ngenzeni? What did I do?"

MaNhleko releases a heav sigh.

"Mntanami, you have to worm your way to your mother-in-law's heart. We all did, you can't just be accepted without proving yourself." MaNhleko is an idiot, I don't know what she's talking about and how this concerns her. Her husband is outside

playing Facebook on Bonga's phone. He has an account, he asked to log in to talk to someone and that someone is not her with yellow and purple Carotone cheeks.

"I'm not desperate for anyone's approval, I don't have a mother, my longing for a mother's coddling and acceptance died with her," I tell her.

But of course her two brain cells make her think she can still convince me that I'm wrong and her sister-in-law is right.

"Telling Malibongwe will break this family apart. I'm not sure that's what you want," she says.

"You don't know what I want, and please don't act like a smart person. I'm not going to tell Bonga for my own reasons, not because you told me to." I turn and look at MaVilakazi.

"It's now time for you to leave me alone." I'm done here, with this whole place and family.

I'm sure Njabulo is on his way with his friend's car. Luckily, I hadn't unpacked.

Bonga is outside with Mkhuleko, their uncle and Mpatho.

"Can we talk?" I don't wait for his reply, I turn and head towards the house that has my belongings.

I'm going to choose my baby over my heart. I love him, maybe I will never love again after this.

He leaves the door open and walks in.

"Uright?" he grabs my arm and turns me around.

He doesn't deserve this, he's such a soft-hearted person. Definitely a man I dreamed of, aside my blesser fantasies.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"For what baby?"

“We have to focus on the baby. I don’t want to be in a relationship anymore, so I’m leaving, we will stay in touch about the baby and other relevant issues.”

“Wait, uright? Look at me,” he lifts my chin up.

“I’m alright. I know you’re surprised, but I need to make a decision to protect my baby from not having a father.” His mother is capable of killing him just to spite me, that’s how deeply she hates me. So for my baby to have a father I have to stay away.

“I don’t like pranks Miyanda. If it’s those YouTube things with hidden cameras just...”

“No, it’s over Malibongwe,” I say.

He goes to the door and closes it.

“Let’s talk about it, tell me what I did so that I can apologize.” He’s not going to understand this today but one day he will.

My phone rings, it’s Njabulo.

I answer, “Are you here? No, there’s a blue-painted house and unpainted foursquare....alright, I’m going to stand outside the gate.”

They’re here, I have to go.

“Njabulo is here, so...I don’t know, sometimes love isn’t enough. You were the best thing in my life, I’m so blessed to have known you and experience true love with you.” I pick my bag and go to the door.

I look back, he’s still standing with a confused face. One day he will find out who his mother really is, but it won’t be from me because I don’t want to be blamed for how broken this family is.

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PHUMELELE

Malibongwe is demanding everyone in the living room. Nombuso was trying to look for her shoe and she got dragged out. I'm going, I can't be alone in the kitchen and I want all details first-hand, Mpatho is not a good storyteller, he will leave facial expressions aside when narrating.

I look around for Miyanda, she's not here. I'm very certain that this is about MaVilakazi sending him to jail.

We are all finding spots to sit down. I can't believe he even summoned their uncle. His face looks red, it's about to go down!

Who's at the door now, I thought we were all here.

I turn my head...Sphakamiso in a white shirt and jeans. I thought he wasn't going to come. It looks like he's coming from work. My excitement is gone, I look across and see Mpatho's face, he's not comfortable.

"Sphakamiso, is this you?" His uncle is happy.

"Yebo malume," he walks in, they shake hands.

Malibongwe signals for him to sit. Before he does, he looks at my direction. I lock eyes with him for a second then drop mine. We need to sit down and talk, this is not how I want to live. But Mpatho is likely to never see the need.

Malibongwe remains standing, his head almost reaches the roof, maybe it's his height that makes him bossy.

"Miyanda just broke up with me and left. I want to know from everyone who was inside, what happened?"

I'm shocked. Broke up with him? For what?

"How can she break up with you after everything you've done for her?" -Nombuso.

"Because someone did something to her. I forgave the slaving she was subjected into because she begged me to let it be. Ma, you know very well that she's not supposed to do any labor."

"Making tea and cooking is not labor," MaVilakazi.

"It is, she was a guest here, not a caterer. So what did you say to piss her off?"

I can't believe he gathered all of us here for Miyanda. This is not the breaking news I came here running for.

"You scared me, I thought it was about what Yoli revealed," Nombuso says.

Miyanda didn't tell, why is she telling? This is getting interesting.

Malibongwe wants to know. "What did Yoli say?"

MaVilakazi looks at Nombuso. "Awukhule wena, grow up. This is not the place or time."

"Don't tell me to grow up, you got my brother arrested. What kind of a mother does that?"

Oh Jizas, it's going down, now for real!

Sphakamiso stands up. "What???"

Mpatho's mouth dropped open. I was going to tell him about it later.

"Miyanda probably broke up with you, Malibongwe, because she doesn't want Ma to keep hurting you to punish her. Sorry fam, but I don't keep dirt in my heart." She returns to her seat.

I need to adjust here, I'm not seeing properly.

"I knew," that's Mkhuleko.

We all look at him. He knew and didn't say anything to Malibongwe? Where is his loyalty?

"I asked Sis' Miyanda not to tell you bhuti when she finds out. Pity, I wasn't warned about Yoli. But I think this is a lesson to you," he looks at his mother. "Be a good mother."

Heehh, not last born ditching raw advices.

"Mkhuleko that's not how you speak to your mother," - MaNhleko.

I swear the doek tied on her head has tied her brain too.

"She's not a good mother, she knows." Mkhuleko doesn't give a damn.

MaVilakazi can't even lift her face.

"I've had troubles with my gift ever since I was nine. Please ask her what she's done to help me. She even ignores my dreams, she calls them hallucinations and says I need to find a job," he says.

"Well, even if you do find that job it won't make anything better, ask me," -Malibongwe.

MaNhleko can't keep quiet, maybe she's her hired spokesperson.

"Now you're all ganging up on her? Even Nkosiyazi is perplexed by this behavior, you're all ruining his day."

Mpatho laughs from his corner. "I'm okay, just listening. I didn't see her as a good mother, not after she abandoned me after 3 weeks. I know her heartlessness better than them."

"All of us have scars from her, Nkosiyazi. I was married and divorced, narratives were made about me. I cried on her lap but

sis never bothered to fight for me. Even now, she lets her friends say I cheated on my ex-husband,” Nombuso says.

I’m sure MaVilakazi regrets coming out of her mother’s womb right now.

“And I don’t know my real father’s family, she made me believe I was a Mcineka for 27 years and watched her husband mistreat me all my life. Now I’m sick because of this identity issue she refuses to solve.” Sphakamiso’s part breaks my heart more than others. I know the kind of person he is. If MaVilakazi told him early he was going to understand and forgive her.

The uncle finally speaks up. “I can see that you’re all angry but let’s just calm down and let her digest everything. Surely she will recognize her short comings and fix where she can.”

“Okay Malume, but I called this meeting. I need one answer from my so-called mother. What did I do to her for her to send me to jail? I could’ve been locked up my whole life,” Malibongwe asks.

I see his pain and disappointment. That was a big betrayal, his own mother!

“Answer me, what did I do to deserve this from you?”

MaVilakazi finally looks up. All along I thought she was better than my mother.

“You all just always have to complain, right?”

Hhayi-bo, what is she saying? She did all the things they’re saying she did.

“I’m tired, okay? Go and find better mothers. How many times have I apologized Nkosiyazi? Your father abused me emotionally, using his financial status. But you’re just like others, always complaining and vilifying me about things I can’t change.”

What the fuck?!

She looks at Sphakamiso. “Really wena? You denied your own child, asking everyone to call Aphelele Malibongwe’s child because of a girlfriend. If she didn’t break-up with you were you ever going to love your child in front of her. You prioritized your relationship over your son, I was the one making him comfortable when you felt like being his father was a dirty spoil to your relationship. So leave me alone, I have apologized and groveled too much to you.”

Sphakamiso is aghast.

I can’t believe MaVilakazi right now, so she’s poking holes in them to justify herself.

“Nombuso, I don’t want to start with you. You only love yourself, everything is about you. You’ve mistreated everyone in this family. Anyone who disagrees must come forward.”

Nobody does. Nombuso is looking at her siblings like, huh.

“So this is now about how horrible everyone is just because we told you the truth. No Ma, you’re the root of everything you’re complaining about. You sent me to jail, you’re capable of killing me, yet you claim that it’s Miyanda who is not good for me.” It’s only Malibongwe who still has it in him to reason with this woman.

“Oh, creamy boy, get over yourself. There are two girls who don’t have a mother right now because of you. And you’re here yapping because you spent two weeks in a cell. You were supposed to go to jail for killing a woman. A helpless woman who was working for her children. Do you ever ask yourself what they’re eating and how they’re dealing with grief?” She clicks her tongue and reverses on her knees then stands up.

“I can’t even drink a cup of tea in peace...’Maa, you did this, you didn’t do that’. Being a mother isn’t the only thing I came on earth to do. Yoh, what kind of suffering is this?”

She’s leaving the meeting, throwing her hands in the air and grumbling.

“I also came from a woman's womb, you’re not the only children on earth, ngixegeni nje!” She waves her hand one last time and disappears.

We sit in two minutes silence, just staring at each other. In life some people you just forgive without them apologizing, just to move on with life.

Mkhuleko is the first one to react to the clapbacks they just received.

“Hhayi no, uyadelela umagriza mekubo,” he says.

I agree, MaVilakazi grew these wings because we are in her parents' home. What a day!

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 102

MALIBONGWE

She’s not answering his calls. In his heart he knows that it’s fixable, he needs to go there and apologize to her for how he’s allowed his mother to treat her. But he can’t go there alone because he already knows that Nyambose is probably craving for his head with a machete.

But for the first time she never communicated her feelings to him. They always talk about things and make decisions together. This time she decided alone, it hurts. He can’t even close his eyes and sleep. It’s already 10pm, he’s just lying in bed and staring at the roof. Yes, what his mother did hurts him.

She had her reasons and yes, he deserved longer than two weeks, but the trust he had in her is gone. He will thread carefully next to her, which is sad because they're mother and son.

He tries Miyanda's phone again. Voicemail, phewww!

"Mommy...mommy!"

What is that now? Who's crying for his mother at 10pm?

Moans....moans...moans. Jizas Christ, is this really happening?

Mpatho knows that he's just next door.

Hearing Phume screaming is traumatizing more than MaVilakazi's attitude.

He doesn't have earphones, he plays music loud in his phone. But Mpatho's groans get louder, and Oh Lord, he's so dirty and raw with everything he says to her.

He can't, Miyanda is too far. He wakes up and goes outside. He stands on his door.

"Ng'cela ukulala, can I sleep?" he asks.

They don't respond but the noise dies down. It's good that Sphakamiso slept with Mkhuleko in the main house because he wasn't going to handle this well.

When he gets back inside the room he's missed calls from Miyanda. His heart almost jumps out of his chest. He dials her number and calls.

She answers, "Hey."

"Sthandwa sami, I've been trying to call you."

“Please stop calling, this is already hard on me, please give me space to get used to this.”

“Miyanda ngiyak’thanda,” he says.

“Please sleep, the baby is kicking and okay. Goodnight.” She drops the call.

His hand starts shaking. WTF!

How does she protect him by hurting him? Isn’t this exactly what MaVilakazi said she was doing.

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MPATHO

He woke up in a good mood. Not because he’s here, nope, none of these people matter to him. He’s here to get the ish surname together. Maybe after today nothing will make him come back here. MaVilakazi? Only time will tell what kind of relationship they will have. His father’s cousins will be here at 12pm, there’s another goat being brought over.

“Morning sweet queen,” he says to Phume when she opens her eyes.

“Mmmmm,” she turns and sleeps on her back.

He reaches to her tummy and kisses her cheek.

“How did you sleep?” he annoys her with more kisses on the face.

“Mpatho!” she pushes him away.

“How is the bed treating you?”

She rolls her eyes and laughs. They both have maps on their bodies, maybe this bed is older than them.

“Don’t worry, I will try to get us a bed for tonight,” he says.

“They will say we think we are better. Do you know how judgmental that MaNhleko person is?”

“I don’t care what they think, you can’t sleep like this. Yesterday I couldn’t even tell if you were crying because of my dick’s pleasure or the pain from the springs pricking your back.”

She laughs, “Both. I don’t know how I’m going to face Malibongwe.”

She was embarrassed last night, she wanted them to leave.

“Naye uyabhebha nje, he fucks too,” he says. He doesn’t care because he wasn’t cheating, he was making love to his wife.

“It’s still embarrassing to know someone knows that I do sex,” she says.

“You’re pushing a belly in public everyday, obviously they know.” He laughs and kisses her cheek.

“Let me go and get us warm water to bath.”

He steps outside, the sun is already up. Most people have woken up. He looks at Malibongwe’s door, he hasn’t opened. He starts in the kitchen first and asks for water. Nombuso says she’s going to boil it for him. She’s so nice these days. He needs to make another appointment for her to see Freedom.

He comes back and knocks at Malibongwe’s door.

“Who is it?” -Malibongwe.

“It’s your father, open the door.”

After two minutes the door opens, Malibongwe appears with red-rimmed eyes.

“You’re not my father,” he says and returns to bed.

Mpatho stands in the middle of the room.

“You look miserable,” he notes.

“Thanks, you just made me feel better.”

Mpatho sighs, “I’m being honest, you need to get up.”

“For what? It’s your ceremony, not mine.”

“It starts at 12pm, you have time to go and get your girl. Go and clear the misunderstanding before her family starts hating you like I do,” he says.

“I was arrested, my reputation is already bad. I don’t think Nyambose wants to see my face.” He’s scared, Nyambose trusted him with his daughter and she returned home crying.

“I will go with you,” Mpatho says.

“What if she doesn’t want me for real?”

“Then you will be single.”

Malibongwe frowns.

He pulls the blanket off him. “Get up, we have to be ready in an hour time. You’re driving and buying drinks on the way.”

Malibongwe sits up and sighs.

Mpatho walks out and goes back to Phume.

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NOMBUSO

MaVilakazi is actually mad at her. Both her and MaNhleko agree that she’s broken the family. She’s not going to entertain

them. This morning she's cooking breakfast for everyone and waiting for the goat meat. She's not going for anyone, unless someone comes for her, then they will collect sweets and sours.

Mpatho's water is ready. She pours it inside 20l bucket and boils more, for three others.

"What are we eating?" Mkhuleko walks in.

"Did you dream of food all night?"

He grabs carrot and eats it raw. He's not hungry, just missing chewing.

"Have you spoken to your mother?" he asks.

"No, she's busy gossiping about me with her sister-in-law. But trust me, we are going home, her family won't be there," she says.

"Maybe she's going to stay here forever," he laughs.

Mpatho walks in to fetch his water. Nombuso shows him.

"Thank you, Phume will join you in no time," he says.

She actually didn't say that.

"Tell her not to worry, I will manage, there's no signal for her to Google everything," Nombuso says.

"She's new to most things," he explains.

"Oh before I go, do you have an iron? I need to iron my T-shirt, Malibongwe and I are going to see Miyanda before my uncles get here," he asks.

"I will iron it, just bring it here," -Nombuso.

Before he walks out Mkhuleko asks,

"Why wasn't I asked to come?"

“You can come, as long as you behave because we are going to be roasted when we get there,” Mpatho says.

Mkhuleko rushes to the room he shared with Sphakamiso, who annoyed him with maskandi all night. Maybe he was trying to distract himself from thinking about what was happening in the room where Mpatho and Phume slept.

“We are going to fetch Sis’ Miyanda,” he announces walking in. Sphakamiso sits up. “What time?”

“They’re already bathing and ironing clothes.”

He yawns, “Okay, I’m going to get ready too.”

Mkhuleko scratches his head. “Ummm, Mpatho is coming with us.”

“I’m going for Malibongwe and Miyanda,” he says.

Mkhuleko smiles. There’s a ray of hope, at last. They will be sharing a ride for two hours. Maybe, just maybe, they will talk things out.

Everyone is running around, getting ready. Nombuso is making sure that breakfast is ready so that they will eat before they leave.

MaVilakazi walks in. “Hhayi-bo, where are they going?”

“They’re your sons, ask them,” Nombuso says.

“I’m still your mother,” -MaVilakazi.

She sighs, “They’re going to the Mthethwas to fix things.”

“Oh!”

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I'd be lying if I say I woke up okay. I'm broken, I still haven't told my father that it's over between me and Bonga. But he knows everything else, unfortunately he's a man, he can't go head to head with MaVilakazi.

Njabulo offered to make breakfast seeing that I'm not okay. Some days he's a human being.

He even knows how to make magwinya. But most of them are oval shaped and have horns.

"I'm thinking of opening a fast food business and sell them," he's getting ahead of himself.

"You took 3 hours, I don't think customers will have the patience," Nyambose says.

He laughs, "Wena ankel you don't know that good things take time."

He looks at me, "Are you seriously not going to eat because you broke up with Malibongwe?"

He did that on purpose.

Nyambose is staring at me. "Things are that bad?"

"I just want peace, for the baby's sake," I say.

"What about your happiness?" It's good to know that he cares.

"I will figure it out baba, don't worry," I say.

Njabulo shakes his head, "What about the cows? I'm already holding people's deposits."

"Were you going to sell them without my permission? Are you the one stealing people's cows in the village?" -Nyambose.

There's someone greeting outside. Njabulo dodges the question like that. I don't think he's serious, he likes provoking Nyambose because he overreacts.

He's talking to the person outside, after a minute he comes in. "You won't believe this, there's a whole clan outside," he says. "Huh?" I'm confused.

He looks at Nyambose, "Do you know where your knobkerrie is? You need to use it, Malibongwe is outside."

What the hell? He can't just come here unannounced.

"Baba, can I go see what's going on?" I ask.

He nods.

Jeez, I'm bringing stress to this old man.

Mpatho, Malibongwe, Sphakamiso and Mkhuleko?

All of them here, what's going on?

"Sanibona," I'm a bit frightened.

"Yebo, can we talk to the elders?" Mpatho asks.

My eyes are on Malibongwe. What is this?

"I will call my father." I turn to Njabulo and ask that he takes them inside the rondavel.

This looks serious. Maybe MaVilakazi sent them. I don't know what my father is going to make of this?

I get inside the kitchen.

"Baba, it's Malibongwe and his brothers, they want to talk to you," I say.

"Baphetheni? What are they carrying?" he asks.

"Nothing, I didn't see anything," I say.

“Okay,” he stands up.

I don't trust his okay, something won't go right in that rondavel.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 103

MALIBONGWE

Nyambose walks in carrying a wooden bench. They're all on the floor, sitting with their knees up. He's got nothing but respect for this man. Miyanda is a product of a single man's upbringing, she was well brought, she doesn't lack anything. Nyambose tried his best to give her a normal life. He wanted to continue there but lately it feels like he brought her nothing but a baby and toxicity.

“I'm not sure whether I'm being attacked, you all just came with nothing but your hands. You didn't announce anything or even call,” Nyambose says. He's not pleased, especially because he just accepted their marriage proposal trusting that his one and only daughter will be treated well.

“Siyaxolisa baba, it was urgent, we didn't plan to come here until this morning,” Mpatho says.

Malibongwe is just here because he wants to see Miyanda, he can't exchange any word with his father-in-law.

Nyambose's silence tells them that he wants details; why are they here.

“There was a little misunderstanding that led into Miyanda leaving during the day. We thought we'd come to ask for forgiveness and clear things up,” -Mpatho.

“Oh, uMiyanda?”

He clears his throat, “Sorry, uMaMsomi.”

Nyambose’s face turns dark.

“Shit!” Mkhuleko curses under his breath.

Mpatho looks at Malibongwe’s direction.

“Mthethwa,” Malibongwe whispers with his head dropped.

“Baba ng’yaxolisa kakhulu, it’s MaMthethwa,” he says with his hands put together. That was an honest mistake, he probably confused it with someone else because of how furious the man looks.

“Let me guess,” Nyambose says, staring at Mpatho like he’s the one who introduced Miyanda to Malibongwe. “You’re now here to ask her to come back so that she can cook for you all and your uncles and their wives and children. Right?”

“No, not at all. We just wanted to turn ourselves in, what happened shouldn’t have happened to her under our care and it won’t happen again.”

“Boys, I’m not going to decide for her but I will decide what I do regarding the disrespect your brother has shown me. I don’t remember pulling my daughter out of my kraal, I haven’t received everything I was promised. Yet, on top of making her pregnant out of wedlock, he’s turned her into a full wife that wears his mother’s apron and cook for his family.”

They don’t justify anything. It’s not Malibongwe who put Miyanda in the kitchen but the cross is for him to bear.

“Hearing that he’s here I expected to see something, even a goat’s kid or a case of beer, showing his remorse. But no, you all just came kwaMpunzedl’emini because you can use your mouths to talk.”

None of them though about it. The goal was to get here and talk to Miyanda. But now that Nyambose has brought it up they can log heads and see how much is in their pockets.

“It was a mistake Dingiswayo,” Mpatho says and turns towards Malibongwe.

Wallets come out. Malibongwe had R500, Mpatho adds his R300, Sphakamiso didn't have any cash except the R50 he saved for a packet of cigarettes, he gives it up.

Mkhuleko?

He's been looking at his torn wallet for ages.

“Kuyahlangana?” Mpatho asks.

He takes a deep breath and releases his R30. He will get it back from Malibongwe with interest because he didn't come here to be scammed.

They put it on the floor in front of Nyambose.

“Baba please get something to drink and cool down your head from the stress we've given you. We will apologize properly when our uncles come for the second time, for now this is all we have,” Mpatho says.

Nyambose's face finally melts, he collects the money and safely pockets it inside his coat.

“Now we can talk,” he looks at Malibongwe.

“I've received complaints from my daughter since the day she came to report the pregnancy. I'm a man, there are things I can't address, especially if it involves women. But I'm not happy that she's not happy. I've come too far to have my daughter depressed by a woman. I've stayed all these years unmarried because I didn't know how other women would come and treat her. So, for your mother to confirm my worst fears, that not all

mothers will mother her warmly, it makes me regret accepting your uncles.”

Mkhuleko lifts his head and scratches the side of his face.
“Thayma, the thing is...”

Sphakamiso’s nudges him with his elbow. Nyambose already had his eyebrows pulled.

“Errr baba, the thing is Sis’ Miyanda is not just there for love, marriage and kids. Most things that happen we have no control over, even if we did try to stop them they’d happen because there’s a vision behind her being part of our family.”

They don’t know what he’s talking about and why he’s saying something.

Nyambose’s face is questioning and back to not being pleased.

Sphakamiso clears his throat. “What he’s trying to say is that we will try our best to protect her in future.”

“No, only Baba can protect her,” Mkhuleko argues.

Sphakamiso takes a deep breath and looks at Nyambose. “He has a thing with the ancestors. But please don't worry, she’s in safe hands. We will have a discussion with the elders about everything that happened yesterday, hopefully a heartfelt apology will be given to Sis’ Miyanda.”

Nyambose looks at him, he still recognizes his face. “You were here when your brother was in jail. If he goes back are you the one who’s going to raise the child?”

Malibongwe breaks a drop of sweat. What kind of a question is this? He’s not going anywhere, he’s raising his child with Miyanda as a family.

“If anything was to happen to one of us the remaining ones will look after the children,” he says.

“If you say so,” he takes a deep breath and looks at Malibongwe. It’s been disappointing, but Miyanda will make the decision herself. He doesn’t say goodbye, he just walks out.

After a short while Miyanda walks in. She’s changed her dress and uncovered her head. Yep, uncovered. When they arrived she had a scarf loosely wrapped around her head. Is this a sign?

Malibongwe’s eyes are wide.

For a minute she contemplates whether to stand or sit.

After a deep breath she sits.

“This wasn’t necessary, Sphakamiso,” she says looking at him.

Sphakamiso’s mouth drops open.

“It’s dramatic, now everyone is going to wonder what happened, why are my in-laws here,” she adds.

“It wasn’t me, our rich brother from the high-fenced mansions actually organized this visit,” Sphakamiso’s says.

“I wanted to help Malibongwe, thanks for your good description,” Mpatho retorts with displeasure.

There’s a battle of stares. It was a matter of time before the hatred stemming from grudges gets between the two of them.

“If you want to be angry at someone then be angry at me,” Malibongwe says.

“You know that I’m not angry, I’m just overwhelmed and hurt. You should’ve called me before coming here and speaking to my father,” she says.

“I thought he was my father too, through you.”

She drops her eyes and blows out a deep sigh.

“Miyanda, what did I do to deserve the pain you’ve put me through?” His voice is breaking.

Mkhuleko looks up with a frown. “It was just a day!”

Mpatho turns and looks at him. Didn’t he say he’d behave?

“Let’s go and wait in the car,” Mpatho instructs, standing up.

Sphakamiso doesn’t argue, surprisingly, he stands and follows.

They’re at the door, Mkhuleko is still sitting. Mpatho turns with a glare.

“I just wanted to hear the end of their fight,” he mumbles lifting himself off the mat. Old people are very boring. When was the last time he saw a couple fight live?

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“Bonga you can’t come close, Nyambose is home,” -Miyanda.

He sits down again. His eyes...did he sleep at all?

“Ngenzeni mina? What did I do?” He’s hurting.

“I wanted peace,” she says.

“Peace for everyone except Malibongwe? Do you love me?”

She sighs, “You know that I love you. Why are you cornering me like this?”

“Because I don’t think I can live another day without you. Please take your words back and allow me some time to address things with my family,” he begs.

“What words now?”

“That you can’t be with me anymore.”

“But I can’t, your mother Bonga...”

“I’m not going to leave if you don’t take that back. I will tell my brothers to leave and move in here with you and your father and beg you everyday.”

“How is that normal?” She frowns.

“Yes, it’s not.” He stands up and starts untying his shoe laces.

“Babeee!”

He looks at her.

“Seriously?”

“I’m staying,” he says.

If she doesn’t calm down right now Nyambose will inherit a son he never had.

“Okay, we are still together, now chill out,” she says.

“Prove it,” he says.

Her mouth drops open. Is this guy a human being or alien?

He’s standing and he won’t take no for an answer. She checks the coast and then goes to where he’s sitting. She only wanted to peck his lips but no, he wants to swallow her. She has to push him back before he’s fined for intimacy.

“I love you,” he says, staring at her anticipantly.

“I, too, love you. Let’s talk over the phone, go before Sphakamiso and Mpatho kill each other.”

He finally smiles, “Okay, we’ll talk then.”

She walks him outside the yard and returns back to the kitchen.

Nyambose looks at her walking in and consciously rubbing her lips.

“They thought you’d leave with them, not knowing that the Mthethwas are hard-headed,” he says staring at her.

She breaks a low chuckle and turns to stack the plates.

“He’s not getting anything back though, he made you pregnant and you didn’t leave because you cheated, it’s their fault,” he goes on to say.

“Yeah baba,” she says and clears her throat.

Nyambose scratches his bearded chin and says, “Anyway, what attracted you to that mayonnaise boy? The Mthethwas are dark to the bone, we drip African aura, you can’t locate us in the dark. If I pinch that ex of yours on the cheek he’d bleed.”

“Okay baba, we got back together, so please don’t criticize him,” she finally confesses.

“Oh?” Nyambose shakes his head and picks his stick and puts it under his arm.

“See why I don’t want to put my claws in your matters, let me go and give Zodwa the money she needed for her stock,” he’s walking out.

“Where did you get the money? I thought you were broke.”

He laughs, “Broke for you, not Zodwa.”

Something doesn’t add up, she stares until he disappears.

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They have to cover 12pm, if they don’t encounter any obstacles they will get there on time. Malibongwe has gained his glow back, he’s smiling and eating his first meal of the day, a cheese sandwich they got in some food truck.

Mkhuleko is sitting at the front, Mpatho is on the wheel.

He looks back, “Bhuti leya mpahla, where are you going to withdraw it?”

Malibongwe wipes his mouth and looks at him, eyebrow cocked.

“What is that?” He’s confused.

“My money, the one you gave to your father-in-law.”

“What? That was a brotherhood contribution to get his forgiveness so that he grants me access to speak to his daughter.”

“Ngiyakuzwa bhuti, but how does that change my life?”

“She’s going to be a Mcineka wife, how is that not changing your life, everyone’s life in the family?”

“But she only kissed you, I want my money,” – Mkhuleko, he doesn’t care.

Sphakamiso laughs, “How do you know they kissed?”

“I dropped my earphones and went back to collect them, then I heard him ebiz’ abadlwane.”

“Get a life, does your girlfriend still even exist?” -Sphakamiso laughing.

“Yes, she’s not married,” he says, setting a new mood.

Sphakamiso’s laugh cuts short, Mpatho focuses on the road, Malibongwe on the sandwich.

It’s 11:43am, they made it.

Even though Malibongwe badly wants to have a conversation with MaVilakazi, he knows that it will be fruitless as long as she sees her family. For the last time they will talk about his

relationship with Miyanda. He doesn't have a leg to stand on when it comes to her getting him arrested. Unlike Sphakamiso, he wasn't wrongfully accused.

He's the first to get out of the car. Ruby is running towards it, Mkhuleko excitedly opens his door and climbs out. They leave the two inside, the tension is high.

A long moment of silence passes.

"I had a child," Sphakamiso breaks the silence.

"A secret child," Mpatho says.

"It was my child and your actions changed his life, forever. The way you and I didn't have a good childhood, Aphelele also went through the most at a tender age."

"I didn't make you lose your job," Mpatho says.

"I'm not Phume, so I'm not going to believe every word you say."
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"Phume ungenaphi?"

"Can't I call her name?"

"No," he says firmly.

"Noted. Anyway, I don't hold grudges forever but I know where 'siblingships' start and end. I know who's hurt my son, I know who I can't trust, and I know who has my back and that is, no one. So it's cool, welcome to the family."

"Thanks, I guess."

Silence falls.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 104

PHUMELELE

I received a call from the hospital that Beauty is not doing good. With Mpatho busy with Miyanda, I have no one to share my fears with. If Beauty dies I will be responsible. I fought and killed because someone criticized my husband. Do you know what's funny? Is that she only added spices but she didn't lie about who Mpatho is. Tomorrow we'll need to go to the hospital. Whether she lives or dies, my life will be horrible.

I'm restless, I leave everyone inside the kitchen and take a walk outside. I bump into Malibongwe and Mkhuleko with Ruby. Mpatho is not with them, neither is Sphakamiso.

"They're talking," Mkhuleko quickly puts me at ease.

They pass me and enter the kitchen. By the look on Malibongwe's face all is well. What's surprising me though is Mpatho's hypocrisy. How many times have I begged him to come with me to have a conversation with Sphakamiso?

I get inside the room, we are going to spend another night here. I don't have the bed I was promised, he's forgotten about his own priorities, he's running after people's girlfriends. I open my goodie bag and nibble on choc sticks to calm myself down. It doesn't take long before I see Sphakamiso passing, he looks okay than before but he's still not his normal self. I still want to have a conversation with him, I don't want us to be strangers like this. I'm sure he doesn't know about Mzimela's death, there's a good chance that Snenhlanhla will come for the funeral.

Oh, the fixer is here at last.

He looks at me and he knows that I'm fuming.

He picks the wrapping I threw on the floor and puts it inside the plastic bag. Then he kisses me on the cheek.

"Are you okay?" he asks me.

“Beauty is not doing good. If she dies I will be responsible for murder.”

“Yesterday she was making good progress. What happened now?”

“I don’t know, the hospital called me. But you were away, chasing down other women. Had you stood up for me and protected me like that from Beauty, I wouldn’t be here.” I know this is not close to the truth because at times when he wanted to deal with Beauty, his own way, I was the one who stopped him.

“She came here to support me,” he says.

The audacity he has!

“And I’m not here to support you? Hhayi-bo Mpatho, I could be home doing my things and I’m here tolerating MaNhleko because of you, and you want to give her the crown?”

“You’re being petty right now, this beef or whatever you two have is childish.”

Did he tell her that or he’s only saying it to me because kimi kuyehlela?

“You can’t be angry at someone because she called you a slayqueen for ten years. I killed Malibongwe’s father, he killed Aunt Nomusa, but we talk and tolerate each other.” He takes off his T-shirt and stands up. He’s changing into a short-sleeved shirt.

“I will tell Beauty’s in-laws about her condition, they’re here,” he’s referring to the Mshazi relatives who are here on his father’s behalf. We are not a close family, the cousins only come when there’s a wedding or funeral.

He walks out.

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I don't know what is the process of everything that's happening today. I have no inclination to find out, I'm okay in the kitchen with the absent Nombuso. Even though it's weird that she's not talking down on anyone and not criticizing me, but I'm enjoying this rare side of her.

"We are going to wash to roll dumplings ke mfazi wasemishini," she says getting off the chair.

Well, I take back my words.

I look at my hands, I don't think I can roll dumplings.

"I will mix the ingredients and you will roll," I suggest.

"No, don't worry, I will do everything. I just said that to be formal, I know you can't do anything." She's got razor mouth, since when I can't do anything? But I don't mind, I will sit my ass down and chill.

Yoli walks in, she's been scarce in the kitchen since Miyanda left. It doesn't bother me, I'm not a people's person, kids have good senses. She's delivering a tea message, it's the third round of tea today, maybe those two women are out to punish me. Maybe this is one of the reasons Miyanda ran away, this is modern-day slavery.

I stand up to make it while Nombuso deals with the dumpling.

"So, how's marriage so far?" she asks.

I didn't expect this question from her, we are not that close.

"It's okay," I say.

"What is the age gap?"

"9 years," I say.

“And it’s okay?” She laughs and picks the packet of flour, emptying it into a bowl.

“You’re young and I doubt you experienced life outside your relationship with Sphakamiso, which was a secured one. Getting married to a man older than you must’ve been challenging. Marriage drained me, and I was married to a man I chose myself, my high school sweetheart.”

Oh wow, she did high school!

“Challenges are there but love wins.” I don’t know why I’m having this conversation, I normally protect my marriage at all costs, unless it’s Ntombi. “He doesn’t listen to me,” I say.

“Do you know how to talk to him?” she asks.

“I know how to talk to people. He wasn’t like this when we first started, he was different, in a good way. He was romantic, patient and understood. He changed after we signed, I guess this is his real character.”

Our backs are turned, I’m just talking not realizing that there’s a third person inside the house.

“Phaka?” Nombuso turned and saw him standing.

I’m sure he heard everything.

“Can I have cold water?” he asks.

“Icy cold?” Nombuso asks.

“Yes,”

She opens the fridge and pours for her. We stand looking at each other, I know he wants to say something, I also want to say something.

“I lost my biological father,” I say.

Maybe it wasn't the best thing to start a conversation with. I'm not looking for sympathy, I'm not sad. I doubt he can feel any sympathy for me either.

Nombuso looks up, alarmed.

"Why didn't you say anything because we were supposed to go there siyokhuza?"

"We didn't know each other," I say.

"Oh, okay." She goes back to what she was doing.

Sphakamiso takes a glass of icy cold water and gulps it down.

He puts the glass away and wipes his lips. I turn back to my tea making duty.

"I'm sorry about your father," he says.

"Thanks but I'm not sad about. I was just telling you in case you want to attend the funeral and see Snenhlanhla Mzimela," I say.

Nombuso gathers dirt and walks out with it. She intentionally wants to leave us alone.

"I'm no longer looking for her, she's not looking for us. How is the baby growing?"

I don't think he's asking because he cares. But my hand rubs my tummy, my smile isn't returned but I'm happy anyway.

"Fine," I say.

He nods.

There's an awkward minute of silence.

"Are you happy?"

What a question!

"It's 50/50," I say.

He chuckles, "I'm 100% unhappy. But I'm happy for you, I know you wanted to be married and have kids."

"Thanks," I say.

He nods and turns to walk out.

I take a deep breath and ask, "Aphelele's mother...was it intentionally about how she looked?"

He stops and turns around.

"Does it matter?" he asks.

"No, but I want to know."

"Yes, she looked like you a bit. But I didn't know that you're a Mzimela. I didn't think something was going to come out of that one day encounter, disappointing you wasn't my intention. I didn't enjoy the first years of fatherhood because I knew something was at stake."

I don't know how I feel about this. I find it creepy but relieving as well.

"How is Aphelele?" I ask, I want to move away from Snehlanhla.

"Growing smart and handsome," he says.

I know I would've made a horrible stepmother, so I'm glad I didn't have a chance to possibly ruin a child's life because of my issues with his father.

Oh fuck, the water!

I switch off the stove and open the tea-pot to pour boiled water inside.

I'm burning my fingers here, the kettle is hot.

He comes behind me and takes it. Without even shielding his hand with a cloth, he pours water into a tea-pot, the hot steam is going up his arm and he's not even flinching.

“You’re not made for this,” he says with a low chuckle.

“But I’m trying,” I say.

“Yeah, I’ve seen, people change for the people they love.”

That’s true but not everytime. If I’ve changed, it was definitely for my own benefit.

“Do you hate me?” I ask.

“No,” he chuckles. “I will never hate you. You taught me a lot, I grew with you from my early twenties to my late twenties. I’m sad things didn’t work out, I will always be, because I know how much you meant to me. But you respected me as a father and I will respect you as a mother.”

I’m relieved that we’ve had a conversation and he finally seems okay with my decisions. I don’t think we’ll be friends and I doubt he’d ever be close to Mpatho. But as long as we are all at peace I can move on.

“You and Mpatho talked?” I ask.

“I talk to everyone,” he says.

“That’s why I respect you, thanks for this, I hope our kids will have a relationship.”

He chuckles and moves away. Nombuso just walked in.

I look at her, her face tells me she knew we were talking but now the time is up.

“You’ve drank your water now,” she says to Sphakamiso.

“Yes, thanks Mrs Mapholoba.” He walks out.

Nombuso looks irritated by what he said, yet when he disappears she starts smiling. I’m not in anyone’s business but I’m intrigued. Is she dating a Ngcobo person? Very coincidental because she went on her vacation with our former guard,

Mapholoba. But she's Nombuso, I don't think she can be seduced, if Mapholoba had pulled a stunt Mpatho would've known.

"So, are you dating again?" I've answered a thousand of her personal questions, she owes me this one.

"No. And why would I tell you? You will tell Nkosiyazi," she says.

Am I a loose-mouth? I've kept many secrets from Mpatho, I'm keeping Ntombi's secrets in my chest too.

"I take that as a yes. Is it the Mapholoba I know, the one who doesn't take no for an answer?" That old man locked me inside the house the whole night and called me crazy, Mpatho came in the morning and took his side. He never saw me as a boss because I'm a woman.

"He doesn't take no for an answer?" Nombuso asks, this makes her curious.

"Maybe he takes it from other men, but my working experience with him wasn't great. Beauty liked him though, she had a crush on him," I say.

"What?!" She bursts a high-pitched laugh, mocking the situation.

Now I know she was seduced by Mapholoba, I've just lost all the fear I had for Sis' Nombuso. She was seduced by a man on vacation, who could've thought!

"It hasn't even been a year and the widow already wants to jump to Mnelisi!" she claps her hands and laughs again.

I didn't even know his birth name. I'm trying to picture them together. Yes, they'd look good, she's what a man like Mapholoba would want. But their personalities, I don't see them getting along. Mapholoba is old-fashioned, he believes that "umfazi listens", and Nombuso is the first born at home. First-

borns in Africa are consulted, not told. Nombuso is a much worse version of a first-born.

She's still laughing at Beauty. "Mnelisi wouldn't be attracted to a slayqueen, he has money to take care of his sisters and children, not to fund overseas trips and Indian hairs."

I touch my own weave, I guess all the Mshazi women are labeled as slayqueens.

There's someone walking in, we both turn and look. It's MaVilakazi. Oh crap, the tea!

"We've waited a decade for tea. Is it going to come now or when you two are done with gossip?"

Maybe when we are done with gossip. I put sugar container on the tray and move to the side. She picks it and leaves without a 'thank you'. From tomorrow onwards Mpatho will be a full Mshazi, nothing will make me someone's daughter-in-law, the only person I feel sorry for is the slayqueen-detector, Miyanda.

"She will be down to earth once we get home," Nombuso says.

I hope so, for their mental well-being. It's like she's swapped personalities with her mother.

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I came to the room when it was time to eat the meat. I don't like goat meat, I had no business sitting there with them, catching subs from MaNhleko and MaVilakazi. I'm chatting to Ntombi, we are discussing the Beauty situation since my husband chose to disregard my feelings. I feel like I've turned into a lite version of my mother. I think differently, sometimes I question myself at night. As Mpatho said, one of us has to be a good person. I have to be a good person and promote love and

tolerance among people. Maybe I need to start a charity organization, that will definitely make me feel less shitty.

“Hello, can I come in?”

I lift my head, it’s Mkhuleko.

“Yes, come in.” I sit up.

He’s carrying a plate of grilled chicken.

“Big bro said I must bring this, he’s scared because you’ve been shouting at him and you complain about everything.”

Wow Mpatho, wow!

“So he’s been gossiping about me?” I’m surprised because he already cut out his testicles if I discuss him with other people.

“No, he was just telling me, I’m the therapist of the family. You can cry on my shoulder too.” He’s smiling. Sometimes he’s a child, sometimes you can’t understand him.

“I don’t think therapists tell what they were told in confidence. Thanks for the meat though.”

He laughs, “I’m a rare type of therapist. Have you checked on your sister-wife since she left?”

Another Miyanda fan, God help!

“We are not friends, I don’t even have her number, why would I check up on her?” When has Miyanda ever checked on me, I don’t see the need to talk to her about anything.

“She’s going to love your seed, and you’re going to love hers, but it will be traumatizing.” He looks around and spots the empty box of donuts. “Why didn’t you leave one for me? I love donuts.”

No, he can’t switch conversations like that. I’m waiting for him to tell me what’s going to traumatize me so much and make me love Miyanda’s baby, not that I was planning on hating him.

“What is going to happen?” I’m anxious.

“What’s going to happen is that this ceremony or whatever they think they’re doing won’t be successful today. UGogo kaNkosiyaizi is in the hospital. She needs to be home when he’s introduced to the altar as a full Mshazi.”

“Beauty?” No, he’s got to be joking.

“Yes, she’s your elder and you need to fight for her. So this will wait until April, they’re going to do it again and you will know everything then.”

I’m sweating. If he wasn’t bigger than me I would’ve spanked him.

“If you knew this then why didn’t you say anything before everyone wasted their money over this?”

“Because there’s free meat and drinks,” he says.

“Seriously?” I’m furious.

He laughs, “Everything happens for a reason, you can’t be angry at me.”

“Are you going to tell them?”

“Later, not now.” He’s not taking this seriously at all.

“He can pay your lobola as a Vilakazi, there’s no trainsmash. Next time you have donuts, leave some for me, I’m also pregnant,” he says and walks out.

I think the ancestors chose the most childish one to live through. What now? Do I worry about the trauma awaiting me, or the failure of today’s ceremony, or Beauty. He said I need Beauty and I have to fight for her. I put Beauty in the hospital, I can’t fight myself, can I?

Unless if someone else is behind her condition worsening out of the blue. I can’t help but think of her sister.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 105

PHUMELELE

When he walks in banging the door I instantly know that Mkhuleko finally broke the news to them. This isn't only delaying our wedding, it binds him to MaVilakazi. I understand why he's frustrated.

"You must pay lobola from here, I'm sure they can transfer everything when Beauty is well enough to welcome you on behalf of the Mshazis," I say.

I mean, how many times are we going to postpone? If he pays lobola and conclude izibizo from here, the only thing he'd do as a Mshazi is the wedding, there's no trainsmash there.

"I'm not a Vilakazi, I'm not going to do anything from here," he says.

"Okay, then let's attend Beauty's health and make sure that she receives the best care available in the country," I say.

"Ang'hlangani noBeauty, she said I killed my father and your mother."

Really now, he wants to whine about that?

"If she dies we will go back to mourning and all that shit." I bet Nombuso would be convinced that what she said about our family always dying is true.

"I don't care," he goes to our bags.

What the hell is he picking them up for?

"We are leaving," he says.

"Excuse me?" Beside MaNhleko and MaVilakazi's crazy demands, these people have welcomed us with warm hands.

It's 3pm, they prepared for us to spend two nights, we can't just up and leave. Miyanda is not my idol, I'm not trying to follow on her footsteps.

"I'm not leaving, your father's side of the family was at fault here," I say.

"Who exactly? Who put Beauty in the hospital? My uncles?"

Right, now it's all Phume's fault neh.

"Did I know the consequences?" I'm not 32 years old, I don't know all the useless slaughtering traditions. I did what I did because Beauty was coming for him through me.

"Exactly Phume, next time leave me to sort things out because you never think critically, you act on your emotions." He takes two bags and walks out.

He comes back after loading them in the car and takes my toiletry bag and other items scattered on the table. He's really dragging me back home with him.

"I'm not going anywhere," I say standing up. I need my bag back, if he wants to pull a Miyanda then he must do it alone.

"We are both leaving, unless if you have another husband here," he says.

I laugh out loud, he can't use the husband title to guilt-trip me. I mean, we only signed the papers for the sake of our inheritance, he hasn't sprinkled gall on me yet, this ring I'm wearing is just a toy, nobody blessed it.

"What's funny?" he's glaring at me.

"Wagcina kudala izinkukhu zilala emthini, manje sezalala emahhokweni bhuti. Help me and go get my bag, I'm not going anywhere." I fold my arms and give him a contest with his icy glare.

It's not happening, he can go and consult the sangoma if he wants, they'll tell him what I'm saying- Phumelele is not going anywhere.

"Why are you calling me bhuti?" he asks.

"Your mother is in the same yard Mpatho, if you want to be babied go and suck her breast." I'm going to get my bag myself, I have no problem walking.

Oops! Why is everyone sitting in the yard? This is going to be a clear sign that we are having a fight indoors.

I get the bag and walk back inside the room.

"People are outside, why are you doing this?" I'm embarrassed.

"They're all useless to me, stay with them if they're going to make you happy."

As if he was going to get home and make me happy in this mood. I sit down with my bag, he furiously walks out with his. A few minutes later I hear him driving off.

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Malibongwe knocks. I'm about to answer a million questions.

He asks walking in, "Is everything alright? Mpatho just drove off without saying anything to us."

"He's angry that the ceremony didn't go well," I tell him.

"But he was told that the Mshazis will rectify everything once Beauty is discharged from the hospital."

This is exactly what I was saying, but you can take a baby to the army and give him multi-businesses worth millions to run, at the end of the day a baby will always be a baby.

“Don’t mind him,” I say. “Tell Nombuso to call me if she needs a hand in the kitchen.”

“Okay,” he looks worried.

Knowing Mpatho the way I do, I know that he won’t be at peace knowing that I’m here alone with my ex in the yard. His insecurities will drive him back for more stunts.

I’m trying to take a nap, but MaVilakazi is here. Unlike Malibongwe, she’s not seeking for clarity on the matter, her tone is accusing me of something.

“So you’ll just take a nap not knowing how he’s feeling where he is?”

Err, if I respond to her based on what’s on my mind, I will be labeled as disrespectful. In 32 years she’s slept like a baby not knowing how Mpatho was feeling.

“He’s a grown man, if he feels like he needs me he will come back,” I say.

“No makoti, that’s not how you treat a man. Today was heartbreaking for him, he needs your support.”

“Maybe he needs his mother’s support, don’t you think?” I don’t understand why I must be the one chasing her son when I’ve done more than what she’s done for him in less than a year.

“Go after him. If you don’t find him at home, search for him in the strip clubs, Beauty said that’s where his heart is.” I turn and lie on my side facing the wall. I wonder if she will be kind enough to open the window for me, lest I boil in this room.

I give it a shot and ask, she ignores me and walks out. Funny how her son walks out of his own failed ceremony and she finds a reason to pin it on me. The only person I'm worried about right now is Beauty, tomorrow morning I'm waking up and going to the hospital. Even if I have to single-handedly look after her I will, Mpatho can continue with his whining and crying alone.

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I'm surprised they let me have my nap. Nombuso only sent for me after Mkhuleko saw that I'm awake. It's already dark outside, I put my jacket on and go to the kitchen. I need to boil water for bath and eat something solid. Walking in I notice that everyone is here except Mkhuleko and Yoli that I passed outside playing with Ruby.

"You sleep too much for someone who's going to be in labor ward soon. Do you know that everything you do will affect your progress in there?" It's the pregnancy expert, MaNhleko Vilakazi.

I ignore her and fill the big pot with water, there's nothing on the stove I switch it on and put my pot.

"You already cooked?" I ask Nombuso.

"Yes, I will dish up and you will help me."

She's a star, I don't mind helping distribute the food, but cooking for this big family is something else. I look around and notice that Sphakamiso has left the room. I wasn't uncomfortable, I'm at peace since we talked.

Nombuso and I dish up and serve, for those who are outside we leave theirs on the table. She carries our food, I carry my bathwater and we both go to the guest room I'm in.

I eat first, Nombuso is sitting with me on the bed.

"They can finally go to sleep now," she says.

"Your aunt and mom?" I ask.

"They're a headache, I've been on my feet all day. I don't even know why Mapholoba insists on wanting to see me, I'm tired and I can't ask MaVilakazi to look after Yoli because she has grown wings lately."

"Oh, you're going somewhere?" I ask.

"Yeah, if I get someone to look after Yoli for me. I will come back in the morning, I just need someone to sleep with her," she says.

Now this explains why she's been so nice to me; she needs a favor.

"I've never really looked after a child before," I say.

"I promise you she won't bother you, I just don't want to drag her along, I don't even know Mapholoba that well, it's just that I can't say no to him."

Indeed, it's Beauty's Maps. He's toned down the Mcineka lioness, who could've thought Nombuso would be scared to say no to someone.

"Mpatho left, so there's no problem, but if she cries I will call you," I say. I'm only being nice because she's been useful and understanding towards me since yesterday.

After I agree she finishes her food and takes our plates back to the kitchen. I take a bath and clear the bed, Yoli is replacing her uncle tonight. I haven't bothered to check on him, he hasn't made any contact either, I guess he's happy where he is.

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I receive a message that MaVilakazi wants to see me before she goes to bed. It's another complaint, obviously. I put on my dressing gown and make my way there. She's lucky I've eaten and I had a good nap earlier, my mood is too good to be ruined.

"Yebo Ma," I sit in front of her.

She's alone, MaNhleko has gone to her room with her husband. There's something off about her husband but that's a story for another day.

She starts off by saying, "I thought Nkosiyazi would be here."

Then she takes a deep breath.

"I wrote him back, on every single letter. I just couldn't send them, everything I've ever felt is on this pile of letters."

Why is she giving them to me? It's a huge pile of letters.

"I'm not the best mother, I wasn't the best wife, and I wasn't the best daughter. I cannot do anything differently, I will just bear the labels and everyday insults," she says.

I think this is something she should tell her children, not me.

"I will give him the letters when I see him," I say.

"Thank you ngane yami, take care of him for me, please," she says.

"I will," I leave her sitting alone in the room.

She seems to be sinking in misery tonight and none of her kids are realizing it.

I'm tempted to look at the letters, I'm curious to know what went through her mind after she received those letters. But it's Mpatho's privacy, I don't want to invade it. I pack them in my bag and wait for my guest.

I have goodies, it won't be hard to entertain her, I will just feed her whatever she wants. I still can't believe that Mapholoba seduced and got Nombuso. Saying she's not dating him yet she's going out to him and blushing when hearing his name is just a big fat lie.

Oh, they're here.

I thought Nombuso would bring her, but it's Mkhuleko with her over his shoulders.

"I've brought your guest," he says.

"Where is...?" I don't finish.

He clears his throat, shutting me up. He doesn't want me to say her name because Yoli will remember and maybe starts crying.

He takes her off his shoulders and holds her by her legs while the other arm balances her little upper body. Then he swings her back and forth. "Dudududu! Yoli is landing!"

Yoli is laughing her lungs off. He flies her to the bed until she lands safely on her back. I'm watching in astonishment. If this is how they entertain her, then Nombuso chose a wrong babysitter. I'm not turning into a pilot to make a child laugh.

"I'm going to buy sugar-sugar, then I will come back and sleep with you and aunty," Mkhuleko tells her.

She nods, she's got so much faith in her uncle. She waves as Mkhuleko walks out.

Now it's me and her, she sits quietly and looks at me. I have a box of Ouma rusks, choc stixs, chocolate cookies and assorted

sweets. I eat these things for fun, I take them out and share with her. For the first time she's smiling and talking to me.

She's asking a million questions.

"Malume wami omunye uyakwazi," she says. (my other uncle knows you)

"Really?" I just know where this is going, kids aren't my favorite species yazi.

"Yes, umalume olaphaya," she points at the door, meaning outside.

How do I explain my situation to a 4 year old? I dated your new uncle not knowing that he's related to your other uncle? And why can't she just forget my face?

It's past 9pm, I don't know kids' bedtimes but right now it's late even for me, an elder. This child is sitting on the floor playing with my shoes calling them cars.

"Yoli, you have to sleep," I'm begging.

"Okay, but I will take Aphe to the shop to buy chips," she says moving the shoe to the corner. I hope that's where the shop is because I want to sleep.

"Is that the shop?" I ask.

"Yes, but Aphe is still buying."

Fuck!!!

I wait two more minutes, she's still not coming to bed.

"Yoli now I'm serious, come to bed," I say firmly.

"But Aphe is buying and the car is broken, I'm waiting for malume to come and fix it."

I'm not doing this with this child, Nombuso needs to come and get her. I'm hearing a car pulling up outside, I hope it's dropping her, she must've felt it in her motherly instincts that I need her.

There's a knock, I go and open.

Guess what the cat just dragged in?

"Hey Mr Mshazi," I say, closing the door behind him.

"Yebo," he makes his way in and sits on the bed.

I can't say I'm surprised he came back, I know exactly what made him come back. He just embarrassed himself, an old man like him.

I still have a mission to get Yoli to come to bed. I don't know what the sleeping arrangement will be now that he's back. Yoli still insists on being Aphelele's Uber driver, taking him to imaginary places.

"Hey, come to bed, I will give you R5 in the morning." I'm pretty sure this is not a good parenting strategy but I've tried everything and nothing worked.

I take the shoe away from her. "You will drive Aphe tomorrow, okay?"

She finally agrees and climbs on the bed. I'm never looking after any child again...oh, I have one on the way.

It takes time for her to fall asleep.

Now, the big baby...

"What brought you back?" I ask.

He can't look at me, I'm sure he feels stupid as he looks.

"I can't sleep alone," he says.

He's just lying. Who drives such a distance because they're bored?

"MaVilakazi was worried about you, I told her not to stress, you're always doing things like this for attention and just to play with my emotions," I tell him.

At least his role model, Miyanda, didn't come back. She made a decision and stood by it.

"So you're feeling better now?" I ask.

He shrugs.

I bet he feels stupid instead of better.

"Well, Yoli is sleeping here with me, I didn't know that you were coming back. I mean, who would expect a grown man like you to act like this."

He glances at Yoli, "Where is Nombuso?"

"Gone to Mapo..." Oh, no.

"She went to see a friend. So I don't know where you're going to sleep, maybe you should go and ask for extra blankets and sleep on the floor."

"You did this on purpose, you just want to punish me," he mumbles.

How did I know? I don't remember training to be a sangoma.

"Did you tell me you were coming back?" I ask.

He doesn't answer. Floor it is!

"Aunty, my car!" the little voice says.

WTF! I look back, this child is not asleep.

"Yoli sleep," I say.

"I want to sleep with my car."

Are kids human beings or human torturers?

I'm not getting up, I'm tired.

I look at her crazy uncle, "Go and get her car."

"What car?" He frowns.

"My shoe in the corner there, it's the car."

He stands up and picks it up from the floor and comes back with it.

Yoli doesn't take it, instead she just starts weeping.

"What's wrong now?" I ask. She wasn't crying when it was just me and her.

"Malume didn't drive my car to me," she says.

Mkhuleko has ruined this child, she thinks everything is a fairytale.

I look at the confused uncle. "Why did you pick it up by hand? It's a car, you have to push it on the floor...I mean road, until it reaches the owner."

His eyes widen. Didn't he want to be a father? These are things he should get used to.

"She's crying, please drive the car to her, I want her to sleep." I'm actually enjoying this, it's a good punishment for what he did earlier, leaving me here alone and causing MaVilakazi to interrogate me. I understand why she doesn't get along with Miyanda.

He drags himself back to the corner and pushes the shoe on the floor.

"Do the 'vroom' sound with your mouth," I instruct.

He shoots an icy stare like I'm the one who invented children.

"Vroom! Vroom! Vroom!"

That's more like it, even Yoli has raised her face, she looks impressed.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 106

SIS NOMBUSO

He knows that she missed him, even though she's pretending to be here because she didn't have a voice to say no. He's not using any power over her, just his voice, but it looks like he's overpowering her because he's more passionate about proving his feelings than her. So far she hasn't given him any solid reason why they shouldn't be together, hence he asked her to come over and set up this nice dinner for two, in his head she's his woman.

He walks in with a bottle of champagne, now everything is set. He puts it on the table and kisses her cheek, which is welcomed with a shallow grunt, then he sits.

"Let's pray and eat," he says.

She raises her eyes, her brow narrowed. "I've known you for a couple of weeks now and I've never seen you praying."

"I've been forgetting, but today the Holy Spirit talked to me. Close your eyes." He's not playing, maybe he's repented and no longer carrying guns to shoot at people for a check.

"God please bless this dinner we are about to have, I know many have gone to bed without anything in their stomachs, we are blessed to have this food tonight. And to be together again, may you show her how much I love her and make her agree to be with me and build a life with me. May your grace make her

nice to me tonight and allow me to....' This prayer is getting too long, surely God has other things to attend.

"Amen!" Nombuso cuts his prayer short.

He opens his eyes. "I wasn't done."

"You are not the only person who needs God's help."

So true, God probably didn't hear him asking for her to be nice.

He stands up and dishes food on the plates. He roasted steak, cooked veges and made short breads. He remembers how to put it nicely on the plate; presentation is everything.

"I cooked it all by myself," he boasts.

"My brothers know how to cook too, in fact most men," she says.

He can say he knows her by now, so that was expected.

"But congratulations for knowing how to use your hands to make something to eat," she gives him his flowers, but they're wilted.

He chuckles, "Thank you."

Now to annoy her, he asks; "When are you coming to cook for me? I miss uphuthu but I'm a man, I don't know how to cook it."

"I will send you instructions," she says.

"Okay, I will send my uncles with the cows. Who is the reciever, Malibongwe or your ex-husband?"

She looks up from her plate, her head is no longer bald, hair has grown but it's still very short. She looks more beautiful each time he sees her, with her yellow plump cheeks and snub nose.

"I don't know," she says, looking rather worried than annoyed by him inserting a topic they've never discussed before. They are not dating, they are just...people.

“Okay, I guess we’ll find out when the time comes,” he says. He doesn’t want to put pressure on her, it looks like this is not a thing she’s comfortable cracking into right now.

They eat with her constantly checking her phone to see if they’re not calling her at home. Dating, or rather knowing a person like Mapholoba, is difficult when you have a child that’s still young and needs to be looked after. She turns down a glass of champagne and sticks to juice.

It’s late, when she offers to clean the table he tells her not to worry about it. This is still his ‘sister’s apartment’, she doesn’t want to make a bad name for herself.

“Does your sister ever come here?” she asks, they are heading to the bedroom.

“Yes, she was here in March,” he says.

March was a long time ago and nothing about this house screams woman, it’s all his things in here.

“We will bath together, right?” he asks already knowing the answer.

“No,” she says.

He fakes massive disappointment. “Okay, I will wait for you to finish then go while you come and warm the bed for me.”

He knows which corners to press, she doesn’t say anything, she takes her bag and walks out.

While she’s gone he makes a call thanking his sister, Fezeka, for the food. Even though she didn’t express it, he knows that he scored some points. When she comes back she’s wrapped in a dressing gown, underneath there’s a long pyjama pant peeking. It’s just fabric, even if it was walls he would’ve broken them down.

When he comes back from his bath, half-naked, she's faking deep sleep. He lathers up his whole body, something he doesn't do usually, most times he just do his arms and legs and face. But Fezeka said something about men with ashy bums being a huge turn-off, sometimes having a sister helps, even though their relationship has its ups and downs because of her last-born syndrome.

He slips in bed, she doesn't move until he gets too close to her face. Then she opens her eyes, he locks his on them until she closes them again.

He kisses her shut lips. "How are you?"

"Mnelisi, I'm sleeping," she grunts feebly.

"I also want to sleep but I crave for your touch first, please hold me." He lifts her unwilling arms over his waist and shifts closer. His face touches hers, she opens her eyes again and releases a deep sigh.

He unties her gown and undoes her pyjama top buttons. Before she gives consent he sits up and takes the gown off her, she allows her body to obey him. With the open pyjama top only she feels naked, her breasts and belly are on his disposal. Her insecurities are skyrocketing.

He wants a kiss, and what Mnelisi wants Mnelisi gets. He's sucking her lips while caressing the side of her face. She kisses him back and feels his other hand travelling down her body and grabbing her tummy rolls.

She feels his monstrous organ poking her thigh and tries to keep a distance, but she's in the bed and there's only a minimum distance she can keep.

She breaks the kiss, "Mnelisi, no."

"Ntofo," his voice is husky and low.

He looks at her pleading, his eyes are full of lust and desperation.

“Only one, then I will sleep and not bother you again,” he says.

“You said you’ll wait until I’m ready,” she says.

Men say a lot of things to impress, in reality he wanted her the very first night he saw her.

“When are you going to be ready?” he asks.

“I don’t know,” she’s not even looking at him.

“Come on, we are both grown. Yes, it’s our first time, you and I, but we are experienced. Don’t you trust me?”

“It’s not you, it’s me,” she says.

“Are you scared I’m going to hurt you?” He rubs himself against her thigh, just so she feels how hard it is.

“No,” she says.

“Then let Mapholoba feel you.” He lifts his hand to her breast and fondles it. The more he does it, the harder he gets. “I’m dying to be inside you, Ntofo yami. I will use protection, please.”

She removes his hands from her and sits up. If everything was normal she would’ve given in, her body has succumbed to lust after a very long time. She’s abandoned her sexual life for years because of the issues she had in her marriage, which haven’t been resolved to this day.

“I’m sorry Mnelisi, I cannot give you what you want, you can take me home.” She’s sitting with her hands on her face.

“I was just asking because my body really wants you.” He goes on to say what everyone says, “It’s been a while since I last had a woman, I’m sorry if I’m putting too much pressure, please don’t leave.”

He doesn’t understand.

“No, I cannot make you happy, and maybe I will never be able to. So it’s useless for you to have a woman who can’t satisfy your needs.”

Now he’s confused.

“But I’ve seen it covered by a panty, you do have it.”

Sigh!

“I cannot sleep with a man,” she says.

“How? You have a child Ntofo, I know the cave of joy is there.”

It’s difficult to explain things to him, he’s making it even more difficult with his counter-arguments.

“I bleed,” she says.

He frowns, “How?”

“Whenever I sleep with a man I bleed, so I can’t.”

“When did this start happening?” He sits up, now looking worried.

“I was still married, and it’s the reason why my marriage ended. When he was with his other woman it didn’t happen, so I was the problem, he accused me of cheating and getting ilumbo and everyone believed it.”

“You didn’t cheat?” he asks.

She looks at him, eyes glittering with tears. She doesn’t need to say it for him to see that he’s poked a wound.

“I’m sorry, can I ask another question?”

She shrugs and looks away.

“After your husband did it continue happening?” he asks.

“I haven’t been sexually involved with anyone after him,” she says.

He frowns, "Hasn't it been years?"

"Mnelisi, I haven't been with anyone else."

"Okay," he exhales heavily.

She doesn't want him close but he pulls her, with a minimum force. She feels like a big tedbear in his arms. He puts her against his chest and tightly wraps his arms around her. For a good minute they're just sitting like that, with only the sound of their breaths.

"I love you," he says.

She closes her eyes and doesn't respond.

"Nothing is going to change how I feel. If you are okay with trying, can we give it one go. If you really have a problem, it wasn't coming from his side, then we'll know and figure a way forward."

"I don't want to embarrass myself and disgust you." She still remembers Yoli's father face when he got off her with blood all over his thighs; he hated her. Most of the times he didn't finish the race, he'd pull out and leave. If Mapholoba does that to her too she knows she'd never recover.

"My mother died before menopause, me and my brother would give her a bath and change her pad when she got too sick and couldn't nurse herself. There's nothing I don't know about a woman."

This impresses her, not cooking food. She likes his empathic side, he makes it easy for her to be comfortable.

"Okay, but I'm no longer aroused," she says.

"Let me see how long it takes me to get you in the mood without these long pants." He's happy, for her it's mixed feelings. This is the first time in a very long time, there's a 50/50 chance of things to go wrong.

There's an obsession he has with her breasts, not even Yoli in her baby days did she suck them like this. He buries his face between them and presses them over his face. Seeing him having so much fun with her body makes her feel better about everything she thought was wrong. He wraps his hand around her tummy, then lifts it up to access her honey-pot. When his hand slides between her thick folds her body tenses up. Yes, she's wet now but she's not sure of anything.

He sticks his finger and takes it out coated with her wetness.

"Is this all for me?" He's smiling.

She releases a sigh of relief when she sees that there's no blood.

Their lips lock, he's kissing her like he wants to eat the whole of her. He sends her hand between her legs again, this time he wants them apart. It's getting more real, she needs to embrace herself for two possibilities.

"Condom," she says faintly.

He grabs it somewhere on the bed and impatiently tears the foil and rolls it on his dick. He rests on his side, facing her, and lifts her leg up. Soon he will be saying it's too heavy...or not, he's not her ex-husband.

Her body undergoes shock when he slides inside her, everything is smooth. Maybe she's too wet, or too wide. His lips part, he shuts his eyes and pulls out. He slides in again, she's looking at his face, he's enjoying. The more he moves the wetter she feels, now she's uncomfortable.

He slightly opens his eyes, "My sponge cake feels so good!"

"I'm bleeding, Mnelisi," she says, scared to death.

He pulls out and looks down, then looks up smiling.

“Relax, you’re releasing the heat you’ve been keeping inside.”

He slides in again, this time he keeps his eyes locked on her.

“Stop worrying, close your eyes and block every doubt in your head. Be here with me, I don’t need you down here only, I need your presence too.”

She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes. She struggles for a minute, then she feels him deep inside her and hears his moans. Moans of satisfaction and enjoyment. He’s still holding her leg up. He feels each stroke and wants more and more.

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He could’ve nudded after the third stroke but he held it together until he felt her walls tightening around him and heard his name slipping shakily out of her lips. Then he spilled and embarrassed himself calling out his dead mother like it’s his first time inside a woman.

He felt proud until he opened his eyes and saw her putting her gown on and leaving the room. She’s been inside the bathroom since, crying painfully. He’s checked everything, even the condom he used and the towel he wiped her with. There’s no blood, he made her cum, and he certainly didn’t rape her. He can’t trace back anything he did that could make her cry like this.

He stands outside the bathroom door again. “Please open the door Nombuso.”

Maybe he called her Ntofo, that’s why she’s crying like this.

She doesn’t open, he leans against the door.

“What did I do wrong?” he asks.

“They called me names, Mnelisi.” She’s still crying.

“Nobody believed me, he made me feel like I was nothing, crushed me even when I was on the ground. I didn’t know any man beside him, he knew another woman. I ended up believing that I was the problem, I went back home with nothing but a bag and a child, I had to adjust to siblings and bear the name-calling.”

He releases a sigh. “You are more than fine, Nombuso.”

“No!!!” she screams. “I have to be civil with that man because if I’m not I will be called bitter. The same woman he destroyed is the same woman mothering his daughter. There’s no extra soul hiding inside me waiting to be a bigger person.”

“You don’t have to be a bigger person,” he says.

She stops crying and asks without screaming. “I don’t?”

“No, as long as you don’t use the child to fight, be spiteful and bitter as much as you want,” he says.

The door opens, she walks out with her face covered in tears.

“I want to call him,” she says.

It’s 10:30pm.

“Okay, do you have airtime?”

“No,” she says.

“Come,” he pulls her back to the bedroom.

He takes his phone and top her up via the bank app.

She doesn’t sit, she calls and puts the call on loudspeaker.

“Maka Yoli kwenzenjani? Why are you calling at this time?” the man says in a deep, sleepy voice.

“Get up nja!”

Mapholoba's eyes widen.

"Nombuso, is that you?" He sounds surprised, anyone would be.

"Cha unyoko," she says. (no, it's your mother)

"My mother?" He's probably rechecking the number.

"Get up wena nxathu, do I sound like your mother? I want you to tell me who looks like a farm pig?"

"I don't know whether you are drunk or not, but you are calling Yoli's father, not your street friend. Where is my daughter?"

"You see your mother's black, saggy ass she opened for your uncle after your father's death? Go open it and ask where your daughter is. It's me who called, get the fuck up and listen."

"WeNombuso!" He's issuing a warning, according to him.

"Don't rub your dark gums with my name wena nja. I want you to tell me who I cheated with? Or you just pulled that out of your ass because you knew that your small, uncircumsed dick had epilepsy?"

"I'm not going to listen to your insults, you will come and ask for forgiveness, you will regret this Nombuso," he says.

"What I regret is marrying a failure like you. Guess what? You were a desert, now I've moved to greener pastures and I don't bleed, bitch."

"So you called to gloat about ubufebe? Where is my daughter?"

"Go and ask your mother's wrinkled ass. Instead of worrying about Yoli worry about fixing lamazinyo akho anopete, your gapped teeth. Ask her to borrow you some sex appeal, clearly she has it more than you, that's why your uncle hoped on her bed before your father even saw Jesus in the after life. Then fix that fridge you open with a screwdriver, my daughter can't be subjected into fourth-hand electronics whenever she visits.

Expect Eskom people tomorrow because after this I'm calling them to report that meter box in your mother's house that cooks samp and beans with 0 units."

"If this is how you want love backs then...."

"Eskom will be there tomorrow morning, make sure you don't buy the new meter with Yoli's money because I will take you to court even if you miss one month. Bye Mr Blood." She drops the call while he's still talking.

She throws the phone on bed and releases a long sigh.

"Are you feeling better?" Mapholoba asks.

"100% better, I will call Eskom in the morning."

His eyes widen, "You are serious about that?"

"Yes, I even have their meter number, he's not going to sleep tonight, just like the many nights that I didn't sleep because of his insults."

She sits next to him, he wraps his arms around her, she's never felt so safe and free.

Wait a minute....

"I have to call home and warn them, he will go there and report me and try to fine Malibongwe, he's a bully like that." She takes the phone and calls one person who will understand her more than anyone.

He answers in a sleepy voice, "Hello."

"I just called Yoli's father and insulted him, including his mother, for five minutes. I think he will come with his family and report."

"You know they're dramatic and Malibongwe doesn't know how to argue, I'm too weak to promise anyone a beating. Why did you do that?" he asks.

“He lied and said I cheated and brought a disease to him. Whereas he was the problem, not me. I just had hardcore sex and nothing happe...”

“Congratulations sex machine!” He drops the call.

“Sphakamiso? Sphakamiso?” She looks at the screen, what the hell?

Didn't he approve of her giving love another shot?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 107

MALIBONGWE

He woke up to missed calls from Yoli's father. Alarmed, he called him back. It wasn't bad news, not in the usual way. He has a complaint, Nombuso has insulting him and Yoli's grandmother. It's confusing to Malibongwe because Nombuso has never disrespected her ex-husband. Personally, he's been waiting for the day Yoli's father comes to ask her to come back, he hasn't doubted that Nombuso still loves him very much. Their marriage ended because of cheating allegations, not because they didn't love each other anymore.

It's a big deal because Yoli's grandmother was included too, they're on their way coming to formally report the matter. Malibongwe has directed them to come at the Vilakazis because everyone is here. Nombuso hasn't come back, she left Yoli with Phume and went wherever her heart wanted.

He hasn't spoken to MaVilakazi since yesterday, but this one needs both of them. Luckily she just woke up, she's alone in the kitchen making herself a cup of tea.

“Sawubona Ma,” he greets.

“Yebo. Do you want a cup of tea?”

“No, thank you.” He pulls the chair and sits.

“Yoli’s father called, Nombuso insulted him and his mother last night. They are coming here, I don’t know what Nombuso wants me to do? I paid two goats cleansing their yard when it was said that she cheated in marriage.”

“Ayy, I don’t know,” MaVilakazi says with a shallow sigh.

“You have to know, you’re her mother, there’s only so much I can do. I also have my own wrongs that I need to pay for kwaMthethwa,” he says.

“Talk to her when she arrives, you know that I get names wherever I try to say something or be told that I’m taking sides,” she says.

He sighs, “Okay.”

She never take any responsibility, but maybe he’s expecting too much from her. After all he’s never been a parent to five children, maybe this is how every parent handles things.

By the time Yoli’s father’s van pulls up outside the Vilakazis Nombuso hasn’t arrived to explain herself to Malibongwe. His uncle gives them a rondavel to have their meeting, he also joins to listen. Nombuso is his niece, he knows her too well to defend her.

Yoli saw her father entering and left Phume’s YouTube videos and ran to him. She’s sitting on his lap as the meeting begins.

Her father narrates everything and even plays the call recording loud for everyone to hear. Malibongwe has no comeback, Yoli’s grandmother was basically called a wh0re, a woman older than their own mother, MaVilakazi.

“Yoli go outside and play, daddy will see you when he’s done talking to elders,” Malibongwe says.

Yoli gets off her father’s lap and leaves as instructed.

He takes a deep breath and looks at Yoli’s father. “Nombuso is not home yet, so I still don’t know why she did this. I’ve never heard her talk like this before, she’s not even someone who likes to swear.”

His uncle clears his throat and leans against the wall.

He continues, “I apologize, especially to Yoli’s grandmother, about everything she said.”

“Err Gwazela, you can’t apologize by mouth after everything your sister said to my mother, her own daughter’s grandmother. I paid full lobola for that woman, even when she disrespected our marriage I didn’t ask for a refund. You have paid lobola to your in-laws with my money.”

“Lutho sbari, I didn’t get a cent from anything you paid for Nombuso. Everything I’m doing comes from my own hustle,” - Malibongwe.

“If that’s the case, then I need my lobola back, you have your sister back home with you.”

“You divorced her,” he says.

“She cheated and she couldn’t satisfy her duties as a wife. I need her to clean my mother’s name and I want my lobola back.” Yoli’s father has always been hard-headed.

MaVilakazi won’t say anything, his uncle too, he’s alone in this.

Others are too young to understand, Mpatho is not related to the Mcinekas and its matters, that’s why he didn’t even trouble him with this.

But the one after him is here, wasn’t he supposed to go to a meeting?

He walks in and sits right beside Malibongwe.

“Sanibona sbari omdala,” he says.

Yoli’s father responds with no enthusiasm.

“I’m sorry to just walk in, I heard passing by the door that sbari wants his lobola back.”

Malibongwe gives him a look. How is that any of his business?

“I wasn’t going to do this but your sister’s behavior has motivated me to do it,” -Yoli’s father.

“I hear you sbari. But can I humbly tell you that you are not going to get anything back? And you’re not going to fine anyone?”

“Sphakamiso, don’t add fuel,” Malibongwe nudges him with an elbow.

“No bhuti, I don’t want them to keep wasting petrol, I love them because they’re my niece’s family. That’s why I’m telling them the truth; they’re not getting anything. I’d rather take this case to the chiefs and kings, he knows very well what he did. How many times have they insulted Nombuso, collectively as a family? Who fined them?”

“It’s okay if you don’t want to apologize to my mother, an old woman that carries my daughter’s blessings. But give me my lobola back,” he says.

“You will also give Nombuso her virginity back and pay her the legal maid salary, calculating every month she spent in your house doing household duties,” -Sphakamiso.

They exchange glares.

“I’m Yoli’s father,” he says, like that is a threat.

“I’m her uncle, so what’s good?”

Malibongwe holds him down. There's no need for violence. They've both made their points, Yoli's father doesn't seem to know what else to say to make his demands valid. Sphakamiso probably knows something they don't know because he hardly involves himself in arguments or defend Nombuso.

They turn down MaNhleko's tea offer, only Yoli is sad to see them leave.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

SMS-; *I'm coming, we need to talk.*

Now I'm anxious because I don't know what he's coming with. We talked and sorted out things, from the last call he gave me last night we were fine. It's an afternoon, Mam' Zonke is here, what she has with my father is no longer a secret. She came around lunch time and cooked, then did Nyambose's laundry. I politely declined when she offered to do mine as well, I don't want to burden her. We are still not close, I'm mostly in my room unless Njabulo is home.

I take a quick bath and change into a wrap-dress and neatly tie my hair behind the neck. Nyambose knows that we are back together, all I have to do is notify him that he's coming. He's not coming here, he will park down the road and we will talk in his car.

I find Nyambose sitting with Mam Zonke. I don't know how their relationship works, I've never seen them even holding hands.

They're like old friends who love chilling together. Even now walking in they're just discussing weather and how it affects crops. I think he's just dating for the sake of dating, wanting someone to close his eyes and sit on the mattress when he dies. There's no spark, no romance here.

"Why are you dressed up when the sun is setting down?" he asks.

"Bonga is coming to drop something, I'm going out to him, don't report me missing," I say.

"Okay," he nods.

Fabulous!

I turn to leave, I don't want to disturb their weather talk.

"Mimi," Mam Zonke calls.

I look back.

"Don't stay outside until it's too dark, you're pregnant," she says.

"Okay, I won't." I'm sure there's a superstition saying a pregnant woman attaches bad lucks if she's out until late.

I go back to my room to wait for Bonga's call.

My mother's picture sits on the table, she looked stunning in her floral print dress and Bantu knots. I see me in her, she had a big personality, all the memories of her that I have are jolly. She had a contagious laugh, people laughed when she laughed. She spoke with confidence; she oozed confidence and loved interacting with people. For a very long time I believed that my father's birth name was Nyambose because she always addressed him that way. She loved my father, and my father loved her back, theirs was loud. Maybe I'm comparing Mam Zonke to her, that's why I'm questioning their level of connection. I forget that back then Nyambose was a

fresh young man, now he's a senior citizen. I doubt he's still intimate.

I wonder how my mother would look like now, with a few wrinkles on her face. I bet she'd be still beautiful. Maybe her personality too wouldn't have changed. If so, I wonder how she would've handled how MaVilakazi has chosen to treat me. Nyambose talked to Bonga and passed the message through his brothers, but I think there's only too much he can do to a situation that involves women. I need my mother, I need this woman, she shouldn't have left me before seeing how life unfolds for me.

My phone rings, it's Bonga.

I need to take a deep breath and push my mother to the back of my mind and go.

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He opens the door for me. He looks and smells good. We drive a distance away and park at the side of the road. He looks happy, so I guess he's not bringing me bad news.

"Uright?" he asks.

I nod, "Yeah, I'm alright."

"Look at me for a minute, don't blink."

Is this primary school or what? I look at him but I blink.

He chuckles, "You always break the rules. Anyway, what's wrong?"

"What do you mean?" I'm a bit confused.

"I can see that you're not okay, there's sadness all over your face."

“Ah, it’s nothing. I’m just anxious about what you want us to talk about.”

“I’m not carrying bad news. It’s about us, I feel like the dates that were set don’t align with my goals and timeframe of them. I don’t want to be delayed in my plans, in less than three months now we are having a baby, you know that I want a wedding soon after. So I feel like lobola should be concluded this coming week or the following, then we set date for izibizo zikaNyambose before April.”

“I don’t know what he will say. I thought you were fine with the dates though. What has changed your mind?” It would be interesting to know.

Is it the break-up fear?

“I feel like time is ticking,” he says.

“Time ticking or not, I’m here with you, I will always be.”

“For real?”

I laugh, “Yeah, for real. They say emendweni kuyabekezelwa, so I guess I also have to take blows and be patient. Love is not an easy road.”

“I never wanted you to use that word, ukubekezela. Neither do I want you to be strong. I want you to be you and be happy. I don’t want your love for me to be defined by how much shit you’ve taken in the name of love.”

“It is what it is Bonga.” I don’t think things will get any better, I’m going to marry into the Mcinekas, I already have a glimpse of how things will be like.

“I’m sorry,” he’s apologizing for the zillionth time.

“It’s okay. How is everyone?” I feel bad about walking out of Mpatho’s ceremony after he was so happy to see me present.

It's what felt right at the time but now I wish I could've done things differently.

"They're good," he says and looks away.

We sit in silence for a good minute. My feelings for him haven't changed but I'm definitely scared of what the future holds for me.

"I love you," he says.

I already know this, there hasn't been a time where I question his love for me.

"I love you too, give me a kiss and go."

He finally smiles, "Why are you chasing me away?"

"Mam' Zonke said I shouldn't be outside until late because I'm pregnant."

"Okay, when am I going to see you and get my time from you?"

"I was with you for almost a week," I say.

"Just the two of us, I miss that. Let's go away for a night or two, ask Nyambose."

"Okay, I will ask." I know if I don't leave, he won't let me go. I lean over and kiss him. I've adjusted to life without him close to him, but it looks like he's still struggling.

"My salary is due Friday, don't forget," I say.

"Full salary? I'm sure you would've missed some days at work."

"Bonga don't make me strike," I say.

He laughs, "Okay, you will get it. Sleep well my love, okay?"

"Thank you, please drive safely." I kiss him one more time and climb out.

Seeing the car drives away is painful, it's like he's leaving with a part of my soul.

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NYAMBOSE

He was standing in the yard when he saw Miyanda getting inside the car. He knew that she'd go back, she was breaking up with him because of fear. Malibongwe takes care of her, that alone gives him peace, that even if he dies today he will leave his daughter in good hands.

He gets back inside the house after seeing the car drive a distance away. Miyanda won't be back immediately, he does have 30 minutes or so to himself. He comes from behind and wraps his arms around Mam Zonke's waist, then grabs the wooden spoon in her hand and puts it down.

"I misplaced my torch batteries in the bedroom, please help me look for them," he says softly against her ear.

Mam' Zonke sighs, "Didn't I tell you to go for eyesight testing? You're always not seeing things and claiming to have misplaced them."

She's yelling at him while making her way to the bedroom. He normally doesn't like people who raise their voices unnecessarily, but he's accepted that Zonke is loud. Even when she's not shouting it sounds like she's shouting, maybe that's why it's taking time for Miyanda to get used to her.

He closes the door after her, she's going straight to the drawer where the batteries are.

"What is this Nyambose?" She turns with them in her hands, only to find him standing behind her.

“Thank you, please put them in the last drawer, I will find them easily there.”

She shakes her head, tomorrow he will be asking them again. She bends down and opens the last drawer to put them inside. As she does so her skirt goes up to her waist; lifted up by someone.

“Nyambose, I have a pot boiling,” she says, moving her hips to the side to escape his hold.

“Ng’zofohloza kancane nje Zonke, I’ve been waiting for this chance since morning. You know this pleated skirt makes you look extra sexy,” he says.

“Ayy Nyambose, what about the pot in the kitchen?”

“Forget about that, I want to eat from this pot first.”

He shifts her high-rise khaki briefs to the side and touches her dangling oversized clit. He rubs it with two fingers, then rolls one finger between her labia. His tarse is standing up and throbbing against his red underwear.

“Mamzo sengingafohloza?” He can barely keep it together right now.

“Yebo Nyambose,” she holds onto the cupboard and pushes her ass back.

Nyambose holds his hungry tarse and runs his tip over her clit before directing it into her opening. Her warmth surrounds him, he pounds inside her and slams against her soft butt. Each stroke is met with a low moan of pleasure; “Mmmm! Mmmm!”

Her moans are met with his deep groans.

“Owww, owww! Mamzo.” He’s in his happiest place.

She’s a blessing, she came and taught him how to live again.

“Let’s ride to the finish mntakwethu, oNyambose sebeyeza.” His voice is shaking, he’s increased the pace of his strokes, dipping into her deep spots.

“Mmmm! Awu Nyambose wang’thinta lapho!” she releases a cry.

He shoots inside her and pulls her down on the floor with him. They sit, drenched in sweat and sexual fluids, he leans for a kiss and then catches his breath.

They clean up and fix their clothes. He kisses her again, it’s only a matter of few hours before they’re safe behind this door again, free to do anything they want. Someone is in the kitchen stirring the pot they left on the stove. She’s back already?

Mam’ Zonke is walking in front of him.

“Nyambose do you see that it’s gathering clouds?”

“Maybe it will rain, our rivers are drying out, I don’t know when was the last time my goats drank water down the river,” Nyambose says.

“I’ve told you to take them out early, before other goats finish the water,” she says.

They stand and look at her.

She looks back, “I found your water boiling and added maize meal.”

“Thank you, I was helping your father look for his torch batteries, “ -Mam’ Zonke.

“Oh, did you find them?” she asks.

“No, we’ll look for them again tonight.”

Nyambose smiles, “Let me go and check on these goats.”

Miyanda looks at their lack of affection and sighs.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 108

PHUMELELE

We are coming from the hospital, we didn't get any answers. Beauty is up, she saw us and didn't really look happy. Mpatho wants to change the hospital and keep her away from her family. I sense a war coming, they won't just allow that to happen. It is said that everything changed at night after she had a nightmare, she wake up sweating and claiming to see things. I suspect witchcraft but I didn't really voice that out. It's going to be one hell of a battle because even if it becomes clear the first people Beauty would suspect is me and Mpatho, not her own family.

"I'm only doing this because I need her for the ceremonies, otherwise I would've left her family to do whatever they want with her." It wouldn't be my husband if he didn't run his mouth and whine about everything.

"If they think they'd inherit after her death then they're wasting their time because they won't even get her bath towel." Add cunning and heartlessness, then you have Mpatho.

"Why wouldn't they get anything?" I ask.

"Because there's no outsider who's going to feed off the Mshazi sweat and blood."

I know he means it, he's his grandfather's grandson.

"I'm a good example of that, hey," I say.

"Don't start." He walks out of the kitchen.

I'm not lying, they were willing to throw me off to the streets if I didn't do what they wanted me to do. The difference between him and his grandfather is that he hides everything with a fake character.

"You're cruel Mpatho!" I yell for him to hear wherever he is.

"Yes, I'm cruel, I attack people in their sleep." I hear him say from the lounge.

I put the kitchen knife down, this meat will cook itself.

I walk in and find him standing in front of the TV stand.

"What did you say?" I ask.

He turns around and looks at me. "Am I next?"

"Go to hell, Mpatho!"

"We are going to adopt a second child, I will have a vasectomy, this is the last time I make someone pregnant," he says and walks out from the lounge too.

I disconnect his phone from the charger and stand. What am I going to do with my life?

He comes out approximately 15 minutes later dressed up. Is he going to the office and leaving me all alone while I'm pregnant.

"Where are you going?" If he's leaving I will cry.

"We are going out for lunch, put a decent dress on."

I look at the dress I'm wearing, I bought it from Zara, Ntombi almost cried begging me to give it to her.

"So this one doesn't look decent?" I ask.

"It does but I don't think it's appropriate for the lunch I want us to go to."

I roll my eyes and go change. I'm glad he thought of taking us out for lunch because I'm not feeling the kitchen today. I put on a ruched, bodycon dress and chunk heels, all black. The intention is to look like a widow next to him.

"Thanks, you look good," he says when I walk back in.

Mission failed!

We get in the car and drive off. I'm mentally preparing for a seafood platter, nothing tells me that I'm going to a basic food franchise.

That's until he pulls up at KFC. I was told that my dress wasn't decent enough for pieces of fried chicken?

"What are we doing here?" I ask.

"Grabbing lunch," he says, opening the door and climbing out.

He comes to my side and opens the door.

"Mpatho why are you doing this?" I ask.

"If you cause a scene we are going to get a lot of attention and you know what the headlines will be. KFC has dunked wings, you like them, and your crushers."

"Did you have to make it look like you were taking me to a fancy restaurant?" I climb out.

Like happy husband and wife, we hold hands and make our way in.

I have to stand a queue to get food, SMH.

The service is good though, we get our order in no time and sit by the glass wall. There's a woonga boy who keeps making signs that I should give him money. Just as I'm looking at that, a foreign guy walks in selling screen-protectors and earphones. This got to be the most uncomfortable lunch I've ever had. I'm enjoying the chicken though.

“So sthandwa senhliziyo yami...” he says unexpectedly wiping his fingers.

It's very rare for me to get pet names, both of us are not used to it.

“I want to tell you where we are really going,” he says.

Now I'm confused.

“Ocean Basket?”

He laughs, “No, you're eating, aren't you?”

“Then where are we going?”

“Why are you wearing black?”

“To look like a widow and offend you.”

Again, he laughs.

“Seriously?” He's not going straight to the point, almost like he's scared of how I might react to what he will say.

“Babe?”

He takes a deep breath, “We are going to the Mzimelas.”

“Huh?” I don't think I just heard him say that.

Because why? On what grounds?

“Your aunt called, he wants you to come and do the preliminary cleansing ritual. He wasn't in your life but you have his blood in your veins.”

No, Mpatho is taking me for granted!

“You always do this, making decisions for me. If you cared at all about how I feel you would've discussed this with me at home.”
I'm trying my best to keep my voice low.

“You're not an easy person Phume. I want what's best for you. Your aunt's concerns make sense; you're going to be in labor

ward soon, you don't need any bad lucks hovering over you. Please do this for me, you don't have to give them any condolences, just do what you have to do."

"I will go but this is not going to keep happening. I'm a human being, capable of making my own decisions. Brandi has never been worried about me for decades, all of a sudden you and her are now my superheroes."

I've lost my appetite, I want to go.

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AT THE MCINEKAS

They just got back home, everyone is here except Sphakamiso who went to a meeting. There are a lot of unresolved issues, between all of them and their mother, and Malibongwe and Nombuso. It doesn't take long after they settled in for Malibongwe to confront her.

"Why did you leave Yoli with Phume?"

Nombuso looks up, "How is that any of your business?"

"She's pregnant, she shared the bed with Mpatho and he had to sleep on the floor after coming back. You need to figure how you're going to balance your love life and motherhood without inconveniencing other people," he says.

"I didn't know that you're their spokesperson, sorry." She gets off the chair, ready to move away from the situation before it gets messy.

Malibongwe stops her, “You insulted Yoli’s grandmother, her father came and played the recording in front of Yoli. She’s been telling everyone that her father’s other name is Nxathu all morning.”

“Has he never insulted me before? He’s insulted everyone here, including you. Why are you only worked up by my part of the insults only?” she asks.

“He wanted to fine me, again! I didn’t benefit anything from you two’s marriage, Mcineka who received everything is dead,” he says.

Nombuso sighs. “Did he tell you why I insulted him?”

“I’m asking you now. Why did you do it?”

“Because he deserves it,” she says.

“You have a child with him. You may be happy and drunk in new love but don’t think that man can replace who Yoli’s father is. If this new man loves you, instead of encouraging you to insult the father of your child he should be building a healthy relationship that will allow everyone to coexist.”

She jumps into defense, “Mapholoba didn’t tell me to insult anyone.”

Malibongwe raises his eyebrow, “The bodyguard?”

She snaps to reality too late, she clears her throat and rubs her cheek.

“Which bodyguard are you talking about?”

“Mpatho’s,” he says.

“No, it’s none of your business anyway.”

“You need to apologize to Yoli’s grandmother. That’s an old woman, don’t involve her in your fights with her son. There are

things that we can't do for Yoli, things that will need her father's family, don't make her life difficult."

This is exactly why she never opened up to him; he take sides and sucks up to people that have abused her in more than one way.

"You don't care about anyone Malibongwe, maybe Miyanda only." She gets up and leaves furiously.

MaVilakazi releases a long held sigh. It hasn't been even a day but there's already a fight and slammed doors. She only gets peace when she's home, at the Vilakazis.

"You could've just let it go," she says to Malibongwe.

"If Sphakamiso wasn't there I could've been held responsible for those insults. Don't tell me what to do, I gave you the platform to do something and you refused. I have every right to confront Nombuso and make her apologize to the old woman she insulted. Not everyone is going to take it like we do. Yoli needs those people, she's not a Mcineka."

"But try to be sensitive," MaVilakazi says.

"When is anyone going to be sensitive towards me?"

MaVilakazi puts her hands up, "I'm not doing this."

Clearly this one came back from Miyanda yesterday motivated to fight his family. Everything was talked about, even Yoli's family was straightened by Sphakamiso, why is he upset?

"My house has been completed, I just need to move the furniture in and it will be ready," he says.

MaVilakazi turns her head, shock stuck on her face. "What does that mean?"

"It means I will move out, Ma. Traditionally move out. I planned to do it after the wedding but I've changed my mind. If Sphakamiso doesn't go to his biological family then he will

remain home and keep Mcineka's light burning here. If not him, hopefully Mkhuleko will remain here."

MaVilakazi shake her head. That can never happen, it's not meant to be that way.

"You're the oldest, you have to remain home, that's how the Mcineka tradition is, you know that."

"I was going to do that with Miyanda, I was going to look after my father's kraal and raise my children here. But everything has changed, I have to protect the woman I love," he says.

"Protect from what? Nobody kills people here, except you." Damn it, she didn't mean to say that, but he just won't stop fueling this situation.

"I became a criminal because I had to provide for you and your kids and grandkids. I wasn't born a criminal." He's not angry, so he's not going to raise his voice today. He wants MaVilakazi to listen and hear him because this is the last time he addresses this.

"As soon as I got out of teenage-hood I had the responsibility to fill my father's shoes. If you think it was easy you should wake up tomorrow and go to the hardware store and ask them to sign you up for 8 hours. In the afternoon take a Tazz and go rob Indian car owners coming from work. Take odd jobs on weekends and risk your life." He tried to keep his image clean from his mother because he thought finding out that he commits crimes would hurt her. But he was wrong, she wouldn't have cared.

"All of you are grown, if you're tired pass the ropes to someone else," that's all she says.

That almost pushes him over the edge but he quickly recollects his emotions. Sphakamiso just got to Unified and it's not bringing any money yet. Nombuso has never mentioned

looking for a job in her whole life. She doesn't even own a C.V. Mkhuleko, in his own words, is "too young to work".

"I don't mind taking care of my siblings and working with them. The only thing I've ever wanted from you was a 'thank you' and a blessing to be happy with whoever I choose. But you've shown me, not once, not twice, that you're not that concerned about my happiness."

"What did I do now, Malibongwe? Wasn't I nice to her throughout her stay here? Did I insult her?" She's annoyed. Not even once did she click her tongue to Miyanda's face.

"Ma, you were prepared to send me to jail just so I can't be with her. I don't think you've changed your opinion about her, and now I don't ask you to. I'm not going to bring her around you again and put her life at risk," he says.

MaVilakazi's eyes widen. Is she a witch or what now? Even Mpatho, a son she abandoned, hasn't feared to bring his woman around her.

"What makes her so special that I'd want to harm her?" she asks. This is beyond stupidity.

"You're capable of anything MaVilakazi. But I wish you'd taken time to get to know her. I really wish you did, even if it was one month. Because I know she would've loved you. Miyanda has a big heart, that heart would've accommodated you too." He looks at his mother, his eyelids lock a thousand tear drops. It would've been a dream come true seeing them together in the kitchen, his children following them around and calling her gogo.

"She's selfless, she knows how to make everyone comfortable. Before Mpatho and I could sit in the same space, he was already friends with her. Miyanda loves people and she loves what I love. One day we talked and I promised her that I will share a mom with her because she doesn't have one. She

promised to share her dad with me because I don't have one. But Nyambose hates me now and you also hate his daughter." He takes a deep breath, MaVilakazi is no longer facing him. She's listening, which is exactly what he wanted. He didn't want to argue, he's not here to convince her something or make her see things differently.

"I love you, but I love her too. She's a mother of my child, and more to come. I cannot stop loving her and supporting her and making her feel valued. Because I believe that if I love her right my children are going to get the best version of a mother from her. I don't want her to go through life feeling the way you do," he says.

"I understand, you don't want her to be a bad mother," she says.

She's offended, which wasn't his intention. He's judged her and said all that was in his chest in the past. It offended her then, she didn't see things from anyone else's perspective.

"I'm sorry about everything you went through at the hands of Mpatho's father, my father and possibly Sphakamiso's father. You did not deserve it. No woman should be separated from her child and forced to marry and bear children she probably didn't wish to have."

"I never...I didn't say I didn't want you all." She loses her battle with tears. It shouldn't be her son saying this.

"But maybe your life would've turned out differently if we weren't here, if men didn't take ownership of your life. So I'm sorry that you never had a chance to make your own decisions."

"Stop Malibongwe!" She will bless his life, wherever he wants to take it.

But he doesn't stop, he keeps going.

“I loved my father, he loved me too, his son. But there hasn’t been a point in life where I wanted to be like him. I know how it felt like when you had to leave us and go look for jobs to support us while he was away. I still remember Nombuso at 10 looking after me and the baby, Sphakamiso. Maybe that’s why I’ve had a soft spot for her that almost ruined my relationship with Sphakamiso. I know that he only started being home after Mkhuleko was born. I know that you had to overcompensate because you made mistakes in your marriage and he held onto that. But not all men have to be like that. The only time I’d watch and let Miyanda cry is when she’s chopping onions.”

MaVilakazi chuckles and wipes tears with her scarf.

“And labor ward too, I can’t prevent that,” he says with a thin smile.

The smile disappears after a second.

“If he lived long enough I know that the grown me, or Sphakamiso, even Mkhuleko, would’ve made him take accountability for all the actions he took that caused you pain. I know you never experienced the love that parents are capable of giving a girl child, which makes me proud of how accepting you were of Nombuso getting married and coming back from marriage. And I’m sorry that you never got to experience the love that men can be capable of giving, and that my dad wasn’t kind to you.”

She closes her eyes, takes a deep breath and lets tears stream down her face. “None of it is your fault, don’t apologize, go and be happy.”

“I will go in a few weeks, I hope that one day you’re going to realize that I didn’t need to create another you. And that one day you will be proud of the man I became and realize that Miyanda has done nothing other than loving your son.” He stands up, MaVilakazi is crying. He wanted to just walk out but

he's trying to make sure there's no bad blood, that she understands that he gets her even though he's hurt.

"I'm going to work, Sphakamiso has been working alone for weeks now," he's knelt in front of her. His hand is over her shoulder. "Be alright!"

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 109

PHUMELELE

I didn't know him, I don't feel anything. I'm here because of Mpatho. I haven't been communicating with Aunt Brandi, but I believe that nothing led back to her, she's a free woman at last. I hope she's not having any regrets.

As we pull up it instantly clicks to me that he just drove here without asking for any directions.

I look at him, "Have you been here before?"

"Ummm, yes, just once," he says without looking at me.

"When? What did you come here for?" I can't say I know him, he's got so many layers under his dark skin.

"I came to update your aunt about the continuation of lobola, it wasn't anything secretive. I just felt like it was the right thing for me to do, personally," he says.

"Why didn't you tell me though?" This is weird.

He tracks my car so that he can know every move I make, then go to my relatives behind my back.

"Let's get inside," he says and pecks me on the cheek.

I've been dramatic enough today, I will let it go.

We make our way inside the yard, then a teen boy emerges. I believe he's Aunt Brandi's last born, we don't really know each other. He's walking barefooted, it looks like they're busy inside. Surely there's a lot of cleaning to do after the funeral.

"You're Phume?" he asks me.

"Yes," I nod.

He looks at Mpatho, they know each other.

"I'm sorry we are cleaning inside, do you mind sitting under the shade? Ma is going to come." He looks like him, he's a splitting image of that man. He lost his father, for a boy child that's hard. I doubt there's another boy other than him.

He gives us chairs to sit under the peach tree and returns inside the house. Aunt Brandi comes out of the house, we are both slaying in black outfits. She asks for me to follow her below the yard. She doesn't look okay.

"How did the funeral go?" I ask.

"Everything went well beside your aunts drama."

My aunts?

Oh, the sperm-donor had sisters.

"Did they suspect anything?" I ask, my voice lowered.

"No, it's money fights. They collected all his baby mamas to come and fight me over insurance pay-outs."

"How much is it?" I want to know so that, if stepchildren are getting something from the sperm donor, then I can get my cut too.

"Around R15 000," she says.

Beauty spends that on a bag.

"Maybe it's time you go back home," I say.

“I can’t leave my house Phumelele, I’m married here, ngathelwa ngenyongo.”

I knew she wasn’t going to agree. She’s now going to be abused by the Mzimela unmarried, tax-unpaying aunts. We wasted money buying that muthi; she still has no freedom.

I do the water and wood-ash cleansing below the yard and re-enter. Her son is making his way outside the yard.

“Did you meet your sister Lwandle?”

He cracks a thin smile. “Yes, Sne’s twin.”

I hope she’s around, I want to see her.

I have some sympathy; I feel sorry for him, and all other kids that Mzimela loved. He looks like a humble, well-taught boy. It’s sad that our mothers never thought of putting their issues aside and unite us. I blame my mother the most, she’s the one who wronged Aunt Brandi. But she was too big to apologize to her sister, that woman was something else. You’d swear Mpatho was her biological son, he took after her and left no crumbs.

I rejoin him under the shade.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“Yeah, I’m good.” I don’t want him to start giving me condolences, I’m not sad for myself.

“Do you hate me?”

What kind of question is this?

I look at him, “I’m your wife of lay-buy, obviously I don’t hate you. I only hate how you treat me at times, like I’m a little child.”

“It’s never to harm you, I do things from a good perspective.”

“You overdo things, if not, you overlack,” I say.

“So what am I, a good or bad husband?” he asks.

“A bit of both,” I say and see disappointment flushing through his eyes.

If I was totally honest I would’ve told him he’s bad.

“In a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate me?”

“5,” I say.

“Did you consider me cooking your favorite meals and baking for you and giving you good sex?”

“Okay, 6,” I say.

“That’s not fair, I deserve a 9.”

Someone is clearing her throat behind us. Damn, these people have no footsteps.

“San’bona,” she says.

She’s carrying a jug of water, pure water. I wish Nombuso was here to see this. But I’m thirsty anyway and the water looks cold. Beside the water looking cold, I’m staring at the old, stale version of myself. It doesn’t click immediately, only after I’ve gulped a glass of water.

She’s standing to take her jug back. It doesn’t look like she’s mentally even here, in this place, serving people water.

“Are you Snehlanhla?” I ask.

“Manesh...you’re the illegitimate daughter ne?”

Wow, I’ve never been called that.

“I’m Phume,” I say.

“Yes, the rich kid. You came in that car outside? I need a lift when you leave.” She’s way too forward, or must I say she’s unstable. We haven’t chatted a second and she already needs a favor from me.

“We need to talk,” I tell her.

She pulls her eyebrows, then dismisses it when Mpatho gives her back the glass. I don't know how he's going to take it when he finds out what I want to confront this girl about. Not that she's girly, she looks more like a tomboy. She's not bad as I thought, I expected to see a real phara that sleeps under the bridge and hardly bathes.

When she leaves he turns his eyes to me. Here we go!

“What do you want to talk about?” he asks.

“Your nephew's situation,” I say.

He frowns.

“Aphelele,” I say.

He inhales sharply and looks away.

It's time I come clean.

“I had a conversation with Sphakamiso at the Vilakazis, you were outside. He's in a good space, there's no bad blood between us, no issues left unironed. I know you don't care, but I'm no longer a stumbling block between you two, if you want to show remorse for everything you did to him this is a start.”

For a minute he doesn't respond. Maybe we should've waited and talked at home. It's like we came here to discuss our marriage.

“I talked to him, he blames me for his son being away from him,” he says.

I wasn't aware of that. Do I think Sphakamiso is justified to do so? Yes, if he had a job none of the things that happened would've happened.

“Don’t you think helping Aphelele meet his mother would be helpful?” I ask.

“I don’t want to do too much and be on his space. I don’t see us ever getting cool with each other. I know that he loves you, he can forgive and move on but I know that he does. And that to me will always be problematic,” he says.

He’s stubborn, I don’t know why can’t he be like his father? His father listened to my mother, whatever my mother said went.

“Can I help?” I ask.

He doesn’t answer.

“Please, you grew up not knowing your mother, you know how hard that is. Put your differences with Sphakamiso aside and do this for your nephew,” I’m begging.

“No Phume!” He shakes his head and looks at me.

I hold his stare until his face softens.

“What do you want me to do?” he asks.

“I will talk to her and make sure that I have the right person. Then you do whatever it takes for her to be a mother to her son, even from a distance,” I say.

“I can’t force someone I don’t know to be a mother.”

“You can make threats,” I can’t believe I just said that. But I know that he’s someone people can listen to, Snenhlanhla may have an addiction but she can still use her brain, that’s why she came to bury her father.

“I don’t know how to make threats. And what if Sphakamiso doesn’t accept that? I’m trying to stay away from the guy,” he’s coming up with every excuse.

“Maybe you can talk to him first. Tell him why you want to help, you know how it’s like to grow up without a mother,” I say.

He sighs.

“Mpatho?” I need an answer.

“Fine, I will keep the girl tracked then talk to him.”

“Thanks,” I go over him and kiss his lips.

“I love you,” I say.

“Okay.”

Am I being tested?

“Excuse you?”

“I love you too, now stop, we are in someone’s yard.”

I can’t believe he hates my kisses. Or perhaps he’s seen someone else here? There’s a history of sisters taking their sisters men in this family.

We have discussed all our marital affairs, after almost an hour outside they call us inside the house. There’s a lot of kids and young girls, two are pregnant like me. Even if Mzimela loved me, I wouldn’t have fitted in this chaotic, crowded family. Aunt Brandi comes with a photo album and sit with us on the couch.

I participate in the photo viewing out of respect, other than that I care less about Mzimela’s ugly face. He wasn’t bad looking, there’s a picture of him on his wedding day looking dashing in a black suit. This was a few hours after I was conceived. My mother was the maid-of-honour.

“She was your maid-of-honour?” Mpatho just wants Aunt Brandi to insult her one more time.

“Yes, she was. I didn’t think my own sister can be that evil. Look at her smiling, she was probably thinking about their time together, unondindwa wasekhaya,” -Aunt Brandi.

He wants to laugh, I don’t know what’s funny.

I clear nothingness off my throat and throw in my two cents, “Most women were like that in the past, not trustworthy. Some had outside children while married, more than just one child.”

Why is he not laughing now? I see why he’s having secret meetings with Aunt Brandi, they gossip about my dead, coochie-generous mother.

“But they didn’t cheat in front of their stepsons and introduce them to their horny friends, right?”

I don’t know what he’s talking about. It’s off topic. Or is it not?

“Who did that?” I want to know.

“No one, I’m just making an example.”

Aunt Brandi is quiet, with no reaction to our back and forth and his weird example. She’s not surprised as I am.

“Aunty, who did that?” I ask her, maybe she knows something.

“No one,” she says. “Did you see your twin, Snehlanhla?”

Mxm, why is she changing the topic?

“She’s not my twin, I don’t look like that,” I say.

“Because you take care of yourself, she looked more like you when she was younger. That’s how I knew she was really Mzimela’s daughter. She showed up with her bag after her foster mom died, someone helped her look for Mzimela.”

“Where was her mother?” I ask.

“Nobody knows. Your father was everywhere, you haven’t met half of your half-siblings, they’re all over the world,” she says.

Men are crap, honestly.

I look at Mpatho, “Do you have a child somewhere?”

I know if I get a teenage girl showing up on my door after 10 years coming from a foster home claiming to be his, I’d lose it.

“No, not everyone can be a good stepmother,” he says.

I’m not even offended. No woman grows up dreaming to become a stepmother.

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We dropped Snenhlanhla at the mall, Mpatho generously offered to get her a car to take to her destination. I know why he did that. I’m praying for a miracle, even if she sees Aphelele twice a year, as long as he knows that he has a mom too. I hope Sphakamiso won’t turn down Mpatho’s help. She only needed to be reminded of a birth year and where she was, then she remembered getting pregnant for a client. I didn’t want too many details, she wasn’t too keen on talking either.

We get home, Sis’ Theh continued and cooked the kitchen I dumped in the sink. We will have it for dinner, we had something on our way back home.

“I find it so weird that she doesn’t even care to know how her child is after carrying him for 9 months,” I’m still in disbelief.

“Maybe if she received love from her biological mother it would’ve been different,” says the president of motherless children.

“That doesn’t make sense, so if I grew up without a mother I’d want my children to go through the same?”

“We respond differently to childhood trauma,” he says.

“Okay....I wonder where her real mother is.” I find it weird that Mzimela just accepted a child showing up on his door not knowing the mother. I don’t know what level of sleeping around is that, where you sit everyday expecting an unknown child to show up.

“I will look into it,” he says.

“Hhayi-bo, that’s none of our business.”

“Okay,” he says.

Something in me tells me he’s going to dig into her life anyway.

“I will massage you after taking a shower,” he says.

“What do you want?” I ask.

He laughs, “I’m just being a grateful, rated 6 husband.”

“I will add 2 if you give me a real good massage,” I say.

“I will try my best,” he kisses my lips.

Then he smiles and spanks my ass; he’s on some mischievous behavior.

My ass tenses up, we have a whole house to ourselves and I wasn’t nice today. I will take forever in the shower, he will end up finding some work to do and forget about my ass. I need Ntombi’s counseling before I take that direction.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 110

PHUMELELE

I took my phone with me to the bathroom. I know Mpatho wants boundaries between Ntombi and I, but I can’t do much without her advices. She just guided me on how to spring-clean my ass because today is not promised for my remaining virginity. I don’t want to embarrass myself and poop in the process.

A loud knock!

“Who is that?” I know very well who it is, I’ve been inside the bathroom for almost an hour.

“Come out,” he says.

I put my sexy, black panties on and open the door. I’m nervous, the excited kind of nervous.

He looks at me and frowns, then glances at his wristwatch. “Did I miss something?”

“What do you mean?” I’m confused.

“It’s not that hot, why are you not dressed?”

For real now? I’m stepping out looking sexy, I’ve just spring-cleaned my ass for him, I smell good.

“I’m being romantic,” I say, a bit annoyed.

“For a massage?” He starts laughing.

Did I miss the memo? He even spanked me, that was a sign.

“So you’re not going to do anything to me?” I’m already turned off, even for that stupid massage.

“I will massage you as promised,” he says.

This attitude, misleading signs, and awful laugh, then this person acts surprised when I get dramatic and give him constant headaches.

“So manje uhlekani, what’s funny?” I ask.

“I didn’t think you’re locked inside because you’re fitting lacy panties. You look beautiful by the way.” He’s still laughing.

I take them off and stand naked. I will never, ever, do something nice for him.

“You’re a drama queen,” he says, scooping me up in my nakedness and taking me to the bedroom.

I’m still pissed off, he’s still amused by the whole situation.

He takes his T-shirt off and lies next to me, putting his hand over my bare hip.

“So, what were you expecting?” he asks.

“I’m not in the mood Mpatho,” I say.

“You are,” he says, his hand dropping to my bald coochie that I shaved 15 minutes ago in the bathroom.

There’s no denying that I was in the mood for something.

“You spanked my ass,” I say.

“But I spank it all the time because it’s gaining some fats.”

“It was different, I thought it was a sign that you will do what you’ve always wanted.”

He smiles, I don’t appreciate his good-structured teeth and their whiteness enough.

“I’m scared,” he says with that smile.

“Of what?” I ask.

“You will cry and I really don’t want to see you going through pain in exchange of my pleasure,” he says.

“But it’s going to be painful once, right?” I ask.

He chuckles, “Phume, anal is different from normal sex. I cannot guarantee that you’re going to enjoy it, unlike with normal sex, I know I can make you happy and not regret anything.”

“But you wanted it.” I don’t understand why he’s getting cold feet, he put me up to this.

I didn’t think I will ever be interested in anal sex until he brought it up.

“I want it because it’s a different pleasure point and I want to explore things with you, many things. The scared part of me is

the part that knows your fragile and juvenile side. I don't want to hurt you, anytime I do it's unintentional," he says.

"It's okay, I'm a big girl, if it gets too much I will ask you to stop," I say.

"What makes you trust the horny me?" He's smiling, as if he knows how much his smile turns me on right now.

"I trust you," I say.

He nods, "Thank you."

He still looks scared, now I'm wondering how bad it is. But the daring side of me wants to experience it, Google has no statistics of anal sex deaths.

He gets off the bed and opens our naughty drawer. Phume do you really want to do this?

He turns around, my eyes are widen out of their sockets.

"Must I stop?" He's making me more nervous with this reluctance.

"Mpatho come and fuck my ass," I say.

He smiles, sexily and dangerously.

He's extra gentle navigating my body with his hands. His kisses are passionate than any other day. I feel his longing but he's practicing a lot of patience. He doesn't touch my ass, his hands are all over my coochie. I hold his neck and deepen the kiss, he pushes my leg away and makes a space for him to slide in between. I feel his hard head between my folds, he rubs it in between. I open my eyes, just as he opens his, we lock a stare.

"Should I?" he asks.

I nod and close my eyes again. I feel him sliding in, slowly, and filling my cunt. He moves slowly, hitting the shallow parts of my pot. I want him deep, he knows that.

“Mshazi,” I whisper.

He lazily opens his eyes, “Mommy?”

“Deep,” I instruct.

“I don’t want to cum,” he says and pulls out altogether.

Is this sex or what?

He reaches to the butt-plug and a bottle of lubricant. I hold my breath in my chest. I thought it was going to be delayed seeing that he’s devouring my coochie instead. He distracts me with a kiss for a few minutes then asks that I lie still. He opens my legs further and moistens the plug with lubricant and some on his finger. He messages my ass-hole, then slowly puts the tip of his finger in.

I stay relaxed, it feels uncomfortable but okay.

More lubricant, okay.

“I’m going to put the plug in,” he notifies me.

I nod and hold my breath while he slowly inserts. It’s a small sized one but getting it in, with all the lubricant he poured, is still hard. It doesn’t hurt much but it’s damn uncomfortable.

“Are you good?” he asks.

I open my eyes and nod.

He rubs his dick on my clit. I can feel the thing in my ass-hole, it’s like I’m constipated with a huge dump. He’s back to my coochie, passionately making love to me. My mind switches from the butt plug to the pleasure I’m getting. Our lips lock, he’s moving in a patient rhythm; disobeying my initial demands.

“I’ve never been so happy and scared at the same time,” he says, smiling at me. “You truly make me happy, Phume.”

He pulls out and rubs his hard dick on my clit again. This time my coochie breaks out a water storm. I’m in my zone, he’s professing his love to me. When I snap back, he lifts my legs further up and takes out the butt-plug. He applies more lube and then tears a condom open.

He’s putting protection on? I feel the difference as soon as he inserts one inch of his tip in. It’s slippery but I can feel my walls stretching. He pushes twice, then I scream.

He shoves his two left fingers into my mouth. I suck them while he pushes more inside. No, no, no! Nope. It’s a negative; no way in hell.

“Please pull out,” I say, trying to slap him but my arm is too short and I don’t want to move too much.

“I only have the tip in, give me two more minutes,” he says.

“Mpatho, it hurts!” I’m almost in tears.

“I will lubricate one more time, okay? Kuzoba right.”

He pulls out, I feel like there was fire in my anus. I roll off the bed, I can’t walk straight, my ass is on fire. This is not normal, no human being can go through this all in the name of sex.

“Mommy...”

If he get closer, I swear.

“Don’t touch me!” I’m holding my ass, I’m thinking of calling my doctor to come over.

He stubbornly touches me; he takes me back to the bed. I lie with my back against him, he’s messaging my waist, I’m moaning like a dying patient.

“I should’ve waited, I’m sorry,” he says.

Being angry at him is unnecessary because I asked for this. I persuaded him to do it today.

“You were so tight,” he says, inhaling sharply between his words.

I feel him rubbing himself against my butt. My whole body tenses up.

“Relax, we will continue later, not now.” That statement almost makes me want to pack my bags and leave.

He moans on my back, grinding against me until I feel something warm running on my butt. He releases a deep groan and trembles behind me.

First anal experience disappointed, big time. I’m eating my dinner sitting on one buttock.

“You’re now acting like I crippled you, hlala kahle,” he says, joining me on the table.

“You did, I need compensation funds for my ass,” I say.

He laughs, “I will pay extra for your lobola.”

“When? That’s not happening anytime soon.”

“It will happen soon,” he says with a deep sigh.

Both him and I know that if he doesn’t want to do things as a Vilakazi then we might wed next year, or the following year.

“Malibongwe won’t get married before me,” he says.

“How? Malibongwe is finalizing amalobolo and moving to the next step. We haven’t started on anything, we did and went back to square one.” I don’t understand what’s hard about going to MaNhleko’s husband and asking to do things that side.

“Why do you hate the Vilakazi surname so much?” I ask.

“I don’t hate it, it’s just not who I am. The only thing standing between my inner peace is the surname issue. I don’t hate MaVilakazi and her family, I just want to have less to do with them. I’m no longer in a place where I’m searching for answers. I don’t need a mom anymore.”

Wow, that’s progressive, I guess.

“I don’t have any idea of having a mom that I want to entertain. I want MaVilakazi to move on, I know she has a lot on her plate, I don’t want to be a lost and found son. I’m okay, I truly am,” he says.

I’m convinced he is.

“But did you read her letters?” I ask.

“I’m not going back there. I wanted to hear from her at 13, 16, 21. I’m old now, I don’t need to know why my mother didn’t come to my soccer match. I have more important things to channel my emotions to,” he says.

I still think he should read at least one, but the decision is his after all. He mentioned something at the Mzimelas, it wasn’t the first time, he’s made hints passing in the past.

“How bad did the abuse from my mother get?” I ask.

He looks up with a frown. “Are you enjoying the chicken?”

“Yes,” I say.

“Okay, I don’t want to talk about your mother.”

One way or another, I want to know.

“Tell me about your first sexual experience,” I say.

“Phume, do you want more?”

My ass tenses up. Why would he hint that? I’m still traumatized.

“Come on, tell me who was your first girlfriend?” I ask.

He chuckles, "She's late."

"You killed her?" I ask.

"Hhayi-bo, am I a serial killer in your head?" He's laughing.

"Then why did she die?" I ask.

"The same reason other people died."

Which other people? Is my mother a part of them? I feel like there's more, deep past traumas and crimes I don't know of. I'm not scared, I know he will never hurt me. But I'm guilty; I feel like shit. A lot happened in my presence, I thought I was a princess in a castle and my stepbrother was a prince. Not knowing that his life was a living hell and that his absence most of the times was deliberate. He was probably lonely most of his childhood, and sad, and confused.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"For what?"

"That my mother hurt you. I didn't pay attention, I missed all the signs."

"You were young," he says.

"Still, I must've overlooked many things growing up. I really liked you as a stepbrother but I thought you were selfish. It turns out, I was selfish and self-centered. But now that I know, I promise you will never be alone in this world," I say.

"Don't do that..." He hides his face and chuckles.

"Don't make me cry," he says.

"You can do anything you want. Sadness is a valid emotion, so are the tears. I'm saying this because I mean it, I will never ignore your feelings and watch someone hurt you, no matter who they are to me. There's a no-go area, and that's the father of my child."

He nods, multiple times.

I know he probably wants to respond but if he opens his mouth he will open a room for tears too. But I know that he knows I mean it. I won't let anyone hurt him, ever again.

"Now help me up," I say.

He takes a deep breath and then takes a sip of water.

"Phume you had 1% of anal sex, you're not disabled," he says.

"Mpatho help me up or I'm calling an ambulance," I say.

He sighs, "Kazi bengivumelani!"

Ayy, he's not a victim here, I am.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 111

AT THE MCINEKAS

MaVilakazi hasn't come out of her bedroom since morning. Yoli who's been going in and out, asking questions and going outside to sing. When her mother appears, coming from the washing line, Yoli stops her.

"Ugogo wami is leaving," she says.

"Okay, go to the tap and wash this mud in your hands."

Yoli runs off, she continues and gets inside to find Sphakamiso eating porridge in the kitchen.

"You're not gaining weight," she tells him.

"Yesterday you said I'm gaining. Did I lose it overnight?"

She doesn't answer, she puts remaining pegs inside their bag and grabs her own bowl to eat. They're no longer divided as

they were, no longer fighting as constantly, but something has been off lately. They're not fighting but they're not close, especially her and Malibongwe.

"So your brother disapproves of me dating," she tells Sphakamiso.

"Why do you need his approval at this age?" He's licking his spoon, there's no big deal, Nombuso didn't approve of Miyanda either.

"I just feel like he's harsh on me, even with Yoli's father's situation," she says.

"That's because you've enabled Yoli's father to paint himself as a good man. Before this Mapholoba person you didn't show any ill feelings towards him, even when he came to see Yoli you cooperated like nothing ever happened," Sphakamiso says.

"It doesn't mean I didn't feel it, I just didn't have a leg to stand on."

Sphakamiso chuckles, "So this Mapholoba is your leg?"

"He's my everything," she says, undoubtedly.

"Hhayi-bo Nombuso," he says, shaking his head. "I know that you haven't dated much, but umjolo is a scam, don't sing praises too early, the heartache will come in doubles when you get hurt."

"He's not going to hurt me, you should meet him." She hasn't said yes to Mapholoba but she's done everything that a girlfriend does for her boyfriend, including opening her legs for him.

"Take Mpatho to meet him," Sphakamiso says.

She gives him a look; he knows that's not possible. Mapholoba is Mpatho's former guard, he resigned after breaking rules on

his job. Mpatho might not like their relationship, she's not ready for him or Malibongwe to meet him.

"He cooks for me, how many men do that?" She's taking this time to appreciate the things she never appreciated to him. That was romantic, he told her not to clean the table or do anything.

"Most men cook," Sphakamiso contradicts her assumptions, because he cooks too.

"But they don't fill the tub for their women and then make sure that the water is not too hot before they get inside. It's like I get to be Yoli when I'm with him." She's stopped eating her porridge, these memories are sweeter than this porridge.

"Get a friend to tell these stories to," Sphakamiso says, looking bored. Yes, he wanted his sister to live again, but he thought she'd be vigilant.

"Bring a girlfriend home so that I can have a friend," she says.

Sphakamiso laughs, "You have two sister-in-laws already and you don't like either of them. When I was dating you didn't like who I was dating, try something else."

"I do like them, especially Phume now, I think she's grown," she says.

"Mmmm, okay," he nods, evidently hurt.

"I'm not saying you were a problem, maybe you were both young and living in your bubble. Get married00 0. V. 30, have a bunch of beautiful kids who'd become doctors and pilots, and live happily ever after. Now she knows that life is not a fairytale, Nkosiyazi made her a woman, usey'bamba ishisa."

"Good for him! So go and tell her these stories since Miyanda is not a woman enough," he says.

“I didn’t say that, Miyanda is just...I feel like as soon as she gets married and come here things will change.”

Sphakamiso raise his eyebrow, “For better or worse?”

“Worse,” she says and imitates Malibongwe. “Nobody is allowed to play music after 7pm, it’s Miyanda’s bedtime. Don’t throw papers on the floor, they’re going to trip and kill Miyanda.”

Sphakamiso bursts into laughter. Malibongwe was walking, he heard everything, not even once had he thought that Nombuso is a voice actor.

“Don’t worry, we won’t live here and bother you,” he says.

“It’s just jokes, don’t take it to the heart,” Sphakamiso says.

He shrugs, “I was making an announcement anyway, I’m going to move out.”

“Is the house ready?” Sphakamiso asks.

“Almost,” he says.

Nombuso shifts her focus to the porridge. Their relationship hit the rock bottom and never recovered.

MaVilakazi walks in, she opens the cupboard and takes out her newest set of tea cups.

“Uyathutha yini ntombi?” Nombuso asks, jokingly.

“Yes, I’m moving out,” she confirms.

Sphakamiso laughs, “Everyone is moving out, except us, the poorest.”

MaVilakazi walks out.

Then after a minute she comes out of her bedroom with a packed bag. Now they know that something is up; it really looks like she’s moving out.

“MaVilakazi?” Sphakamiso is no longer laughing, he’s confused.

“Are you all here?” She looks around, Mkhuleko is missing.

“Call your brother,” he says to Sphakamiso.

He walks out, confused and scared. Since they came back from the Vilakazis they’ve been throwing jabs and making jokes of their situations, quoting her last response to their grievances.

Mkhuleko comes, now it looks like an urgent family meeting.

“I guess everyone saw that I was packing my bedroom since dawn. I’ve decided to go back home, I cannot spend the last years of my life in a place that holds no pleasant memories for me.” She just dropped a bombshell. They’re shocked, especially the two young ones.

“Why? Did we do something wrong?” Mkhuleko asks.

“No, not at all. I’m doing this for me. I’m happy when I’m home, this place can never give me that,” she says.

“What about us?” Sphakamiso asks.

“You’re all grown, you can make your decisions. If you want to stay here, then stay. If any of you feel like they need me, I’m at the Vilakazis,” she says.

“So you’re going to be a marriage returnee at this age?” - Mkhuleko.

“If you want to call it that, all I know is that I’m going to place I can call my sanctuary.”

Mkhuleko looks at Nombuso and Malibongwe. They’re older, why are they quiet?

“What about us? Your husband’s house? You can’t just leave Ma, you belong here,” he says.

“I don’t hold your father to that high standard anymore. I don’t have to live by his rules, I don’t have to look after his father’s house, I don’t owe him any more piece of me,” she says.

“But you can’t leave, you’re complicating things for us,” - Mkhuleko.

“Mkhuleko I’ve made up my mind, I’m leaving. If you want to come with me then go and pack your bags.” She looks at others, Malibongwe and Nombuso seem to be lost for words, Sphakamiso is hurting. “I’m sorry mfana wami,” she says.

“For what?” Sphakamiso.

“That I didn’t secure a home for you. I wish I had given you to your father, you would’ve needed me but you’d have a place to call home,” she says.

Sphakamiso nods with tears blinding his eyes.

Malibongwe releases a deep sigh, “He does have a place to call home, his home is where all of us are.”

He pauses and locks eyes with his mother. “So you’d rather leave?”

“This is about me, not you. I told you that I want you to be happy, wherever you choose to be.”

“I can’t move out and be where I wanted to be. You know that I can’t leave them alone, this is you controlling my life again. What did I ever do to you? I’ve apologized for what my father did, what more do you want from me?”

“Malibongwe you can move out, if you need help I will come back for the traditional beer brewing and help you with the whole process,” she says.

“I cannot leave them alone. WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO ME?” He bangs the table, scattering everything that was on top. Sphakamiso rushes to calm him down.

“Do you hate Miyanda so much that you have to turn your back if she’s coming? What did the poor ever do to you?” He’s tearing.

“Ninomsindo!” Mkhuleko complains, his chest bouncing; he’s sweating.

“I wanted to move out of her house, ngimshiye ngok’thula emzini wakhe. Now I have to carry the guilt of separating all of you from your mother. No guys, MaVilakazi doesn’t love me!” He shakes his head and sobs his way out. Sphakamiso follows him.

“This is not fair Ma,” Mkhuleko says, his voice swallowed by sadness.

“Life has never been fair to me mfana wami. I’m not doing this to punish anyone, I know and I feel that I need to choose my happiness for once before I return to my ancestors,” she says.

Nombuso clears her throat and asks, “Are you divorcing my late father or just leaving so that Malibongwe can buy goats to appease to the ancestors when you finally return to them? You know the process of returning home after failed marriage, not following the right steps prove what Malibongwe said. You’re doing this to punish him for choosing Miyanda, you know he will face challenges if anything happens to you at the Vilakazis.”

MaVilakazi sighs faintly, she expected this, unfortunately she’s made up her mind.

“Yazi ndodakazi yami I’ve taken a lot; physically, emotionally and mentally. I had to put up with a lot; doing it for my children. 36 years is a very long time to be unhappy. This is one time, after raising you all to your thirties and twenties, where I don’t put anyone above me, where I know what makes me happy and choose it.”

“Your happiness makes us unhappy,” Nombuso states, hoping she can still change her mind.

“I’m sorry,” that’s all she says.

She looks at Mkhuleko, “Please take me to the taxi stop, I know your brothers won’t drive me.”

“And he’s going to help you leave our father’s house?” Nombuso asks and glares at Mkhuleko icily.

He scratches his head, contemplating his next decision.

She’s an old woman, he can’t let her struggle with the bags.

“WeMkhuleko!” Nombuso scolds firmly.

He picks one bag and a teacup set, then mumbles a sorry to Nombuso who’s feeling betrayed.

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They’re gathered in her bedroom. She didn’t leave anything behind, not even a bedsheet. Others are squatting on the floor, Malibongwe is standing by the empty cupboard, Nombuso is at the window. Malibongwe spots something shiny on the floor and picks it up. He stares at it long enough to attract his siblings’ attention.

“What is that?” Sphakamiso asks.

“It’s her ring,” he says, his voice bruised by sorrow.

“Who leaves a dead husband?” Mkhuleko still can’t wrap his head around it.

“Your mother,” Nombuso says. She’s still thinking of how she’s going to break the news to Yoli when she comes back from playing at the neighbor’s house. She no longer has a granny.

Mkhuleko clears his throat, "I have to call and hear if she arrived safely."

"Mmmm," someone says.

He walks out scrolling down to his mother's number. He might be against her decision but that's his mom, the one and only.

Malibongwe shoves the ring in his pocket and looks at Sphakamiso. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," Sphakamiso says with a low sigh.

"We'll be fine, all of us. Many people function without parents. We will hold each other's hand and move forward," Malibongwe says, he's trying to give him hope.

But Sphakamiso is already feeling broken by this whole situation. MaVilakazi just deserted him, without her around there's no meaningful excuse for him to be here. He was here because his mother was here, that was the only connection he had with the Mcinekas, biologically speaking.

"I'm going to charge my phone," he says and walks out.

Malibongwe leans against the cupboard and releases a long sigh.

Nombuso closes the bedroom window; it's getting windy. Then she turns and looks at Malibongwe.

"You asked everyone if they're fine except me," she says.

Malibongwe lifts his eyes to her. "So?"

"So get over it, I've apologized enough. It's not like I cut Miyanda's boobs off." She's had enough of this tension, she's not going to ask for forgiveness forever.

"You're older than me, Nombuso. I don't even care about your opinions about me and Miyanda. I just expected more from you. We were tight, really tight. You chose Yoli's father, I showed

you nothing but support. You separated from him, I did everything in my power to make sure that you come back to a comfortable home and feel loved and accepted. So I expected others not to understand me, but not you.” He looks away and shakes his head. “But today you sit and talk about me, judging me. Out of all people, you chose to come at me when I needed someone to have my back.”

“I didn’t come at you,” she denies.

“You did and you hurt me, I’ve always had your back, even when you provoked and fought people for no reason, I never sat down and judged you. You chased Aphelele away, Sphakamiso came and fought me, saying I’m allowing you to mistreat his son. Not even once have I ever called you names, humiliated you, or stood on the way of what made you happy.”

She takes a deep breath and nods. “I’m sorry, I really wasn’t ganging up on you with mom, maybe I was careless with my words and didn’t think of how you must’ve felt.”

“Nobody ever thinks of how I feel anyway,” he shrugs and moves away from the cupboard.

“Miyanda does,” she says.

“And that’s her biggest sin, right?”

She sighs, “Miyanda and I are okay, I gave her half of my wardrobe.”

“I don’t want you to give her things, I can give her everything she needs. I want you to be welcoming and be happy for my baby the way I was happy for you when Yoli came.”

She’s happy, but if this is not enough then she will start ululating everytime she sees Miyanda’s belly.

There’s a car outside, they’re not expecting any guests.

“Maybe she changed her mind,” Nombuso says, they’re heading to the door.

Urgh, it’s only Mpatho!

She can’t hide her disappointment. “It’s just you kanti.”

“What’s going on? I got Mkhuleko’s text,” Mpatho asks, looking anxious.

“It’s what the text said, MaVilakazi is gone,” Nombuso says.

His chest bounces, he struggles with his breath for a minute.

“Wha- what happened?” His chest is dry.

“She just packed and left,” Nombuso says.

He frowns, “What the fuck? So she’s not dead.”

It may look ridiculous that he’s angry that someone is not dead, but Mkhuleko prepared him for the worst. Speaking of that culprit, he’s here.

He looks at them, “I just spoke to Ma, she arrived safely.”

Mpatho glares at him. “You said you just lost her, you’re an orphan.”

“Figuratively,” Mkhuleko says.

“And figuratively you’re very stupid. I almost had an accident coming here.”

“I’m sorry big brother, it’s just that I feel like I’m living in an orphanage.” His phone beeps.

It’s his airtime; a reward he gets for helping MaVilakazi with her bags.

“She sent R12 instead of R5, MaVilakazi is a star.” He walks away smiling.

“How many personalities do you people have here?” Mpatho asks, looking confused. What’s going on here? Are they sad or happy?

Malibongwe heaves a sigh, “We are motherless.”

“Welcome to the club,” Mpatho says.

Malibongwe’s face remains sour, this is not a joke to him.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 112

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Nyambose and I talked earlier this week, I discovered that Bonga is actually allowed to come and visit during the night and leave in the morning. I didn’t waste time, I called and invited him. We haven’t really spent much time together after we broke up and made up. I thought tonight was finally going to be about us cementing our love again, after that one day break up. But he’s been keeping something from me, my head is now all over the place. He may not say it but I know him and all his siblings know that I drove their mother away.

“On Tuesday your father will have everything that’s his to him,” he says.

“Yeah,” I nod.

Tuesday they’re finalizing my lobola, Nyambose and I started talking about ukugqib’amasondo. I have some money saved up but it’s not much. Nyambose said he will see what he gets, that means he will sell some goats. Then we will have enough money to buy for ingqibamasondo. I was excited, I looked forward to it. But now all that is gone.

“Have you spoken to her since she left?” I ask.

“To say what babe?” He’s holding onto anger and not seeing things beyond that.

“So the last part of my lobola will come without your mother ululating?”

“Nombuso can do that, if MaVilakazi decides not to come.”

“What about ingqibamasondo? Will she even take my gifts?” Everyone will see the tension and that I’m not welcome there. Everyone, girls I will be sending and his village that will be watching.

“I will take your gifts, so will all my siblings, Mcineka aunts and uncles. Don’t worry about MaVilakazi, worry about what you’re going to wear tomorrow because in the morning I’m leaving with you.”

I just sigh and don’t even ask where I’m going to. I can’t just pretend like MaVilakazi leaving her house because of me doesn’t affect me. The morning that Bonga gave me a lift he had woken up from home. He had a lunchbox prepared by his mother. He loved his mother, his mother loved him.

“How are others coping?” I’m trying to hold it together, I don’t want to show him how actually broken I am.

“We are adjusting,” he says.

“How so?” I want to know the specifics.

“Nombuso is home cooking and all, Sphakamiso is at Unified, Mkhuleko is around, and I’m hustling and trying to make sure that life moves forward,” he says.

It doesn’t sound organized to me. He’s basically doing whatever to get more money, Sphakamiso is obviously dedicated to the business Bonga started and got too lazy to

run, Nombuso is a home slave because she doesn't contribute financially, and Mkhuleko is the baby.

"Don't you think for you all to have a good relationship things need to change?" I ask.

"Things already changed," he says.

"No, I mean sit down and talk about roles. If you all try to replace MaVilakazi with Nombuso things will fall apart. As long as the three of you don't have wives, home duties and chores should be drawn up and agreed on. Maybe start new family traditions that will help you function and improve as a family."

He sighs faintly, "I hear you."

"Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I do, I just wish we were married already, I need you. I don't know if your father can grant me permission on Tuesday," he says.

"Don't tell me you think I'd want to come there while your siblings probably hate me for being a problem between you and your mother."

"They don't hate you and nobody thinks you're a problem." He links his fingers on mine and lifts my hand to kiss it. "Is there anything I haven't proven to show how far I'm willing to go with you?"

"No Bonga, that's not the point. I'm scared of what image is being painted by this. I have cooked for you, did your laundry, and even fell pregnant for you before you sent your uncles." We have vat'n sat, I did everything that a wife does without even knowing that one day he will propose for marriage.

"You're not a bad person for loving me," he says.

"But things went downhill in your family ever since you met me," I say.

“I was depressed when I met you,” he says.

“Now the whole family is depressed, right?”

He cups my face and forces me to look at him. I know I didn't do anything specifically but that's how it looks like.

“Mcineka broke my mother, I'm paying for it, you're just caught in the mix. I don't know what I'm going to do with her situation, I have set up a meeting with the Mcineka elders, I hope they will help me because she didn't leave the right way. You are innocent in all this.” He kisses me on the forehead and looks in my eyes, assuringly. “I love you with all my heart Miyanda, and I hope that umndeni wami uzowandisa.”

“I'm already pregnant,” I say.

“That's why I don't want you to be stressed. I apologize for everything I've put you through, and I promise that next time you will have a stress-free pregnancy, I will spoil you rotten and you will never ever shed a tear because of me.”

I nod, “Okay.”

He smiles.

No, I don't mean okay to next time because there will be no next time I'm pregnant.

“Do your friends still visit you?” he asks.

“I only have two friends, one is in Durban working. Others are just my neighbors and girls I know. And yeah, they do visit and we gossip,” I say.

“I have a project that I'm working and it needs a female intervention. Please give me your close people's numbers, I will interview them and see if one of them qualifies.”

Now excuse me?!

“Why don't you interview Nombuso?” I ask.

“I did, she doesn’t qualify,” he says.

“Then interview me? What project is that?”

“You’re pregnant, you won’t qualify. It’s a project about women products...women who are not pregnant. And I want your friends to have the opportunity first because I love you.”

I’m not having a good feeling about this. Why is he not hiring girls in his village? I don’t have trust issues but this is strange, very strange.

“Are you going to give me their numbers?”

Ayy, this is a test of my faith. I will accept the challenge and trust my homegirls not to snatch him.

“When is this interview?” I ask.

“Saturday,” he says.

On weekend? No legit project conducts interviews on Saturday.

“Bonga are you happy with me?” I ask.

“No,” he says.

So that’s why he now wants to secretly interview my homegirls and friends on Saturday?

“Why are you not happy?” I’m worried.

“You got in bed wearing this long dress. You know that you don’t have a sisterwife, if you haven’t fed me it means that Mcineka is starving.” He’s taking this to a different direction, I thought he wasn’t happy for real, not because of a dress.

I wore it so that Nyambose didn’t look at me weirdly when I left the family house.

“I’m not wearing anything underneath,” I tell him.

His Adam’s apple bobbles up and down, his hand travels to the flounce of my dress. He lifts it up to my waist and rubs his hand

around to my big belly. He lifts his eyes to lock them on mine. I can't believe I have, for a day, thought I can live without this man.

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PHUMELELE

I'm with Mpatho in the hospital, waiting for the doctor to be done with Beauty. He wanted to go to the Vilakazis and talk to his mother; he's worried about her leaving her children alone. It's her thing, I believe. I don't know why it's a big deal now, she's done it before. And beside, all the Mcineka kids are grown, there's no big deal. There's a four of them, they can become a family on their own. Some of us were the only child when we lost our mothers, to death. They know where their mother is, they can go and see her whenever they want. Beauty must be Mpatho's first priority, we've transferred her to another hospital, now we have to make sure that her family stays away and she gets the best help possible. Lines have been definitely drawn between the Mshazis and her family; everyone is threatening and pointing fingers. It's selfish that we've banned her family, including her blood sister, from seeing her, but it's what best for Phume and Mpatho, so it's what goes.

The doctor steps out of the room with a relaxed face.

"You can come in, she's awake for now," she says.

Mpatho holds my hand, we step inside. I don't know when was the last time I saw Beauty's natural face and hair. I didn't even know that she has a V-hairline.

"Hey," I let go of Mpatho's hand and go hug her.

“Hey,” she responds in a low, quaky voice.

“How are you feeling?” I ask.

“A bit dizzy but okay.” She’s avoiding Mpatho’s eyes.

“Where is Lindy?” she asks me.

I look at Mpatho, he will explain better than me.

“I banned your family from seeing you.” Well, that’s not better.

I chip in, “Lindy will come when you’re better. We brought you here for safety reasons, we got worried when you suddenly became unstable after your family spent the day with you.”

“Phume what are you talking about?” she asks.

“We don’t know what they did, we were told that you started hallucinating and saying things that didn’t make sense. You’re a Mshazi, we might have our differences but we don’t want to lose you. And nobody messes with us,” I say.

“So you want me to believe that you two care more about me than my family?”

“We do,” I say and look at Mpatho.

All he has to do is act, I don’t know what’s the long face for.

“Mpatho needs you, you’re his grandmother,” I say.

“I’m not a grandmother,” she says.

“Yes, biologically. But he respects you as one. We actually don’t have anything to gain from this, unlike your family that can benefit from your death,” I say.

“Benefit while Mpatha is still alive?” She pulls her lips and inhales sharply, looking away thoughtfully.

I hope she realizes how important sticking with us is.

Regardless of what has happened, family is family, and hers is us.

“Do you remember anything about the night you fell?” I ask.

“No, but I know that I wasn’t drinking, no excessive alcohol was found in my system.”

Awkward, very awkward!

“But there was an empty bottle next to you,” I say.

“I didn’t drink all of it,” she says, but there’s subtle doubtfulness in her voice.

“Maybe it was ghosts,” I say.

She frowns, “Ghost?”

“Yeah, your late husband, maybe it was him.” I receive a blood-freezing look from Mpatho. I’m doing what I have to do, so what if his dead grandfather takes the blame?

“Mvimbo wasn’t the type that had a potential of coming back on earth to haunt people at night,” she says, defending him. Then she clears her throat and says, “Maybe it was your mother.”

“So my mother had a potential?” I know she was a bad person and maybe only me and her husband liked her, but I can’t stand the jabs everyone keeps throwing. Let the poor woman rest in peace.

“She haunted people while she was alive, what makes you think death stopped her?”

Okay, I’m not engaging on this any further.

“The doctor said you need to rest,” I say.

“Thanks,” she says.

Then she looks at Mpatho, “Can I get a favor?”

That’s bold, she hates this guy.

“I need security, I’m not ready to die. Please get Maps to come and keep an eye on me.”

“Mapholoba is working for someone else now,” Mpatho says.

“I’m sure you can find him, I don’t trust any other person, I want him.”

I can’t keep quiet and let this happen. I know why she’s specific on him, it’s not for security issues.

“Mapholoba is busy with his new relationship and work,” I say.

She frowns.

Mpatho is looking at me like he caught me cheating red-handed.

“How do you know all this?” he asks.

“Are you the girlfriend, perhaps?” -Beauty.

If I take a minute before answering there will be a court hearing when we get home.

“No, Nombuso is the girlfriend,” I say.

“The Mcineka pink, fat pig?” Beauty.

“Her name is Nombuso,” Mpatho says, he looks mad. Mad at Beauty degrading Nombuso’s looks and what I just accidentally revealed. I need to soften him up because if Nombuso finds out that I snitched I’m good as dead.

“Maps had a girlfriend, a beautiful girl,” she says.

I don’t know how true that is, what I know is that Nombuso spent the night with him and she’s in love.

“I was just telling you,” I say.

“Okay, cancel the security thing, I don’t care if I die.”

Awww, just like that?

We leave the hospital, Mpatho still looks mad.

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We had a doctor's appointment before going home. It was his third, he's getting better at everything I complained about. Our little implant-resistor is growing healthily. I haven't had time to mentally prepare for the arrival, which isn't too far now. We need to start shopping, setting up the baby room and...when am I getting a babyshower?

"Mpatho!" I call him from the kitchen.

He appears within two minutes.

"When am I having a baby-shower?" I ask.

He looks confused.

"I want one, I can't throw it for myself," I say.

"Okay. Do you have a list of things you want? Décor? Guest list? Food?"

"No, you organize all that and invite all my close female friends and relatives," I say.

"All three of them?" he asks.

Today went well, I don't want him to start with me.

"Okay, I will get it done." He kisses my cheek and grabs a slice of cucumber from the bowl and walks out.

For real now, how many friends do I have? Only Ntombi, others I no longer fuck with. Relative wise, I only have unstable relationship with one Mzimela sister out of 6 of them...not even sure about that number. He can invite Nombuso too, then that's it.

I only had a salad, I'm hoping he's going to offer making food or get us take-aways. When I hear a car driving in and see him

stepping out in his shorts, my hope rises. He definitely had something delivered for us. I take out cutlery and wait, my stomach is growling.

It's taking him long, I don't know if the delivery guy had a wrong order. I walk out to see what's keeping him. Mapholoba?

Why am I seeing this man here again? He's wearing his casual clothes, they're standing shoulder to shoulder. It doesn't look like they're discussing business, Mpatho is doing most talking. My guilt-self meddles; I walk over the lawn and greet Mapholoba.

"Sawubona Bab' Mapholoba," me.

"Yebo sawubona, it's been a while."

"Yes, I'm surprised to see you back." I look at Mpatho, "Are we in danger?"

"No, we are just talking," he says.

"About what?"

Mapholoba snaps his eyebrows. I'm sure it's about a woman questioning a man.

"Our unfinished business," Mpatho says.

"Business, business?" I ask.

"Phume!" he narrows his eye.

"I'm hungry," I say.

"Go inside, I'm coming."

I'm restless because I revealed that Mapholoba is dating Nombuso and now he's here. I didn't tell him to fight with Nombuso. Mapholoba fell in love with a woman he was supposed to look after, so what? He fell in love with his step-sister, me. To this day people still look at us like we are incest ambassadors.

He finally walks in, I'm sitting in the kitchen thinking about all the insults Nombuso is going to give me.

"What do you want to eat?" he asks.

"Why did you confront Mapholoba?"

"It's our business and what our agreements were. Don't worry about it. Uzodlani?"

"Surely I will eat Nombuso's insults, thanks to you."

"Nombuso won't insult you, she never insult anyone. I will invite her to come on Saturday to your baby-shower, if that's okay with you."

I bet she won't come after I have betrayed her like this. By the way I don't want bread rolls.

"I want baked beans," I tell him.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 113

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Nyambose has put his foot down, he doesn't want me to go and live at the Mcinekas. My lobola was finalized, I'm a recognized fiancee now. But still, Bonga cannot have me in his father's house. I'm permitted to visit on weekends and stay over for not more than one week.

"I cannot let her go in this condition to live in a place I know is not healthy for her and the baby," that's what he told Bonga's uncles when they made his request.

Unfortunately there's nothing I can do. He said he will revisit his decision after I've given birth, as long as he hasn't handed me over I remain his child living under his rules. I'm going there today and coming back tomorrow. I'm going there to see the project Bonga has invited my homegirls and Hlengi, my friend from high school, for. Some of them have ordinary jobs around the village, I don't know what pay he's promised for them to dare leaving everything for a shot in an unknown project's interview. I don't know all the arrangements, Hlengi said they will all go together, she was too excited for just an interview. I hope I will see them tomorrow and I hope that Bonga is not running a scam. I still have a lot of questions about this project. I'm leaving in the afternoon, Bonga will come and fetch me.

Njabulo just got home, he has a fresh scar on his forehead.

"Who beat you?" I ask him, getting his plate to dish for him.

"I fell," he says.

I roll my eyes.

"Have you thought about finding a job?"

"I'm self-employed," he says.

Njabulo thinks everything is a joke.

"You need to get a wife, or a desperate girl that needs a man and a home. Because I'm getting married soon, I will leave and it will be just you and Nyambose."

"Mam' Zonke too," he says.

"I'm talking about long-term relationships, I can't put my trust on Mam' Zonke and Nyambose. They seem to be forcing things," I say.

He laughs, “Forcing things? She doesn’t sound forced in the bedroom when she recites our clan names and asks that Nyambose gives her more.”

I feel a bubble of bile rising to my throat.

“Say you’re joking!”

“I’m not joking. Yesterday I came home around midnight and heard things from Nyambose’s bedroom. Ankela needs to teach me his techniques because MaZulu only moans like a...”
He stops and looks at me.

I know MaZulu, there’s only one in the area. Yes, she’s married, her husband is in Joburg working. I’m sure he’s still paying off their wedding debts.

“You’re sleeping with someone’s wife?” I’m perplexed.

“No, MaZulu is my girlfriend from KwaGoqo. Please add more meat there, I have a headache.”

Meat doesn’t heal headache. I really hope he’s not lying because MaZulu’s husband is a gentle, kind man who used to look after us as his little sisters, all girls in the village, when we were growing up.

“I’m serious about you getting a wife or a girlfriend that’s willing to act like a wife. Even if Mam’Zonke is here, you also need a partner who will take care of your personal needs.” He’s grown, he’s even older than me, it’s time he grows up. Nyambose will let go of his only daughter, it would be great if his nephew brings him a daughter-in-law.

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I was nervous coming here because I didn’t know how they will react. But I’ve seen Sphakamiso, he came to greet me and he

looked chilled. Mkhuleko wasn't here to greet me, he didn't even know that I'm here. He came to steal bodywash and found me here and opted to ask for it. I didn't feel any shift of energy from them, they're still the same. I'm a bit relieved, Nombuso might act differently but knowing the other two don't hate me is enough.

Bonga walks in with two plates of food. So Nombuso hasn't come because she's caught up in kitchen chores. You can tell by looking at her cabbage that she was tired cooking this meal.

"I asked her to cook something meaty because you love meat but she opted for cabbage instead," he says, almost like apologizing.

"It's fine, I love cabbage as well," I say.

He sits down, we eat over a light conversation.

I feel like Nyambose's rules will be broken. I will go to the kitchen after this, Bonga and I will wash dishes. I don't want to be a burden and I don't want him to be a nuisance to Nombuso.

"I asked Nombuso to come tomorrow," he says.

"I thought you said she already failed the interview." I'm confused.

"No, I just want her to come and help but she has an early day commitment, she might be late," he says.

I still don't understand.

"You want her to be a panelist in the interview?"

He laughs, "No, I just want her to help with little things."

Let me stop asking questions and let them do their thing.

When he stands up I also stand and put a scarf over my head.

He looks at me, frowning.

"Where are you going?"

“I’m coming with you,” I say.

“Babe, my uncles were fined Tuesday for what happened at the Vilakazis. You can’t come, I will take plates back to the kitchen,” he says.

“I will take care of my father, let’s go.” I’m not negotiating this, at least this time I’m not forced, I’m doing what I feel is right.

Someone ate on the veranda and left a plate on the chair. I take it as we make our way inside. Mkhuleko is watching TV, Yoli sees me and comes to us. Her mother is not around. She's such a happy child, Bonga directs her to where a pack of lollipops is hidden and she's gone.

Hhayi-bo, where is this Bonga going now?

“Bonga we are washing dishes,” I say.

He stops with a frown.

“Collect others, wherever they are, then we wash them all at once and clean the kitchen.”

“Babe!” He’s not having it.

“Awufuni?” I ask.

He sighs, “Okay.”

He goes to other rooms collecting dirty dishes. I don’t know why they don’t all gather in one place at a specific time and have their meals and put dishes together.

Sphakamiso comes in with his empty bowl. So Mkhuleko left that plate on the chair!

He shyly throws his bowl inside the washing basin.

“Why are you standing here sisi?” he asks.

“I’m waiting for Bonga to come back with all the dishes. He’s still collecting them from every corner.” I say that to intentionally plant something in his head.

Bonga walks in with a pile of dishes, some were probably hiding somewhere for a very long time, they even collected dust.

“Are you allowing Sis’ Miyanda to wash dishes?” Sphakamiso asks him. He knows my father better than anyone, he’s a part of the lobola delegate, he’s heard how he addresses issues.

“She insisted,” Bonga says.

Sphakamiso looks at me.

“We are both washing them, don’t worry about it, Nyambose won’t know,” I say.

“Coincidentally, I also came here to wash them,” he says.

I know he’s lying, just trying to stop me from washing them.

“I got here first,” I say with a thin smile and turn to fill the basin with water.

They’re standing behind me, Bonga should be getting the soap, we are in this together.

“And then?” that’s Nombuso.

She was eating somewhere, she didn’t finish her own poison, she’s putting half of it inside the fridge.

“Sis’ Miyanda is washing dishes,” Sphakamiso says like I’m committing a sin.

“Why? Did her father send her to get another R1000 fine?”

“Nombuso!” Bonga cautions her.

“I’m just saying, she shouldn’t be inside the kitchen,” she says.

I don't think Nombuso thinks before she talks, she says crazy things and then justifies herself with, "I was just saying..." then says what she could've said in the beginning.

"It's okay, I offered to do it," I say.

She shares a look with Sphakamiso.

I didn't know that my father fined Bonga's uncles R1000.

"Thank you for the food," I say.

"You're welcome," she smiles a bit.

Bonga has forgotten to help me.

"They all thanked you, right?" I ask.

"Sorry what? Who?" She bursts into laughter.

I look at Bonga, he's looking like a confused fella, like he's at the wrong place on a wrong time.

"I was going to thank her when I walked in," Sphakamiso says.

I didn't know he's the best liar in the family.

"Thank you Nombuso for the food," he says.

Nombuso gives him an awkward look.

Bonga doesn't feel the need because he's the breadwinner. I'm irritated and he knows me very well. From how I blink to how I nod my head for no reason when something has set me off.

"Thank you for dinner," he says to her.

Nombuso folds her arms. "If you can all thank me for every effort I make here, I can be happy and put my heart in every meal that I prepare."

"So you cooked that cabbage on purpose?" Sphakamiso asks.

We all laugh. I'm glad even Nombuso knows that she fucked up our taste buds.

“Yesterday I made delicious beans and nobody appreciated the effort,” she says.

“Didn’t I compliment it?” Sphakamiso asks.

“You did, but complimenting and saying thank you are two different things,” she says.

“Maybe we can all start appreciating each other’s efforts,” Bonga says and looks at Sphakamiso. “I’m grateful for your help. I’m a little jail-bird who doesn’t really know much about taxes and launching business websites.”

“Jail bird? You were in a cell for two weeks only,” Sphakamiso says.

“You only spent three nights, I’m better than you,” he says.

Maybe I’m slow. I don’t see how it’s funny to brag about being arrested. And Sphakamiso has been arrested too? Never judge a book by its cover.

“Has the game started?” he asks.

“It starts in 20 minutes, let’s go,”- Sphakamiso.

Bonga is leading their way out, I don’t know where he thinks he’s going.

“Bonga,”

He turns around.

“I said we are washing dishes and cleaning the kitchen,” I say.

Sphakamiso doesn’t risk turning his head, he disappears as Bonga walks in with a look of defeat.

I thought Nombuso would go and relax in front of TV with Mkhuleko. But she grabs a chair and sits to watch us.

Bonga drags himself to a stack of plates. I don’t know why he’s acting like this. Why is he putting a dirty plate in the water.

“Why are you starting with a plate?” I ask.

He looks at me, “I’m washing, you said I must wash.”

“But you know that we have to start with cups and glasses. Why are you pretending like you’ve never washed dishes before? We had turns when we lived together, yeka ukutefa and wash properly.”

“Wait, so he had a turn to wash dishes?” Nombuso looks up, shocked.

“And to cook,” I say.

“Wow Malibongwe, wow!”

If I must add, Sphakamiso is another kitchen master.

“Sphakamiso had his own room, he ate from my room most times, but he also cooked on his own. They once missed samp and assisted each other in cooking it.”

“But Malibongwe doesn’t know the difference between curry powder and soup.”

And she believed that? They know her soft spots and play on them. I bet even he’s even claimed not to know the difference between rice and maize meal.

“Malibongwe knows curry powder brands, he doesn’t like Rajah,” I say.

He gives me a look. I didn't know it was a secret.

“Oh, so ngiwumkhovu all this time? Even MaVilakazi testified that her sons don’t know much about the kitchen.” She probably regrets all the times she’s buried her head in the pots while they sat and bragged about their jail times outside.

“Sphakamiso!” she yells.

She has to repeat three times before he appears.

“Make me a cup of tea,” she says.

Sphakamiso frowns and looks around.

"Huh?" He's shocked, because why him and not people with vaginas.

"Do I put the cup inside the kettle?" he asks.

Nombuso takes out her croc slipper. "Sphakamiso ungangenz' islima, make me a cup of tea!"

"Okay, chill!" he takes the kettle and fills it with water.

I laugh at her because I know and she knows very well that she can't beat them. I doubt she can even touch Mkhuleko, as young as he is.

See, Sphakamiso knows how to do everything. He takes a small tray, refills the sugar container and puts a teabag and a packet of milk powder on the side of the tray. When the water boils he pours it into the cup and gives her.

"Say thank you," he demands.

"No, this is just a beginning, you're all going to pay back for fooling me," Nombuso says.

Sphakamiso looks at Malibongwe, he's got no clue what has led Nombuso to this conclusion.

"Tomorrow I will cook lunch but supper is on you. You will decide whose turn it is. In fact, every weekend. I will commit to chores during the week and have my breaks on weekends," she says.

"Hhayi-ke, it's not my turn tomorrow, neither is Sunday, mine will be next Saturday," Sphakamiso says.

"I have some commitments tomorrow late in the day, so it's not my turn either, I will take Sunday," -Malibongwe.

I'm confused. Is this a game or what?

"Mkhuleko!" Sphakamiso calls.

That one has been watching TV since I arrived.

He walks in, looking bored.

“Tomorrow it’s your cooking turn, don’t disappoint us boy,” Sphakamiso says.

“I don’t have a cooking turn,” Mkhuleko says and turns around to leave.

“You have one now and it’s tomorrow,” Nombuso says.

Now he knows it’s serious. He turns around with a look; who did I kill.

“We implemented new house rules, whoever cooks will wash dishes as well,” Nombuso says.

“But I’m younger than all of you, the ANC was already corrupt when I was born, I know no apartheid struggles. What kind of modern slavery is this?”

Cooking is slavery?

Well, only Nombuso and I think otherwise.

“It is what it is bafo, k’sinda kwehlela,” Sphakamiso consoles him and sighs faintly.

“So this is real?” Mkhuleko. It’s slowly sinking in.

“I’m washing dishes, what makes you think it’s a game?” Bonga mumbles.

I don’t understand how he’s still washing the fifth plate, I’ve washed plenty and I only have two hands, just like him.

“Okay fine, tomorrow 18:30 dinner will be ready. Is it up to me what I cook?” He looks at Nombuso.

But Malibongwe is the one answering. “Yes, but normal food only Mkhuleko, singaxabani!”

“Who said I won’t cook normal food?” He suddenly looks too excited about this.

Nobody looks sure anymore. One thing I’m grateful for is that I won’t be here to eat that food, even if he decides to cook a frog stew.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 113

PHUMELELE

I’m woken up by constant, loud footsteps around the room. I’m annoyed, it’s super early, I don’t know why he can’t walk quietly. I grab my phone and check the time. It’s 7:45am, even chickens are still asleep at this time.

“Morning,” he kisses my cheek.

“It’s still night. Why are you up and making noise?” It’s Saturday for crying out loud, for once we have no damage control to make, no hospital to visit, can’t we just sleep until until?

“Ummm, Nombuso is here,” he says.

My eyes widen.

“For what?” I’m confused.

Did someone perhaps break in at the Mcinekas and steal her bed? People are in the comfort of their beds at this time.

“For the baby shower,” he says.

I need to check the time again, because WTF.

“The baby-shower at this time Mpatho?”

“It’s around midday but she’s already here, please get up.”

I think he called her and said she must come here by dawn. I don't know the reason but he's capable.

I sit up even though my body still needed a rest. He walks out, I hear them laughing somewhere. I drag myself to the bathroom to brush my teeth and wash my face. Ntombi is the deputy baby-shower host but I'm sure she's still in her mother's house asleep.

But Nombuso is here, I don't know if she thought a baby-shower is umbondo, she's wearing her mother's apron. When she was going to Mapholoba she looked good, she did this on purpose.

"Hey morning," I sit on the couch, wrapped in a fleece blanket.

"Morning. Am I too early?" She looks at Mpatho.

"No, we are also getting ready in no time."

Really, she's not early?

He looks at me, "Miyanda is also having a baby-shower today and Nombuso has to be there."

I didn't expect that.

"That's very coincidental," I say.

"Malibongwe didn't know, I only told him this morning that you're also having yours and it was too late for him to postpone because he already planned everything and hired a car to fetch her friends. I almost told her, he pissed me off last night," Nombuso says.

"Oh, so she doesn't know?" I look at Mpatho.

I know about mine, I asked for it.

"I had to beg him to throw me one," I tell Nombuso.

He smiles, I don't know what's funny.

"What's the difference?" Nombuso asks.

“Romantic vs non-romantic,” I say.

“I had neither,” she says, like I’m ungrateful and dramatic to even spot out the differences.

Mpatho doesn’t even bother showing remorse.

“Where does one subscribe to get a cup of tea here?”

It was about time. Nombuso as a host, excellent! Nombuso as a guest, you’d wish someone can put you in a casket until she leaves.

I look at Mpatho, “Hot chocolate for me.”

“Hhayi-bo!” that’s Nombuso exclaiming.

I look at her, it looks like she’s protesting.

“Why don’t you go and make it?” she asks.

“Because I’m pregnant and tired,” I say.

It’s funny how she loves it when Mapholoba does things for her and raises eyebrows when I want the same from Mpatho.

“Don’t worry, I don’t mind,” Mpatho says.

“Do you need help?” she asks him.

How caring!

They both go to the kitchen. If she thinks I will feel bad then she needs to spend more time with me. I lie on the couch wrapped in my fleece blanket. Oh, I need peanut butter sandwich with my hot chocolate.

“Mpatho!” I yell.

He doesn’t come, instead he sends Nombuso.

“Tell him to make me peanut butter sandwich,” I say.

“Kanti what do you contribute? Spreading people’s business?”

Oh, now I see why she’s been provocative.

She doesn't send back the report, she stands in front of me.

"I don't understand what made you think it was your place to tell him. Did you run out of things to talk about in your pillow-talks?" she asks.

"I was looking out for you, you don't know the context in which that was revealed, okay." Instead of yelling at me she should be kneeling in front of me and saying thank you.

"If it wasn't for me Mapholoba would be sitting by Beauty's hospital bed right now," I say.

"Your grandfather's' slayqueen namathanga enyoni?" She's suddenly interested in what I have to say. "What did she want?" she asks.

"She needed someone to protect her, someone she calls Maps, she was specific," I say.

"Her husband hasn't even rotten in his grave," she says, eyes wide.

"Men move on while their wives are still lying in mortuary. I had to tell Mpatho that Mapholoba has focused on his relationship and job," I say.

"I didn't know, I thought you opened your big mouth for no reason. Thank you doll. What else do you want from the kitchen?"

How kind!

"Wine gums, that's it."

She walks away, suddenly friendly again.

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I had my face done, my dress fits perfectly, my hair bounces. I'm the epitome of beauty today. I must pat myself in the back too, I've slayed throughout my pregnancy. Now that I think about it, nothing really causes people not to look beautiful when they're pregnant, you can be lazy and still take care of yourself.

Anyway, I have one problem that's going to ruin my baby-shower pictures. This problem has a name and two legs.

"Didn't you bring proper clothes?" I ask her.

She looks at herself like nothing is wrong. "This is a proper apron, MaVilakazi has never wore it even once. She forgot it when she left and I said to myself, let me put it on for the new baby. New apron, new baby."

Someone send help!!!

"And the doek?" I ask.

"Give me hair brush, I will leave the doek here."

Still, she won't look a part and I think she did this on purpose.

"My mom had ankara dresses designed, some may fit you."

She frowns, "Why would I wear MaShandu's dresses?"

How do I say this? Mpatho should've told her to dress up nicely.

"I want pictures to be beautiful, everyone will be dressed up elegantly except you."

"So you're saying I'm going to ruin your pictures?" she asks.

I tried to put it nicely but since she's a straight talker, I guess she wants people to be direct with her too.

"Yes, you're going to ruin my pictures," I say.

She exclaims loudly and claps her hands.

"Nkosiyazi!" she yells for her brother.

He appears and she tells him right away what I just said. I'm not scared of Mpatho, that's what she doesn't know. I'm fetching the dresses for her to try on.

I come back, she's still blabbering about it.

"Nombuso, I didn't insult you. Trust me, if you ever host an event and ask me to wear a certain way I will respect you," I say and give her the dresses.

"I could've gone to Miyanda's where there are no Ts and Cs. Next thing she won't like my face and then tell me to wear a mask or paint it. Yazi sithwele, nongayidl'inja uyolala ey'dlile namhlanje." She grabs the dresses, I can tell she will look stunning in one of them.

"Nkosiyazi get me water with a jug," she says.

Mpatho goes to the kitchen. She's dumped the dresses on the couch, she's now wasting time waiting for water instead of trying the dresses on. Phewww, this is going to be a long day.

Mpatho comes back, instead of drinking water she asked for she kneels on the floor with it.

"Jehovah Baba, I bless this water in your name. Please fight against any demons that try to detach from a piece of fabric and come to me. I call out MaShandu's spirits from these dresses I'm about to try on. Protect me Lord, amathunzi obumnyama awasale la, amen!" She stands up and starts sprinkling water on the dresses.

I'm in disbelief. Nombuso is the last person to judge my mother because MaVilakazi is just as worse. But I'm not going to entertain this drama, I need to put my shoes on. Mpatho needs to check his sister before we clash.

Ntombi texts me, they're already at the venue. I have no idea where the venue is. In fact I don't know anything, I told Mpatho

to figure it out alone. What if he flopped? I trust him but sometimes his head just lose screws out of nowhere.

I make my way back and ask. "Where is the venue?"

"Relax," he says, smiling cockily.

"Don't disappoint me, my reputation is at stake." I can't imagine a whole me having a hideous baby-shower.

Oh look who's here! She looks more beautiful than me now. I said she must look representable, I didn't say she must outshine me.

"Where did you buy those earrings?" I'm envious.

She won't move away from the mirror. "I bought them, can't tell you my corners."

"Okay, you look beautiful, I didn't know you dyed your hair." Right now the only thing missing from her is a bag to match her shoes. I have a Fendi bag that can really look good for her.

"Let me borrow you a bag that will match," I say.

"Then we will take pictures." She's twirling in front of the mirror.

I hear Mpatho's loud sigh. "Are we ever going to leave?"

He can't rush us. It's been only two hours since I started getting ready.

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I know what I'm walking into, but I'm still worried because I don't want a baby shower mediocre. My nerves are all over the place as we enter the gate. Yeap, he hosted it in one of our

apartments. The little fan of romantic movies in me had something else in mind.

“I thought there would be an outdoor décor as well. Are you poor?” I ask him.

He just takes my hand as I climb out of the car.

“Did you hire a sound system?” I ask.

Mpatho knows me, but Nombuso doesn't, and she doesn't know how to shut up. I'm only asking questions because I'm nervous.

“Can't you just shut up and be grateful?” Nombuso.

I ignore her. Mpatho holds my hand tightly. It's quiet here, I don't think there will be any music.

Then he opens the door, there are people but I can't recognize any of them because my mind just blanked out when I walked and saw the décor. Finally, he's got it, this is how I want to be loved. I like elegance that comes with simplicity. A little-lumberjack themed baby shower is all I could've imagined.

Someone grabs my head and kisses my forehead.

“I can't believe I'm here to celebrate you having sex,” she says.

I look up. It's Aunt Thobi, my mother's best friend, the queen of soft life and a certified tequila lover. She's consumed it already, judging by the constant kissing.

“I thought you were in Zambia.” I haven't seen this person in months, she's never home.

“I arrived yesterday,” she says and I get another kiss.

“Thobile awume,” that's Lorna, another one I didn't expect to see.

This is my mother's crew, her fellow housewives she lived luxuriously with.

“Happy baby-shower pumkin!”

Happy baby-shower? Okay.

Lorna pecks my cheek and takes my hand from Mpatho.

I don't get a chance to say thank you, he briefly speaks with Ntombi and then leaves. The table is full, Ntombi is here, she's the deputy host. I know everyone here, my mom's people almost occupy the whole table. These are the people I grew in front of, my mom is not here but their presence means everything.

“Is this my baby-shower or my mother's?” I ask.

They all laugh. Ntombi puts a belt around my arm, and a crown for drama.

A tedbear, really? They want me to hold it like a baby.

“Sbahle is coming, her make-up artist delayed, she's late,” Ntombi whispers.

They invited ‘everybody’, trust me. I'm seeing a tower of gift-bags and boxes. With these people I know I'm getting the best of everything.

“Who came with a Basket Of Wisdom?” Ntombi asks.

“We all contributed, except you Virgin Mary,” -Lorna.

“Hey, I've never been a mom,” Ntombi laughs and takes the stand.

This is more than what I imagined. His text comes through, he couldn't wait to find out if I'm happy with his baby-shower planning skills or not.

“I LOVE YOU FOR LIFE. THANK YOU FOR THIS.”

He texts again, this time a smile creeps out of my face.

It reads: “I'M PROUD OF YOU AND HOW FAR YOU'VE COME FROM THE DAY THE WILL WAS READ, TO NOW.”

THANK YOU FOR MAKING ME A FATHER, I PROMISE TO BE A GOOD ONE.

LOVE YOU FOR LIFE.”

“Phume!” someone yells my name.

I look up from my phone.

“Some of us took 18 hour flights, in first class, to be with you,” Lorna says.

I need to put this phone away before they kill me.

There’s a loud sigh next to me. It’s Nombuso, she’s not feeling these people.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 114

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I really didn’t need to come here. One, he said I don’t qualify because I’m pregnant. Two, I’m going to be bored waiting for him to conduct his interviews then drive me home. But I came, I’m looking like a vagabond with this bag over my arm.

“Leave the bag in the car,” he says.

“No,” I refuse for no reason.

“Babe, the bag is heavy, leave it in the car.”

“No,” I say, firmly.

He gives up and leads me inside. The interviews are held at Unified, I haven’t been here since the building was completed. I see two cars parked, I’m not sure if they’re operating already. It looks much better than I expected. It doesn’t give upcoming

businessman, this is a high quality repair store. But I have to give Sphakamiso his flowers too, his magic hand did all this.

“I’m proud of you babe,” I say.

He just turns and smiles. We make our way in what I guess is the office at the back. He pushes the door open, as soon as he does screams deafen my ears. I freeze at the door, the bag I insisted on carrying drops on the floor.

“What is going on?” I’m literally shaking, my heartbeat is racing.

Bonga holds me. “Welcome to your baby-shower, my love.”

“But...the interview...” I look around, there Hlengi is.

“The project?” I’m confused, tears are burning my eyes.

“There was no project, I wanted to surprise you.” He smiles and smashes his lips on me.

Judging from my body reaction clearly I’m not a person for surprises. I need to take a few breaths and process all this. I rest my head on his chest and calm down.

Then I look up. Baby-shower, whaaaat?!

“I hate all of you!” I can’t believe these girls.

Andile and Hlengi went as far as asking me for interview advices since I’ve had multiple jobs.

I hug my man, the best one in the whole world.

“I can’t believe you did this. I love you,” I kiss his lips.

I’ve never thought about a babyshower, it’s not a tradition where I come from. But I know that people do it and I feel blessed to be among those people who have a chance to have one. Finally, I’ve walked in the room and had people shouting, “surpriseeee!”

I hope it never happens again though because I almost fainted.

“Can I leave now?”

Fuck, I’m still holding him.

“You’re not staying?” I ask.

“No, I will wait outside. This is for you and your girls. I thought Nombuso would be here too but it looks like it slipped her mind when she got to the Mshazis.”

“Don’t worry, everything is fine. Did you buy the cake?”

He smiles, “Yes, now go and enjoy.”

Phewww!

I turn around, “Guysss!”

Yes, it’s only my baby-shower, but my village girls are here, we made it.

“Let’s pray first,” Hlengi suggests.

Grunts everywhere!

But we close our eyes after she finishes her song and we pray along. I doubt anyone knows what happens in the baby-shower here, we are just excited to be together and have all this food and drinks to ourselves.

“Guys, let’s settle down,” Hlengi yells.

Everybody sits.

“Are we going straight to the gifts?”

We all look at each other. No, we have no idea.

“How about a game to set the mood? Guess-the-guest,” she says.

A game it is. They all have to write something about someone who’s here, then mix pieces of paper in a bowl, and ask me to

guess the name the statement implies to. There's a seven of us here, Hlengi is my real friend, then others are the homegirls that I'm close to. We are snacking while at it.

After we are all done writing Hlengi mixes the bowl. For a moment I had my breath held because girls can be spicy sometimes and not everyone like each other here. But they chose peace today, all the guesses I have to make are based on good things.

I don't know what took us from a game to a full house conversation about men. Bonga is easily the reference of what a real man is. He's not perfect, nobody is. But he's everything I've ever dreamed of. He always goes all the way and surpass my expectations.

"Hello!" the person walks in, heavy footsteps.

I know it's her, I didn't think she'd make it. Now Bonga's heart will be full. He loves his family and he's crazy about their stamp of approval. Nombuso coming here will mean everything to him. I wouldn't have minded if she didn't make it, but to him it would've been a big deal.

I'm surprised to see her looking this good. And the bag?

"Everyone, this is my sister-in-law," I introduce her.

They're mesmerized.

"Your bag is really beautiful," Hlengi compliments.

She looks at it. "Oh, you love the color."

No, it's a freaking' Fendi bag, nobody cares about the color.

None of us here own a luxury bag. Funnily, I also thought Nombuso doesn't own one. But I guess the new man has opened new doors for her.

"They're all rich, hey," Nomzamo whispers.

“Not really, they’re hustlers,” I say.

“I’m also a hustler but I don’t have a designer bag.”

I know where this is going, bathwele. Only if she knew that Bonga was driving a Tazz when I first met him. It took a lot of shit, dodging bullets and weeks in jail.

Nombuso comes to me. I can’t say we are close, but we are civil with each other. She’s another one that kept this from me, I was with her in the kitchen last night for hours.

“I’m sorry I got held up, I got you a gift,” she says.

She gives it to me. It’s inside an envelope but I know it’s not money.

Well, it’s a picture of a dimpled toddler carrying a doll on his lap.

“Was he gay as a baby?” I love this so much.

“No, that was my doll, the only one I ever had in my entire childhood. Ma couldn’t afford two, Malibongwe wanted one, so we ended up co-parenting,” she says.

My poor baby! But now he has real cars, not toys. A real baby, not a doll.

“He was on his fathering duties when this picture was taken,” she says, staring at the picture next to me. “And now he’s going to be a real father because of you.”

Fuck, why am I crying?

“I know he’s going to be a good one,” I say.

“Definitely! He’s a rare breed and he’s lucky that he has you in his life. We have our ups and downs but I see the positive changes, I see your mark,” she says.

“Thank you so much.” I never thought we’d ever hug but here we are.

I place my picture gift in a safe place. It's the most meaningful one, surely I will always remember this baby-shower.

I have more gifts but what warms my heart the most is seeing everyone celebrating my pregnancy and having fun. That includes Nombuso, I don't know where she left her bitchy attitude today, I'm seeing her chatting and laughing.

"Mimi,"

Nooo! This is a women thing. And how did he get here?

"Njabulo this is not a party. What are you doing here?"

He stands next to me, looks around and chuckles. "Sbari is good with these things. But I thought you'd have new friends over. Ubani lowa s'dudla?" He's looking at Nombuso and I'm glad she's at a distance, she didn't hear him.

"That's Bonga's sister," I say.

"Relationship status?"

No, he's not doing this to me.

"Shhhh!" I shush him.

He yawns and sits down behind me with his bottle.

Someone was giving motherhood advice. I'm one of the few who almost reached the 30s without a child. I'm more interested in what happens in labor ward.

"Breast milk is the only way," says Andile.

"Not really, it's just convenient and cheap," someone argues.

Now I'm not sure which is which.

Njabulo raises his hand, "I vote for breast milk."

Nobody said there are voting lines open. Others know him, Nombuso doesn't and he's finally got her attention. She's looking at the party-pooper with her eyebrows raised.

“It will be up to you Miyanda,” Hlengi says.

“Everything is up to you after you’ve given birth. What should you pray for right now is a gentle midwife because k’yanyiwa.”

“Is it that bad?” I’m curious.

“Sis! I begged for an operation and they refused. If there was a rope I would’ve committed suicide that day,” Andile says.

“The nurse told me to open my legs wide as I opened them when I made the child,” Nombuso says.

I’m sorry, but this is too funny.

“How wide did you open kanti s’dudla?” The question is loud.

The room goes dead. My heart is pumping rage.

“How wide did your mother open when she made you?” - Nombuso.

Njabulo needs to leave, it can’t work with both of them in the same room.

“I was conceived the doggystyle,” he says.

That’s my aunt he’s talking about. I get up and grab his hand, he’s going outside to Bonga who invited him. He’s sitting in the parking area with other two guys.

“Your guest is here,” I hand Njabulo over.

“Sbari zithini?”

I leave them there. Bonga knows how Njabulo is. He shouldn’t have been brought here and spoiled with alcohol, that’s a recipe for disaster.

I have to cut the cake, we have to be home before sunset.

“Err Miyanda, please cut three extra slices for me,” Nombuso says.

I'm confused.

"I have a daughter and two motherless children at home," she says.

I smile, "Oh, don't worry."

She turns to the table, there are left-overs everywhere. She asks for a container and fills it up with snack burgers. I guess that's for her three kids at home. She adds fruits inside. By the way everything is being put inside the Fendi bag. Maybe she's used to luxurious life, she's not careful as I would be if I had a designer bag.

Okay, cans of cold drink now, she's taking everything. Now the bag is too small for everything but the African woman in her will squeeze until that zip closes. I literally close my eyes in fear when she puts it on the floor and presses her knee on it.

"Gosh, that's a Fendi bag you're destroying?" Andile exclaims.

She looks up, the bag finally closed but I'm not sure about the condition of that zip.

"You said what?" she asks Andile.

"The bag. Do you know how many of us wish to have that bag?"

She shrugs and moves away. Is this what they call 'levels' on social media? She's so unbothered.

"Your in-laws are rich!" Andile says.

I have no comment.

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AT THE MCINEKAS

Nombuso can't get over how disrespectful the drunk cousin of Miyanda was. She's been whining about it to Malibongwe ever since they came back. The event was successful, she was happy, that's all Malibongwe wanted.

"Miyanda wants to send ingqibamasondo, there's no date set yet but it's something the Mthethwas are discussing," Malibongwe tells her.

"That's very nice of them. I hope MaVilakazi will be here," she says.

"I don't think she will come," -Malibongwe.

Nombuso frowns, "Why do you say that?"

"There was a fight between Gog' MaNgema and the Vilakazis," he says.

"What did that woman say? She's never cared about us here. And who put her in charge of the Mcineka issues because grandpa had dumped her when he died?"

Malibongwe gives her a look. "Don't bring those things up, she's an elder as far as the whole Mcineka clan is concerned. The only thing I want us to focus on is making sure that nobody bullies Ma anymore, even if we don't agree with her decisions."

She nods with a heavy sigh. "Are they forcing her to come back?"

"Yes, and they want her to pay a fine for leaving. She doesn't want to come back, I don't think that's right but we cannot side with the oppressor, because in her eyes Mcineka oppressed her."

"I agree, but families still need to come together and separate properly, just like you did for me," Nombuso says.

"She doesn't want that," he says.

“Hhayi-bo kanti ufunani?” This is getting frustrating.

“I don’t know and I don’t want to be stressed out by it. As soon as Miyanda gives me the date I will let you know,” he says.

Footsteps come in.

“What date?” -Sphakamiso.

He’s not alone, Mkhuleko is right behind him with Yoli sitting on his shoulders.

“Where are you all coming from?” Malibongwe asks.

“We were around. How did the babyshowers go?”

Nombuso can answer because she attended both.

“They were great, the girls were happy,” she says.

Then she turns and takes the bag she filled with left-overs.

“I even bought you, orphans, some goodies,” she says.

Now she’s speaking their language. Yoli stands in front of her salivating as she unpacks the food.

Malibongwe looks at the wrapped burgers, looks very familiar.

“You bought it?” he asks, just to be sure.

“Yes, I knew they’d be hungry when we get here.”

He nods and takes out his phone to see if Miyanda has read his last text.

They waste no time feasting.

“This is nice,” Sphakamiso says with his mouth full.

“Yes, but these chips look like they’ve lived before,” Mkhuleko says.

Sphakamiso laughs. “You mean they’ve chip’sed before coming to chips here?”

“Longevity!” Mkhuleko.

Nombuso looks up, annoyed.

“They were fresh when I took them at the baby-shower, stop being ungrateful brats.”

“We are just kidding. Thanks, it’s really nice of you to think of us when you’re in an event getting food,” Sphakamiso says and clears his throat.

“And?” Nombuso raises her eyebrow.

“No, no buts. I’m just wondering if anybody saw you collecting and asked who you’re collecting for?”

“Oh, so you think I embarrassed you?” -Nombuso.

“Ummm, no,” he says, rolling his eyes to the side.

“Good, because beggars can’t be choosers, you have no mother.” She looks at Mkhuleko, “When are you going to start cooking?”

“It’s still early, I want to cook when all the neighbors are done with theirs. I want my spices to fill up the whole village, then I will be hired to cook in events.” He laughs at his own wild dreams and looks at Malibongwe, “Did you talk to Mpatho about the baby-showers?”

“No, we are not that close, it was just a coincidence,” Malibongwe says.

“I will name my other dog Coincidence,” he says.

Other dog? All eyes are on him, nobody looks pleased. Ruby alone is enough, there’s no space for Coincidence.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 115

PHUMELELE

I woke up to a verification badge on my Instagram account. God knows how many times I've tried getting verified without success. I've been on the app for years, I used to travel a lot with my mother and post vacation pictures and videos trying out new adventures in different places. Now I don't have much content, hence I'm a bit scarce on social media. I hope I will get my groove back, maybe start sharing my motherhood journey after delivery and get even bigger. With a boutique in the process of opening, I can use my platform for marketing.

I'm almost done with breakfast and it's only 7:25am.

This is what a good wife does. I will finish up and go take a shower and dress up.

"Morning," Mpatho walks in coming from his morning exercise drenching in sweat.

He kisses my cheek and looks around the counter spread with breakfast assortments.

"Did I miss my birthday?" he asks.

"No, it's not your birthday," I say.

"Then what is the special occasion? I usually get two eggs and a cup of coffee in the morning."

What about the bread? And I rinse fruits for him too.

"I got verified on Instagram," I tell him the news.

I expected a round of applause, but he's just eating his banana. I don't know why he bites banana only twice and finish it. He can eat with order.

"I don't know what that is," he says.

“What year is it Mpatho? Verification badge means you’re a person of interest on social media, I’m a public figure,” I explain.

“Which public?”

He’s not going to spoil my morning.

I cover all the plates and walk away. “I will go and take a shower. Don’t eat before me.”

“I’m joining you,” he says.

“Okay, but you’re not going to get anything.” I’m not going to nurse the sex addict that downplays my achievements...social media achievements.

He follows me to the bedroom. I have to keep an eye because he always comes back from his exercise with his clothes drenched in sweat and leaves them on the bed. I don’t know if it’s all men, but I found Mpatho a well-organized man and as soon as I came in his life he began acting like a child. Sometimes he can’t find his socks and his other shoe lace is missing.

“So, tonight the Mthethwas are coming to express their gratitude for the lobola, are you going to make it?”

It’s today? Wow, time flies.

“Are we invited?” I ask.

“Yes, I told you about it long time ago.”

“I must’ve forgotten. I don’t think I will go, I don’t have anything to wear.” I’m not prepared and, without sounding any rude, I’m not keen on the Mcineka gatherings. He can go, it’s his half brother, I don’t have any pressing reason to be there.

“You have clothes Phume. Nobody has clothes more than you in this village. So that’s just a bad excuse, they came to support us when I had that failed ceremony at the Vilakazis.”

“No, that’s their uncle’s house, they were obliged to attend whether it was your ceremony or not. I get that Malibongwe is your half-brother and you get along now. But what obliges me to go to the Mcineka gatherings?”

“What obliged Miyanda to go and help you cook and serve guests at the Vilakazis?” He still doesn’t get it, right now I think he’s doing it on purpose.

“She was serving her in-laws. Who are the Mcinekas to me? Please Mpatho, let’s go and take a shower before our breakfast dries up.” I cover my head and go to the bathroom. I don’t need to go and make things awkward for Sphakamiso in his own home. Yes, our paths will cross frequently but there are occurrences I can avoid. He’s just getting better and working on himself again, I don’t want to be all over his face.

“So much for a public figure!” I hear him say behind me.

Good he said public, not a Mcineka figure.

I turn back, “Why do you care whether I go or not? You will be with other men the whole time getting praised for food parcels and I will be stuck with people I don’t even know, Nombuso will be busy.”

“Why are you shouting?” he asks.

“I’m not shouting, I projected my voice to be a little bit higher than usual,” I say and walk away. Sometimes I just wish I can give birth already, my moods are always unpredictable.

The little argument before the shower didn’t ruin anything. We are still in the celebration mood. Or rather I am, Mpatho is just joining because there’s food. He’s not dressed up yet, he’s topless and wearing only his pants.

“I love how you keep your body fit for me,” I say.

“For you, madam?” He smiles.

“I wish you can get verified everyday,” he says.

“You make it sound like I starve you. What time are you coming back from work? I will cook for you.”

“Around 12pm, so that I can be on time to see izintombi zakwaMthethwa,” he says.

“That’s why I’m letting you go alone, I want you to have freedom and see beauties. Who knows, you might come back with beautiful side-chick,” I say.

“Mxm!” He thought I’d be jealous and change my mind.

His phone rings. He looks at it and curses lowly. It must be an important call.

“I totally forgot,” he tells the person.

I pull my own phone and text Ntombi to see what she’s busy with tonight.

“No, I have quite an eventful morning, my wife got verified on YouTube. I will reschedule her appointment to next week. Okay, sharp see you later.” He sighs and puts down his phone.

“I wasn’t verified on YouTube, I said Instagram,” I say.

“Same difference. Yazi I forgot about Ruby’s vet appointment.”

Ruby is now a princess of every kingdom.

“I didn’t know she has a medical aid,” I say.

He gives me a look, even though he knows how I feel about dogs. I hope Mkhuleko will love his children the way he loves his dog, because he’s a good dog dad.

“Now sthandwa I have to leave,” Mpatho says. He kisses my cheek and takes one last sip of his coffee and disappears to the bedroom to dress up.

Malibongwe has made progress, I have no doubt that they will have their wedding before us. I need to go to the hospital today again and check if they're not ready to discharge Beauty. Now I don't think Mpatho and I will go through all these gift-giving ceremonies, we'll do only what's necessary and plan a wedding.

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The Mcineka and Vilakazi elders haven't been seeing eye to eye lately, due to MaVilakazi's departure. She's not here today but she met up with Nombuso and assisted her with shopping earlier this week. With the neighbors' help, Nombuso managed to prepare for the ceremony. Mkhuleko was useful for once, he collected money from his siblings and bought paint to renew the rondavel's painting where izintombi will be accommodated.

Mpatho arrives, he's here after the neighbors. It looks like the guests will be arriving at any minute now. He spots Malibongwe on the verandah and makes his way to him.

"I came empty-handed," he says. It's something that only crossed his mind after he already left home.

"You just carried your big head and came?" Malibongwe asks, passing him a glass to pour a drink that's in front of him.

"Where is Phume?"

"She wasn't feeling well. Is Miyanda coming?"

"No, but I will fetch her," Malibongwe says.

"To visit?" Mpatho.

"No, to come and stay with me. I will go and ask again. MaVilakazi is not coming back, she's not here even today.

Nombuso needs a helping hand and she has to live her life too.”

Mpatho chuckles and looks away. “With Mapholoba?”

“Yes, she’s a grown woman, at the end of the day she needs that kind of attention.”

“What if he wants to marry her?” -Mpatho.

“Now? He definitely can’t.” MaVilakazi already left, they won’t survive if Nombuso leaves too.

When he sees Mpatho’s judgmental look he blows out a faint sigh. “Look man, Nombuso was married and it didn’t end well. I want her to heal, ejole and have fun at home.”

“I bet Mthethwa wanted the same for his only daughter,” Mpatho says.

Malibongwe gives him a look. This is for Nombuso’s own good, marriage has been hard on her once, he’s definitely not taking her down the aisle.

Sphakamiso comes out of the house, he’s half dressed.

He didn’t expect to see Mpatho. Yes, he knew that he might come but not this early.

“Ahem!” he clears his throat.

He’s actually here to have a word with Malibongwe.

They both turn their heads to him.

“Will they bring induku yomkhongi today?” he asks.

“No, it will come ngombondo omkhulu,” -Malibongwe.

Mpatho frowns, “Another one? Is this culture or you guys just love wasting money?”

“You focus on expensive dinners with your friends and let us do our things, uncultured swine.”

Sphakamiso breaks a chuckle. That was a good response, he liked it.

“Hi,” he finally says.

“Hi Sphakamiso. Is Aphelele here?”

“No,” he says.

“Oh, I thought he’d be here. Anything from his mother?”

Sphakamiso’s expression changes; this is none of his business. Heck, he’s never even met Aphelele.

Before he says anything Mpatho asks if they can talk. There’s no friendship here, no brotherhood, nothing. They’re just people who know certain mutual people.

Malibongwe excuses himself and gets inside the house.

“She’s my wife’s half sister,” Mpatho says.

“So what?” He doesn’t care and he doesn’t need Mpatho telling him.

“She’s in rehab,” Mpatho says.

There’s a moment of silence. Sphakamiso is staring at him, in total disbelief.

“I thought she was in Pretoria,” -Sphakamiso.

“I believe she was,” he says.

“Did you put her in rehab?”

He nods. Maybe all along there was no valid reason to dislike this guy but now there is.

“You said I’m the reason why your son has a tough childhood,” Mpatho says.

“And the first thing you thought was dusting up a drug-addict that abandoned him as a baby and put her in rehab?” He’s

infuriated. It wasn't Mpatho's place, he never asked him to force Snehlanhla to be Aphelele's mother.

"I'm sure her son won't care that she was a drug-addict, he'd just be happy to have someone to call mom. An opportunity some of us never had," Mpatho says.

"Some of us, Mpatho Nkosiya, had 'parents' who didn't want us. The presence and the title means nothing if the parent doesn't love you. Aphelele is not you, your journey is not his, so please don't try to give him a mother. Go and fix your own life."

Mpatho takes a huge breath. Phume did say this might backfire, he was supposed to get permission first.

Nevertheless, Sphakamiso is angry for his own reasons.

"If it was Malibongwe who put her in rehab would you still talk like this?"

"Malibongwe would never stick his nose in my business," he says.

"You know what boy, I don't care, get over it. God, you're so childish!" He clicks his tongue and finishes his drink.

"And you're so cocky, you think because you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth you can solve every poor man's problem. I've never asked you to be my superhero, go and kill yourself Mpatho."

"I will, right after killing you," Mpatho.

Nombuso walks out and hears the exchange, immediately she sighs.

"Guys, really? We all know that you have issues but today is not the day. Okay?" She looks at both of them.

They're glaring at each other, not looking at her.

“People are coming over, please put aside whatever you have against each other and behave. Otherwise we will look bad,” she says and walks away.

She only needs them to get along, or just ignore each other, for today only. Tomorrow they can kill each other and head to hell where they belong.

She walks in the kitchen, everything is in order. She was hoping that Phume will come and do her YouTube copied dessert.

“I don’t even know I was born into this family!”

No, not another one please.

She turns, it’s Mkhuleko followed by Malibongwe.

“And now?” she asks, a bit embarrassed because the neighbors are already here.

“He drank the bottle of Gordons I put aside for izintombi,” Malibongwe says.

Mkhuleko sighs, “Oh Shembe! I’m telling him that Ruby drank it. I don’t drink alcohol, I’ve been on the self-discovery journey since...”

They stare at him, he was drinking yesterday when Sphakamiso came with ciders.

“Since early this morning, and I’m doing great so far,” he says.

Nombuso stops Malibongwe from responding. All these arguments can be done after the ceremony.

“Please do this after 5pm when they’ve left,” she says.

Malibongwe takes a deep breath in and leaves.

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The girls are beautiful, they came with a lot of gifts. Malibongwe got worried a bit when he saw them because there's still another one they have to bring after he sends izibizo. He doesn't want his in-laws to empty their pockets so much.

He walks in, Nombuso is packing everything in the kitchen.

"It won't all fit here, we have to put some in MaVilakazi's bedroom," she says.

"Umh, yeah." He looks around. There's MaVilakazi's blanket that she didn't come to receive.

"I wish Ma was here," he says.

Nombuso stops and looks at him.

"Well, I love you guys a little bit when she's not here, you don't annoy me as much."

He laughs. Maybe she's right because she hasn't been accusing them of things and starting fights lately.

"I wish Aphelele was here though," she says.

They never talk about this one. It's between her and Sphakamiso.

"I feel like he will forget about us, which is probably what Sphakamiso wants. And of course I understand where he's coming from because I wasn't a good aunt to him. But everyone deserves a second chance. Yoli misses him, I miss him too," she says.

"Talk to him about it. It's his child, I can't tell him what to do," Malibongwe says.

"You're right." She turns to the bucket that came with izintombi. Malibongwe walks out, he needs to monitor because some of the local guys get a bit crazy when they see girls. He doesn't

want them to be mistreated. Nombuso opens the lid after he walks out and looks inside the bucket. It's the scones, this one definitely needs to go to her room and stay behind the suitcases.

"Hey," Mkhuleko walks in and follows her.

"What do you want?" He should be in the rondavel trying his luck because this current girlfriend he claims to have seems to play no role in his life. He's still childish as he was when he was 12 and clueless about love.

"I want...what is inside that bucket?"

Nombuso sighs, "Scones."

"I want a share or I will tell everyone where to find them if they want them."

"Fine Mkhuleko, I will keep them behind the suitcases, just don't tell anyone else. Now go, all the boys are in the rondavel courting girls," she says.

There's no peace of mind in this family. One can't even hide a bucket of scones in peace.

"They're asking for you," Mkhuleko says.

She frowns, "Why?"

"You're the groom's sister, they have gifts for you."

This is her favorite part, she hides the scones and hurries out.

After they've presented all their gifts Nombuso asks her helpers that they serve them food.

Mpatho asks men to leave the rondavel.

"Everyone onamasende outside!" he says, looking at Sphakamiso who's still sitting next to a particular girl.

Sphakamiso doesn't move. He will, just not on Mpatho's order.

"Bhuti we-leather please get out," Mpatho says. He was instructed by Malibongwe to do this, izintombi won't eat if there's a group of men with big heads staring at them.

Sphakamiso leans over to the girl's ear and says very loudly. "He was a soldier, he got an accident that messed with his head, he thinks this is a military base."

"I'm not playing with you Sphakamiso. If you think..." Nombuso appears behind his shoulder.

"Please, you can do this after 5pm when they've left," she says.

He holds back and walks out. Sphakamiso follows. They will be served outside, after izintombi have eaten, they're the main priority today. Mkhuleko sits next to Malibongwe whose eyes are on the time. It's an hour away from 5pm, there's a lot that he wants to address. Mpatho wanted to leave early and be home for dinner because today is a special day for Phume. He may not see it as a big deal but Phume is happy for this verification thing and he wants to celebrate with her. Today would've been a good day to try anal again too. But he will stay and leave after 5pm when he's addressed Sphakamiso's nasty attitude towards him. This is no longer about Phume, both of them have moved on from that. Now they're just undermining each other, which can be fixed.

They walk izintombi to the quantum they came with. He's realizing how old he's getting, like those old senior men who's passed all stages of manhood. He didn't attempt to ask for one's girl's number. It's not cheating, it's something all men do, married or not. When there's a group of izintombi from another place men have to keep them company and ask for their numbers, even if they're not interested in pursuing anything with them.

It's 4:55pm when they make their way back to the house, parting ways with other local men who came to check out girls. Five more minutes to go!

They sit on the table, not talking to each other.

Nombuso walks in, "Can you guys believe that Maka Nqo wanted me to give them portions today before our ancestors even smell the groceries?"

They don't respond. They have issues deeper than that, with each other.

Malibongwe looks up, "Is it 5pm now?"

"Yes. What's happening at 5pm?" She's confused.

"I have a few things that I need to say, Sphakamiso nawe Mkhuleko." Malibongwe says, standing up.

"What did I do?" Sphakamiso gathers his brows in confusion.

"Ung'jwayela kabi, that's what you did," Mpatho says.

He stands up and rolls up his sleeves. "Call the police, Mshazi."

Malibongwe looks at Mkhuleko, "I'm tired of your bullshit wena."

Nombuso sighs.

This is not what she signed up for. MaVilakazi needs to come and teach her kids manners. She's not even going to listen to them or try to stop them. She takes 2l of cold-drink and grabs Yoli's arm and heads to her room.

"Uzoyiphuza nani leyo drink? What are you going to drink that with?" Sphakamiso asks. He's hungry, they didn't eat at all, what they had were portions of taste for what was cooked.

Nombuso stops with her eyes widen.

"Nothing," Mkhuleko says.

They forget about their arguments and look at him.

“She’s a Coke addict, she never drinks it with anything. It baffles me everytime too, but that’s who she is. Back to the fights...” He looks at Malibongwe who seemingly has a problem with him.

Malibongwe sighs and sinks down on the chair. “Today was supposed to be great bafethu!”

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 116

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I don’t know how he convinced Nyambose because he was putting his foot down. I’m finally allowed to go to the Mcinekas and live there. We’ve lived together, there’s no much difference except that his siblings will be there as well. My perspective on Nombuso has changed, so I have no doubt that we will be fine even if we are not best friends.

Bonga was only able to fetch me in the afternoon, it’s already dark when we arrive. It’s only one week before Unified opens, there were some delays here and there but Sphakamiso has finally put everything together. I expected them to have a grand opening party but I hear they’re only going to celebrate with a simple braai and invite only friends and family over.

Sphakamiso comes and gets my bags.

“Welcome back,” he says. “The traditional beer you sent was nice.”

I smile, “Thank you but Mam’ Zonke made it. I don’t know how to make traditional beer.”

I’m lying, I know how to make it, but I was told not to do certain things while I’m here.

He takes my bags to Bonga's rondavel and leaves.

"Isn't he always the sweetest?" I say to his brother.

He chuckles, "Wait until you know the real him. Nobody is sweet here, except you, come here."

He wraps his arms around me, I lift my face to look at him.

"How did you bribe Nyambose?" I ask.

"I had a man to man talk with him. I cried, pleaded and made promises. I just couldn't be alone anymore," he says.

"Am I here to cook and be a wife?" I ask.

"No, we all take turns in cooking now. I just needed you home, next to me." He kisses my lips.

I want to be here with him. I've missed the pregnant woman soft treatment. I want him to rub my feet and take care of my cravings. And just to see my tummy growing and feel his baby kicking.

"I'm happy to be here," I say.

He kisses my lips again. There's so much more that I'd like us to do, it's been a moment. But we have the whole night together, we need to go to the main house and be with others.

Yoli welcomes us at the door and gives me a big hug.

"How are you princess?" I ask.

"I'm good. Ung'phatheleni?"

I look at Bonga, I totally forgot about it. It doesn't matter where you are coming from, as long as you're arriving dressed up Yoli expects something.

Bonga gives me gum. I know she probably likes it but nope, I can't have Nombuso killing me, she will put it all over her clothes.

"I brought you money, you will get it in the morning," I say.

"Okay. Do you want to know a secret?"

Bonga sighs, "Yoli let aunty sit down first."

"No," she pulls my dress.

I have to bend down, she stands on her toes and covers my ear with her little hands.

"There's a bucket of cakes behind the suitcases, in my mom's room," she says.

I'm pretty sure this is her mother's secret.

I laugh, "Okay, I won't tell anyone."

I was thinking that's what she wants but she pulls her uncle as well and tells him the secret.

"No wonder nobody seems to mind that dinner is delayed except me and Sphakamiso," he says, shaking his head.

There's always something with them. Maybe this is how it's like in every big family. I come from a small, peaceful family. For some weird reason I love the liveliness here, which includes their unnecessary arguments and endless fights.

Mkhuleko is watching TV. I wonder if he has another hobby, except TV and troubling his siblings. Nombuso is setting table for dinner. There's been some good changes, now they always eat together.

"I'm glad you're here," she says taking the apron off. "Can you please continue with this? I need to make a phone call before my Vodacom minutes expire."

“No,” Bonga.

She rolls her eyes, “Can he stay out of your business for once?”

“Just finish up and go make that phone call. She hasn’t even sat down and you already want her to serve dinner. Your turn is your turn,” he says.

“I hate both of you.” She puts her apron back on and continues.

Bonga means well, he makes sure that he always stands up for me. But sometimes he just needs to relax and let me be. We will definitely have a conversation about this soon.

Eventually everyone gathers around the table.

“Malibongwe, you’re cooking tomorrow,” Nombuso says.

“Tomorrow?” He looks surprised.

“Yes,” she says, narrowing her eyes at him.

“But I have to meet with the drivers in the afternoon,” he says.

“Your turn is your turn,” she says.

It’s work, I understand.

“I will cook for you, don’t worry,” I say.

Nombuso rolls her eyes. I expected that annoyed face.

“Dessert?” Bonga asks her.

She pulls her eyebrows. “This is not a restaurant, you eat your food and drink water and go to bed.”

“Okay,” he says and stands up and leaves the table.

That was dramatic.

They all look at me. I shrug, I don’t know what that was about.

But after a few minutes he comes back with a dark-green bucket, which I know very well.

“What is that?” Sphakamiso asks.

“Dessert bafo,” he says.

Damn, Yoli said it’s a secret.

Sphakamiso wastes no time, he takes two.

Mkhuleko doesn’t look excited, which is strange because he’s the foodie of the family.

I notice that Nombuso is throwing daggers at him.

He widens his eyes at her and shrugs.

Then he points at her, she shrugs too.

She clears her throat and asks, “Wow, where did that come from?”

“From Father Christmas. Won’t you come and take some?” Bonga is enjoying this.

“No, I’m good,” she says.

He looks at Mkhuleko. “Nawe?”

“I’m on diet,” he says.

We all know that he’s lying. I just love how dumbfounded him and Nombuso are.

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Sphakamiso works, so does Bonga. But Sphakamiso really takes his work seriously. So I wake up early to make breakfast so that he can eat before he goes to work. I do this religiously everyday, by the time everyone wakes up breakfast is ready.

Cooking by turns is still a rule though, I only specialize in breakfast.

Today Bonga decided to stay home and help Mkhuleko cut grass in the yard. They're out in the scorching sun the whole morning. Knowing Mkhuleko I know that he's already hungry and tired.

Nombuso made vetkoeks in the morning, so I send Yoli to call them in so that they can eat and have a drink. Yoli comes back telling me that Bonga said they will only eat after they've cut all the grass.

Maybe he's fasting or trying to lose weight. But this is unfair to Mkhuleko.

I walk down to them, Bonga has turned pink, Mkhuleko is grey.

"There's no break here?" I ask.

He stops and stands up. "Yoli saw a snake yesterday, we have to cut all this grass."

"But Mkhuleko is tired now," I say.

"Tired is an understatement sisi, ng'zolala ngidonsa ingubo ngamazinyo, ziyay'shuka eGibhithe ezweni lobugqila," he says.

Mkhuleko is funny. Here I am feeling sorry for him and he's making a joke out of it.

"Come on, come and eat, he will continue alone ngoba akakhathali," I say.

I know that Bonga wants to scold me but he knows how much I adore Mkhuleko, I will pull the sun down on his face if he tries. Mkhuleko puts his tools down and follows me.

He sit under the roof shade, I fetch his food and bring it.

"Don't be in a hurry, myele ashe yedwa," I say.

He chuckles, "You're a lifesaver."

I turn to leave him to eat in peace.

"Sis' Miyanda," he stops me.

I turn and look at him. He's got that look on his face, I know whatever he's about to say is not one of his jokes.

"How did you heal from losing your mother?" he asks.

I didn't expect this question.

"I don't think anyone heals, you just learn to live," I say.

"Is it bad? Not having a mother," he asks.

I'd say this is a childish question but he looks troubled by this and desperate for an answer.

"Some days are worse than others," I say.

He nods, "I see, thank you, my superhero."

I smile and turn away.

That was awkward. I wonder why he felt the need to ask me that. Maybe someone close to him lost a mother and he's looking for ways to comfort her.

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I was promised a massage but I knew I wasn't going to get it after he spent the whole day cutting grass. He slept flat the whole night. I sneak out of the bed to go and make breakfast. I start by washing my face in our tub and brush my teeth, then I wear my gown.

"Babe," his sleepy voice calls.

I thought he was asleep.

“I’m going to the kitchen,” I say.

“Come here first.” He opens the blanket and moves aside.

Sphakamiso will be leaving at 8am and it’s already 7:29am.

He holds my hand and pulls me back in bed.

“You always leave me,” he says, kissing my neck.

“Everyone is up already, you know that you make noise.”

He doesn’t care, he runs his hand over my ass and grabs it. I feel his hard erection, I know he will want to make up for last night.

There’s a knock at the door, just as I run my hand over his hard chest.

“Yoli, we are still sleeping,” he says.

“Malibongwe!” the person says.

He frowns, “Ma?”

MaVilakazi???

He gets out of bed and puts his clothes on.

It’s her, he opens the door for her and hugs her.

“Ma?” He can’t believe it.

“Usalele?” She looks around, skipping me with her eyes.

“You’re back?” Bonga asks.

“Yes, I had to come and see my children. When was the last time you polished the floor?”

“Ma!” he laughs.

I polished the floor two days ago and it still shows.

Yoli comes in with a broom, her grandmother instructed her to do so.

“Miyanda is here,” Bonga finally tells her.

She saw that I’m here. But she pretends to just see me now.

“MaMthethwa uyaphila?” she asks.

“Yebo Ma,” I say.

“Siyabonga-ke, I’m happy to see you. I will just clean here for you, I know my boys are lazy.”

That means we have to leave. I don’t know how I feel about her cleaning after me but I don’t want to spoil anyone’s mood.

While they celebrate their mother’s return I make my way to the kitchen and make breakfast like I always do. They’re all happy to see their mother. More happy than I imagined. They love her, she’s their mother. Mkhuleko, as tall as he is, he was jumping up and down. Sphakamiso said he will only leave for work after 10am. Bonga’s face has been stuck with a smile ever since the knock came and disturbed our morning glory.

“MaMthethwa, are you making eggs?” It’s her, she’s done cleaning our rondavel.

“Yebo,” I say.

“They will eat porridge, I cooked it already,” she says.

“I’ve already made eggs and set the table,” I say.

“They will eat porridge. That’s how I raised them, they love it that way.”

“Not Bonga,” I say.

“I’ve known him his whole life, he likes porridge, not undercooked eggs.”

We will see!

I put eggs on everyone's plate and add slices of bread and hot relish.

Yoli comes, I send her to call them in and tell them that breakfast is ready.

MaVilakazi comes, like she's testing me, with bowls and a pot of porridge. They all come and sit. I sit where I always sit with my plate in front of me. Nobody talks, not even Nombuso.

"Breakfast!" MaVilakazi says.

"I know you haven't been taking care of yourselves. I want all this porridge gone, all of you have lost weight except Nombuso, you starve yourselves."

They take bowl she's handing to them. I know MaVilakazi very well, this is not for them, it's for me. I sit and watch them. It's not a competition, they can eat whatever they like. I'm just not going to be a victim of mamezala's abuse. I don't even know where she's been and what made her decide to come in the morning unannounced, she announced when she left.

Mkhuleko takes a slice of bread and bites. Then he picks a spoon and digs it in the porridge bowl. I guess he's paved the way, others do the same except Yoli who's enjoying her eggs. It's day one but I can already see myself back home tomorrow morning.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 117

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Everyone knows that I'm not okay but they still expect me to sit at the dinner table and shine teeth with everyone tomorrow. Nombuso came up with the dinner idea, they're inviting Mpatho

and his wife as well. MaVilakazi hasn't said anything to me directly but she's talked about me, to all of them without mentioning my name. She's been doing everything for Bonga. Cleaning for him, collecting his clothes in the morning and ironing them. She's his mother but now he has a fiancée, I'm sure everyone knows that there's a line. I expect her to call him at anytime after 5 am in the morning.

What annoys me is that everyone sees what she's doing. Bonga fetched me living happily with my father and brought me here. If his mother wants to be his wife then he should marry her and leave me alone.

He comes in, I don't even know how long he's been in the kitchen. It's a few minutes after 10pm, I would've been in bed if I wasn't packing these clothes.

"Hey," he holds my waist and kisses my shoulder. "I thought you'd be asleep, Sphakamiso was giving me some updates, I'm sorry."

"It's okay. You can sleep on my side, I will remove these clothes."

"Ziyaphi izimpahla?" he asks.

"In my bag," I say.

"I mean why are you packing?"

I'm sure that he knows why I need to have my bags packed.

"Just in case I have to leave unexpectedly," I say.

"Come on, Miyanda!" He pulls my hand and sits down.

Why is he acting surprised? He's seen how things have been since his mother returned.

"You're making things difficult for me," he says.

“How? You’re not the one being degraded and hated for no reason.”

“MaVilakazi is not here to stay and she’s been out of your way. There will be ‘this and that’ here and there, but I don’t think that’s something you should leave over. It’s going to destroy my relationship with Nyambose.” He’s only worried about himself.

“I don’t have a relationship with your mother and you want me to stay in an environment that’s not good for my mental being to protect your image.” I don’t understand, maybe he thinks I receive pain differently, maybe with my ass rather than my heart.

“This was my last chance, I already look like a failure to your father.”

“Maybe you are,” I say.

“You’re right, maybe I am a failure. This failure just needs a bit of help. I want your father to hand you over with a pure heart. I don’t want him to lose his trust in me. It’s my first time seeing them so happy to have her around, they will feel somehow if she leaves because of us. I need this as a favor, please stay.”

I guess I’m the lamb of sacrifice, in all this my feelings don’t matter.

“Okay,” I say.

“Please look at me.”

There’s no need, I already said okay. I take the rest of the clothes and shove them inside the bag. I turn off the light and get in bed. It’s late but I don’t think I will have any sleep soon.

He wraps his arm around my waist and rubs my tummy. “When was the last kick?”

“I don’t know.” I’d prefer silence over meaningless questions.

“Ngiyaxolisa,” he says, pressing his lips behind my neck. “I will try to have a conversation with her about coming here and waking us up in the morning.”

How many times has he promised me that things will be better if he talks to her? Unless God himself speaks to her directly, MaVilakazi’s feelings will never change. And I no longer want her to like me, I just need her to respect us and our space. She goes through our dirty basket looking for Bonga’s clothes. What kind of craziness is that?

My phone is ringing. I don’t even know where it’s ringing from and who’s calling me at this time. I find it under the pillow and check.

Nyambose is awake at this time?

“Baba,” I answer.

“Njabulo says I have been given free minutes by Vodacom to talk before 11pm.”

I wonder what made Njabulo not use all of them without telling him. He’s always using Nyambose’s airtime and free minutes to call his people and blame it on the network.

“Anyway, are you okay there?” he asks.

I’m not okay, I have to lie about my feelings and that alone is heavy on its own.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I say, my voice trembling a bit.

“That’s good. I will go and buy airtime tomorrow and call you.”

“Okay thanks, goodnight.”

Odds have always been against women. Two people make a child together but only a woman has to carry the child. Then we have to leave our father’s houses and go rebuild other people’s houses. I’m crying in someone’s home but my father is still alive and he loves me.

His hand touches my shoulder, “Miyanda?”

I wipe my tears and close my eyes. I don't want to talk to him about anything.

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PHUMELELE

MaVilakazi is back. I've never heard of such a dramatic old woman. But her children are rejoicing, including the one I live with. It seems like I'm behind, living in the past, for thinking that 'we didn't like her'. He came back from work earlier than usual and said there's dinner at the Mcinekas, we are invited and going. He knows how I feel about attending the Mcineka gatherings, even the smallest ones. I hear that Miyanda is there, that's their rightful daughter-in-law, I don't see the reason why I should be there. But I know how hard it takes for him to understand when I'm not interested in things he's interested in.

My phone rings. I'm still finishing the Netflix episode I was watching, he's in the bedroom dressing up. I check the caller, it's Beauty.

“Hello gogo,” I answer.

“Your grandmother was never fresh like me. These fools say they will release me tomorrow, can you come pick me up?”

Finally, thank God!

“It's called discharging, you weren't in jail,” I say, laughing.

I wish they'd discharged her today, I would've gotten a valid excuse not to attend the Mcineka dinner. I don't even know

whose idea it was to welcome MaVilakazi with dinner, it's not like she was somewhere fighting for human rights.

"I will be there. Should I bring your Era glasses?" I ask.

"Phume, you're getting so clever. Listen, go to my closet..." She gives instructions on what I should pick for her to wear tomorrow. This is the return that deserves dinner.

"I will get a chef to come and make your welcome home dinner," I say.

"Can prawns be on the menu, please? I'm in starvation land here." She's dramatic as usual.

I promise her an epic return.

When I put down the phone Mpatho is fully dressed staring at me.

"Beauty is coming home," I tell him.

"Is that why you're not dressed? It's almost 7pm."

"We are just going across the hill, not to another country." I get up and go get dressed. I want to support him, and I do support him, but I don't want the Mcinekas pushed down my throat. I grab the first dress my eyes land on. It's a wrap dress I bought before my tummy grew. It's a bit short and tight now. I'm not wearing a weave, it's too hot. I grab a comb and run it on my hair a few times and put my earrings on.

"Are you done?" He's standing at the door.

"Almost, give me a minute." I spray the perfume and check if I have everything in my purse.

Yes, I'm done.

"And your head?" he asks.

I turn back and look at the mirror. My head? What's wrong with it?

“Linjani?” I ask.

“Never mind, let’s go.”

Of course, it’s such a pleasure to go.

I follow him outside, he gives me the car keys and stays behind to close the door.

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Everyone is here except Malibongwe and his plus-one. I thought we were late but family members aren’t even complete yet. MaVilakazi looks good, she has some glow, she’s smiling. Mpatho went and hugged her. It’s my first time seeing them talking without bringing up the past. Sphakamiso is sitting right across us, we’ve exchanged glances but it’s not too awkward.

“It was Miyanda’s turn but I offered because nobody cooks ujeqe better than me,” Nombuso says.

There are two boiled chickens, it looks like we are going to have traditional dinner. I hardly cook traditional food at home, I’m sure Mpatho is salivating.

“I hope you eat Zulu chicken,” she says to me.

“It’s Zulu?” I’m definitely not eating.

“Yes, these are from the yard, MaVilakazi’s chickens.”

This is not tribalism or anything. I love everything Zulu, except the chickens. Zulu chickens eat poop and insects, I don’t like them.

“Don’t worry,” she says.

There’s a separate bowl she’s uncovering.

“I knew that you will not get off your high horse, village Miss Universe. So I made this beef for you. The meat was bought from a white man’s butchery, I’m sure the cow spoke English,” she says.

Mkhuleko bursts out and laughs.

“Thank you.” I mean, what else can I say.

Malibongwe makes his way in, just as we are about to start.

He sits, everyone is staring at him. But the wondering ends when Miyanda walks in. She sits next to him, they don’t look at each other. It looks like there’s trouble in paradise.

“Miyanda made the chakalaka, everyone,” Nombuso announces.

I think she was trying to break the ice but at this point this room is just refrigerator, that’s how cold the atmosphere is.

“Anyway, MaVilakazi said she’s not back for good. She came to check on us, which is why I organized this evening and asked you to be here Nkosiyazi,” she says.

Mpatho looks at MaVilakazi, “You will leave again?”

“Yes, I’m here against my in-laws words, they told me to come back with a cow to apologize. Imagine, a cow! But their cousin never paid anything, or even apologized with his mouth, for everything he put me through.”

This is getting awkward for Mcineka’s kids.

“So you’re here by force?” Mpatho asks.

“My children are here, they can’t tell me not to come. It’s my son who built all these houses, they never helped me even with a bag of rice after Mcineka’s death but now they want to come and rule here.” This is a different version of MaVilakazi. I’ve never met their relatives, I’m sure those are the aunts and

cousins who only come for funerals. We have them at the Mshazis too.

“I know you’re in good hands,” she says and turns her eyes to me.

Is that a smile I’m seeing? MaVilakazi didn’t like my mother, there’s no way she likes me.

I wasn’t good for Sphakamiso, she talked me down for leaving just because ‘her son cheated’.

“I feel like you’re my only sane child,” she says.

Mpatho laughs, “I know I am.”

“What about me?” -Mkhuleko.

“You’re my baby-boy, the most handsome.”

“It’s your genes, MaVee.”

I’ve never seen them so peaceful, not arguing and competing with each other. Everyone else is happy and enjoying, even Sphakamiso even though he’s quiet. But Malibongwe and Miyanda are not emotionally in the room. They didn’t greet, they just sat quietly. Miyanda is eating, Malibongwe is not.

“Where is Yoli?” I ask.

“She slept early, she caught a flu, angithi akalaleli,” Nombuso says.

“Not listening doesn’t make anyone sick,” the biggest rebel says.

“And you’re a good example of that,” Sphakamiso says.

“Shut up wena, Makhanda,” Mkhuleko.

“Thoshi,” -Sphakamiso.

Mkhuleko has a round scar in the middle of his forehead, everyone called it a torch growing up, hence the now banned

nickname Thoshi. I don't know why Sphakamiso is Makhanda because his head looks perfect to me. But the Mcinekas have started, this is what makes me thank God for not giving my mother another child. Having siblings requires a forgiving heart, long temper and a mouth that's sharp like a razor.

"Miyanda, can you give my wife your chakalaka recipe?" - Mpatho.

I don't know where this compliment is coming from.

She smiles, "Yeah, sure."

"It's really good," he says.

I'm sure she got the compliment the first time he said it.

"I will give her my recipe for ujeqe as well, for R100, free of charge." Nombuso is the opportunist, she reminds me of Beauty buying me a gift and then selling it to me.

I'm glad Mpatho dragged me here, I needed this laughter. I'm having a good time, so does he. We are a small family and we don't do a lot of things as a family. We don't tease each other and argue to make no point but to win an argument. No, we fight dirty. Attempted murders, secret Home Affairs marriages, inside heist jobs and poisoning each other. The craziest part is that it's just a three of us. Maybe money really doesn't buy happiness, we are miserable behind aluminum doors.

Miyanda leaves the table as soon as everyone is done eating. Her tummy is bigger than mine, I guess she will deliver hers first. Malibongwe looks miserable today but he's talking with his mother in a civil manner. They seem to appreciate MaVilakazi more now that she's left them.

We also need to leave soon, I want to sleep early so that I can wake up tomorrow and get everything ready for Beauty's return. I don't want us to fight anymore. If the Mcineka siblings can

make peace with their mother, why can't we do the same with Beauty?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 117

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

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What annoys me is that everyone sees what she's doing. Bonga fetched me living happily with my father and brought me here. If his mother wants to be his wife then he should marry her and leave me alone.

He comes in, I don't even know how long he's been in the kitchen. It's a few minutes after 10pm, I would've been in bed if I wasn't packing these clothes.

"Hey," he holds my waist and kisses my shoulder. "I thought you'd be asleep, Sphakamiso was giving me some updates, I'm sorry."

"It's okay. You can sleep on my side, I will remove these clothes."

"Ziyaphi izimpahla?" he asks.

“In my bag,” I say.

“I mean why are you packing?”

I’m sure that he knows why I need to have my bags packed.

“Just in case I have to leave unexpectedly,” I say.

“Come on, Miyanda!” He pulls my hand and sits down.

Why is he acting surprised? He’s seen how things have been since his mother returned.

“You’re making things difficult for me,” he says.

“How? You’re not the one being degraded and hated for no reason.”

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I guess I’m the lamb of sacrifice, in all this my feelings don’t matter.

“Okay,” I say.

“Please look at me.”

There’s no need, I already said okay. I take the rest of the clothes and shove them inside the bag. I turn off the light and get in bed. It’s late but I don’t think I will have any sleep soon.

He wraps his arm around my waist and rubs my tummy. “When was the last kick?”

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“Ngiyaxolisa,” he says, pressing his lips behind my neck. “I will try to have a conversation with her about coming here and waking us up in the morning.”

How many times has he promised me that things will be better if he talks to her? Unless God himself speaks to her directly, MaVilakazi’s feelings will never change. And I no longer want her to like me, I just need her to respect us and our space. She goes through our dirty basket looking for Bonga’s clothes. What kind of craziness is that?

My phone is ringing. I don’t even know where it’s ringing from and who’s calling me at this time. I find it under the pillow and check.

Nyambose is awake at this time?

“Baba,” I answer.

“Njabulo says I have been given free minutes by Vodacom to talk before 11pm.”

I wonder what made Njabulo not use all of them without telling him. He’s always using Nyambose’s airtime and free minutes to call his people and blame it on the network.

“Anyway, are you okay there?” he asks.

I'm not okay, I have to lie about my feelings and that alone is heavy on its own.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I say, my voice trembling a bit.

"That's good. I will go and buy airtime tomorrow and call you."

"Okay thanks, goodnight."

Odds have always been against women. Two people make a child together but only a woman has to carry the child. Then we have to leave our father's houses and go rebuild other people's houses. I'm crying in someone's home but my father is still alive and he loves me.

His hand touches my shoulder, "Miyanda?"

I wipe my tears and close my eyes. I don't want to talk to him about anything.

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PHUMELELE

MaVilakazi is back. I've never heard of such a dramatic old woman. But her children are rejoicing, including the one I live with. It seems like I'm behind, living in the past, for thinking that 'we didn't like her'. He came back from work earlier than usual and said there's dinner at the Mcinekas, we are invited and going. He knows how I feel about attending the Mcineka gatherings, even the smallest ones. I hear that Miyanda is there, that's their rightful daughter-in-law, I don't see the reason why I should be there. But I know how hard it takes for him to understand when I'm not interested in things he's interested in.

My phone rings. I'm still finishing the Netflix episode I was watching, he's in the bedroom dressing up. I check the caller, it's Beauty.

"Hello gogo," I answer.

"Your grandmother was never fresh like me. These fools say they will release me tomorrow, can you come pick me up?"

Finally, thank God!

"It's called discharging, you weren't in jail," I say, laughing.

I wish they'd discharged her today, I would've gotten a valid excuse not to attend the Mcineka dinner. I don't even know whose idea it was to welcome MaVilakazi with dinner, it's not like she was somewhere fighting for human rights.

"I will be there. Should I bring your Era glasses?" I ask.

"Phume, you're getting so clever. Listen, go to my closet..." She gives instructions on what I should pick for her to wear tomorrow. This is the return that deserves dinner.

"I will get a chef to come and make your welcome home dinner," I say.

"Can prawns be on the menu, please? I'm in starvation land here." She's dramatic as usual.

I promise her an epic return.

When I put down the phone Mpatho is fully dressed staring at me.

"Beauty is coming home," I tell him.

"Is that why you're not dressed? It's almost 7pm."

"We are just going across the hill, not to another country." I get up and go get dressed. I want to support him, and I do support him, but I don't want the Mcinekas pushed down my throat. I grab the first dress my eyes land on. It's a wrap dress I bought

before my tummy grew. It's a bit short and tight now. I'm not wearing a weave, it's too hot. I grab a comb and run it on my hair a few times and put my earrings on.

"Are you done?" He's standing at the door.

"Almost, give me a minute." I spray the perfume and check if I have everything in my purse.

Yes, I'm done.

"And your head?" he asks.

I turn back and look at the mirror. My head? What's wrong with it?

"Linjani?" I ask.

"Never mind, let's go."

Of course, it's such a pleasure to go.

I follow him outside, he gives me the car keys and stays behind to close the door.

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Everyone is here except Malibongwe and his plus-one. I thought we were late but family members aren't even complete yet. MaVilakazi looks good, she has some glow, she's smiling. Mpatho went and hugged her. It's my first time seeing them talking without bringing up the past. Sphakamiso is sitting right across us, we've exchanged glances but it's not too awkward.

"It was Miyanda's turn but I offered because nobody cooks ujeqe better than me," Nombuso says.

There are two boiled chickens, it looks like we are going to have traditional dinner. I hardly cook traditional food at home, I'm sure Mpatho is salivating.

“I hope you eat Zulu chicken,” she says to me.

“It’s Zulu?” I’m definitely not eating.

“Yes, these are from the yard, MaVilakazi’s chickens.”

This is not tribalism or anything. I love everything Zulu, except the chickens. Zulu chickens eat poop and insects, I don’t like them.

“Don’t worry,” she says.

There’s a separate bowl she’s uncovering.

“I knew that you will not get off your high horse, village Miss Universe. So I made this beef for you. The meat was bought from a white man’s butchery, I’m sure the cow spoke English,” she says.

Mkhuleko bursts out and laughs.

“Thank you.” I mean, what else can I say.

Malibongwe makes his way in, just as we are about to start.

He sits, everyone is staring at him. But the wondering ends when Miyanda walks in. She sits next to him, they don’t look at each other. It looks like there’s trouble in paradise.

“Miyanda made the chakalaka, everyone,” Nombuso announces.

I think she was trying to break the ice but at this point this room is just refrigerator, that’s how cold the atmosphere is.

“Anyway, MaVilakazi said she’s not back for good. She came to check on us, which is why I organized this evening and asked you to be here Nkosiyazi,” she says.

Mpatho looks at MaVilakazi, “You will leave again?”

“Yes, I’m here against my in-laws words, they told me to come back with a cow to apologize. Imagine, a cow! But their cousin

never paid anything, or even apologized with his mouth, for everything he put me through.”

This is getting awkward for Mcineka’s kids.

“So you’re here by force?” Mpatho asks.

“My children are here, they can’t tell me not to come. It’s my son who built all these houses, they never helped me even with a bag of rice after Mcineka’s death but now they want to come and rule here.” This is a different version of MaVilakazi. I’ve never met their relatives, I’m sure those are the aunts and cousins who only come for funerals. We have them at the Mshazis too.

“I know you’re in good hands,” she says and turns her eyes to me.

Is that a smile I’m seeing? MaVilakazi didn’t like my mother, there’s no way she likes me.

I wasn’t good for Sphakamiso, she talked me down for leaving just because ‘her son cheated’.

“I feel like you’re my only sane child,” she says.

Mpatho laughs, “I know I am.”

“What about me?” -Mkhuleko.

“You’re my baby-boy, the most handsome.”

“It’s your genes, MaVee.”

I’ve never seen them so peaceful, not arguing and competing with each other. Everyone else is happy and enjoying, even Sphakamiso even though he’s quiet. But Malibongwe and Miyanda are not emotionally in the room. They didn’t greet, they just sat quietly. Miyanda is eating, Malibongwe is not.

“Where is Yoli?” I ask.

“She slept early, she caught a flu, angithi akalaleli,” Nombuso says.

“Not listening doesn’t make anyone sick,” the biggest rebel says.

“And you’re a good example of that,” Sphakamiso says.

“Shut up wena, Makhanda,” Mkhuleko.

“Thoshi,” -Sphakamiso.

Mkhuleko has a round scar in the middle of his forehead, everyone called it a torch growing up, hence the now banned nickname Thoshi. I don’t know why Sphakamiso is Makhanda because his head looks perfect to me. But the Mcinekas have started, this is what makes me thank God for not giving my mother another child. Having siblings requires a forgiving heart, long temper and a mouth that’s sharp like a razor.

“Miyanda, can you give my wife your chakalaka recipe?” - Mpatho.

I don’t know where this compliment is coming from.

She smiles, “Yeah, sure.”

“It’s really good,” he says.

I’m sure she got the compliment the first time he said it.

“I will give her my recipe for ujeqe as well, for R100, free of charge.” Nombuso is the opportunist, she reminds me of Beauty buying me a gift and then selling it to me.

I’m glad Mpatho dragged me here, I needed this laughter. I’m having a good time, so does he. We are a small family and we don’t do a lot of things as a family. We don’t tease each other and argue to make no point but to win an argument. No, we fight dirty. Attempted murders, secret Home Affairs marriages, inside heist jobs and poisoning each other. The craziest part is

that it's just a three of us. Maybe money really doesn't buy happiness, we are miserable behind aluminum doors.

Miyanda leaves the table as soon as everyone is done eating. Her tummy is bigger than mine, I guess she will deliver hers first. Malibongwe looks miserable today but he's talking with his mother in a civil manner. They seem to appreciate MaVilakazi more now that she's left them.

We also need to leave soon, I want to sleep early so that I can wake up tomorrow and get everything ready for Beauty's return. I don't want us to fight anymore. If the Mcineka siblings can make peace with their mother, why can't we do the same with Beauty?

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 118

SPHAKAMISO

He's done a good job. Malibongwe came to check the shop early this morning and he couldn't be more proud of him. He's grateful to Miyanda for bringing him back home because this was always his passion, he was the only one who got the opportunity to go to college and get a piece of qualification. His mother used to say he's the brightest, even though he wasn't that good at Maths, he aced Physics and Geography. He loves how much freedom Malibongwe gave him, he made this shop his baby. And just like Aphelele, he loves this baby. They're ready for business, in six days they will be running.

He can stay at home and wait for next week but waking up in the morning and coming here is now in his blood. But today he will go home early because his mother is there. It's been refreshing having her back home, she's taking extra care of

them. It has made Miyanda uncomfortable, which they all understand because her return came soon after Miyanda arrived. There's nothing they're really fighting about because it's not even Malibongwe. Maybe MaVilakazi feels a bit threatened by Miyanda's presence because she's the first of her kind to ever step in the Mcineka premises. There's something about her that will change the whole generation once she gets hold of the reigns. And MaVilakazi knows it, so she won't let her just come and take her children and change them.

He lifts his head from the laptop, there are two ladies and a small boy making their way to the door. They came from the Yaris parked at the side of the road. He has no meeting with anyone and everyone around knows that they're opening next week.

He walks out to them.

"Hello ladies, can I help you?"

The older one looks at the other, the other one is smiling at him, she looks so familiar.

"I know you," she says, still smiling.

He looks at her, trying to remember where he knows her from. It's definitely the rich kid that was at Aunt Teekay's house complaining about her father who had given her a small car. He smiles, thinking how hard he prayed to never see her again that day but she's here today.

"Oh gosh, no!" says the older one, seemingly annoyed. "Our car just broke down. We were wondering if you can help us or at least know someone who can," she says, impatiently.

"Ummm, no. We are not open yet, but I can check it out." He's looking at the girl from Aunt Teekay's house, whose name he sadly can't remember.

“How do you two know each other?” the older one asks. She must be the sister, the boy standing next to her studying his face must be her son.

“He is....” the girl from Aunt Teekay’s house says but doesn’t finish because the young boy just interjected.

“Aphe’s father, my uncle,” he says.

Sphakamiso's eyes widen. Oh, Aphe is now famous.

“Small world. You have a beautiful son,” the boy’s mother says. They know Aphelele, they must be related to Aunt Teekay.

“Thank you,” he says.

“Aunty!” the boy pulls his mother’s dress.

Oh no, he’s calling her aunty.

“He’s my uncle,” he says to his aunt.

The aunt looks confused, so does Sphakamiso. But it could be that children call all men that aren’t their fathers their uncles

“Okay Nzu, I get it. But right now we are stuck in another town and you have to be home three hours before your bedtime,” the aunt says.

Now he understands why she looks so frustrated. Their car broke down and the boy has to be home.

But the boy continues punching her ass, demanding her attention. He doesn’t look like an easy child, judging by those punches he’s throwing at his aunt.

“Uncle Sphakamiso, remember?” He’s desperate for his aunt to know.

“Yes, I know,” the aunt says and turns her eyes to Sphakamiso. He needs to get his working gloves and go check their car.

“Sphakamiso, you...” the aunt calls his name to say something but stops.

Then she freezes. Her mouth drops open.

What is this? Does she know him from a crime scene?

“Wait, what’s your surname?” she asks.

Sphakamiso pulls his eyebrows. This lady seems to be frightened by something.

“Mcineka, kind of,” he says uncomfortably. Saying his surname is no longer comfortable because he knows that his identity is a lie.

“Mcineka? Vilakazi? Mhlongo? Which one?” the lady asks.

Those surnames relate to him, all of them. But for a stranger to mention the Mhlongo one startles him. He swipes his hand over his face, now he’s sweating.

“Who are you? And how do you know me?” he asks.

“He’s been looking for you,” she points at the child.

This is getting way more complicated. This child is not more than 10 years old.

His eyes widen. “The child?”

God let not this be another Aphelele situation, one child is enough for now.

“Your sister’s child, he’s got a special bond with his late grandfather,” the lady says.

His sister’s child? Now his mouth turns dry.

Does Nombuso have another child? This makes no sense.

“I’m Salo Mhlongo,” the lady extends her hand.

Mhlongo! His heart starts beating fast.

It's what the man said, right now he's standing in front of a Mhlongo and she knows him. She's saying he's been looked for, there's an ancestor that knows him.

"Sphakamiso M...Mhlongo." He shakes her hand.

Her hand is warm, he's touching his own blood.

"I've been waiting," he says.

She smiles like she knows what he means.

She exhales heavily, "This was meant to be, I'm glad you're still driving a Yaris Nokwanda."

"Gosh please!" the dramatic girl is Nokwanda, now he remembers. "Is he Nondu's brother?"

Salo nods, "Yes, my brother too."

Nondu? Wasn't she at Aunt Teekay's house too?

"The lady with my nose?" he asks.

"It's Babomdala's nose. I can't believe this is you. Are you older than me? Gosh, you're so tall."

"I'm 28 this year," he says.

"I'm 27, but you will call me 'sisi', everyone does."

Wait, where is the boy?

Sphakamiso looks around, there he is playing.

"He's put us through hell looking for you," Salo says.

He frowns, "Him?"

"Nzuzo? Urgh, you don't want to know. I hope he will be normal now that he's found you."

They've been on their feet this whole time. He apologizes and asks that they come inside the shop and get something to

drink. Salo is the chatty type, she's ready with the Mhlongo family history. But he's got to check their car first, then they will exchange numbers and take it from there.

Nzuzo follows him to the car. He no longer cares about him being his lost uncle. All he wants him to know is that him and Aphelele know how to fix broken wire cars.

"Babaphe," he says.

Sphakamiso smiles, this sounds short and sweet.

"Yes," he says.

"When are you going to bring Aphe his mother?"

Hard questions!

Aphelele probably told him that he's never met his mother. He didn't think this will be in question so soon. Things are complicated, not even Mpatho with his money and connections can't help.

"Soon," he says.

"Okay, take Enhle with you when you come and go leave her at the hospital."

Who is Enhle now? And why does she belong to the hospital?

"Yay, the car is moving!" Nzuzo throws his hands up happily.

He didn't do anything, everything looks fine with this car. Maybe Nokwanda just forgot how to drive.

He switches the engine off and closes the door.

"Is it okay?"

He turns his head, it's Nokwanda.

"Yes, everything is okay here," he says.

“I’m sure this old bitch just wanted to be touched by a man. You look better by the way. Were you hungry or sick that day?” she asks.

“Both,” he says with a chuckle.

This is why he prayed not to meet her again.

“I will take your number, just in case my bitch needs to be fixed.” She’s one of a kind. She gives him her phone to save his number. He saves it as Makhenikha because that’s probably what she will remember him as.

She looks at the number. “Sphakamiso M will do.”

It’s a business contact exchange, nothing more. He looks at her, just as she lifts hers to him. Damn, she’s cute but girls aren’t something on his mind right now, there’s a lot happening.

“I will wait for your call, Nokwanda. Let me go and chat with...”

“Your sister,” she says, smiling.

He nods.

Fuck this girl is tempting him.

He turns and walks away with Nzuzo behind him.

“Salo,” he says, walking in to her speaking on the phone.

She turns to him and says goodbye to the person.

“I was talking to my father, telling him about you. But you know jail and their rules, talking to him for long is not easy,” she says.

“Is he Vincent’s brother?”

“Yep, he killed my mother’s boyfriend after my mother’s funeral and got arrested.”

Quite a hectic family, aren’t they?

“So, why are you a Mcineka?” she asks.

“It’s my mother’s husband’s surname,” he says.

“The one who abused you?” she asks.

He frowns. How is this information available to her?

She sees his confusion and points at Nzuzo with her head.

He’s pulling things from the shelves and throwing them on the floor.

“He’s complicated, isn’t he?”

Salo shakes her head, “Very complicated.”

“Is his grandmother still alive?” he asks.

“Yes,” she says and drops her eyes. “But she doesn’t know about you. The story was that your mother had an affair with Babomdala but after you were born she told him that you were husband’s child.”

“That’s not my mother’s version,” he says.

“They will have to meet and talk, woman to woman. Then you can come home and meet everyone,” she says.

“I hope my mother will agree. But I’m happy to meet you and Nzuzo. I guess meeting Aunt Teekay was meant to happen. Aphelele was led home before me.”

“I hope you will be home soon too.” She gets up and hugs him. “Nondu will be so happy!”

He smiles, hopefully when he meets them they will be happy. Him and Salo exchange numbers before they leave. He’s got to go home and break the news.

His people have looked for him and found him.

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MaVilakazi listened, she knew that he wasn't going to let it go. Now he wants to go and meet the wife. He's staring at her, waiting for an answer.

"Okay," she says.

Sphakamiso stands up. "You will go?"

"Yes, Sphakamiso, I will go. But after you've opened your shop, I will start there and then return home," she says.

"Ngiyabonga Ma." It's a relief, he has to text Nondu and tell her. Salo gave her his number, she called and they spoke for half an hour. Her and Salo will tell their mother about him.

"I have to tell Aunt Teekay too," he says, it almost slip out of his head. Aunt Teekay is like his second mother, he should've told her right away.

"You're not going to leave us, right?" Nombuso asks.

"I thought that's what you wanted, everyone to leave," he says, laughing.

"We only became a good family after Miyanda. I want it to last. You can go to those people and khi-khi-khi with them but your real family us. You will never find a sister like me."

MaVilakazi crosses her legs and slurps her cup of tea.

"One of you is enough, Nombuso," Sphakamiso says. He takes out a small packet of soft mints and takes two, then he passes the packet to Nombuso.

She takes one and pushes the packet inside her bra.

"Hawu thina, what about us?" Mkhuleko asks.

She doesn't respond, she gets up and leaves.

Malibongwe walks in to Mkhuleko's rantings.

"What happened?" he asks.

“Is it not Nombuso.....”

Okay, this will take the whole day.

He interrupts; “What must I cook?”

MaVilakazi lifts her face, her eyes squinted.

“Meat,” Mkhuleko says.

“Cabbage, we ate meat yesterday,” Sphakamiso says.

“You came from home smelling KFC but now you want us to eat cabbage. We will vote, let me go and ask others.” He stands up and goes outside.

He bumps into Ruby, Ruby votes for meat, Yoli says the same. Then he hears Miyanda’s voice saying meat before he even goes to the rondavel.

“Back with the results, everyone wants meat except you,” he says.

Malibongwe turns to the kitchen to start with the pots.

“Bonga,” MaVilakazi calls.

She gets up and follows him. Only his father and Miyanda shortens his name like this.

“I will cook, go and relax with your siblings,” she says.

“Thank you,” he says and steps aside, making a way for her to the cupboards.

He wants to say something but he doesn’t know where to start.

“Ma,” he clears his throat.

“Mmmm.” She looks at him.

But before he says anything Nombuso walks in.

“Ma, look at these pictures. Can you believe I was taller than Malibongwe when we were growing up?” She’s coming with a photo album, the long forgotten one with their old pictures.

“Now you’re short, everything goes above your head,”
MaVilakazi.

“So true!” Mkhuleko yells from the living room.

“When it rains she’s always the last one to know,” Sphakamiso adds.

Nombuso is annoyed because she’s not even short. Obviously they’re taller than her because of corruption. Laughter fills the room.

MaVilakazi looks at Malibongwe, “Bonga, you were saying?”

“I wanted to say thank you for taking my turn,” he says.

“You’re my prince,” she says and changes it before others hear her. “You’re one of my four princes.”

He fakes a smile. He promised Miyanda that he was going to talk to her but he’s failing because everyone looks so happy.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 119

PHUMELELE

Beauty came home, I’m happy. Genuinely happy. I don’t want to fight her no more. We will keep our skeletons in the closet, confessing everything to her will take us back to the past. We’ve gained her trust, I don’t think she’s in speaking terms with her family, which is good for us. Her family was the main reason she wanted to destroy us.

I talked to Mpatho, we are on the same page. But man, he's stubborn. I asked him to buy a goat so that we exchange apologies the traditional way and let the ancestors know that we are reuniting. He said he's got no money. I have to get a goat myself because this was my idea, then we will call his uncle to come and do the ritual.

I'm going to the boutique to take my mind off my stubborn husband and Mshazi matters. I haven't been there in weeks, I only see it in pictures. Maybe it's the pregnancy and the fact that Mpatho made my dream his, I'm just not as passionate as I was when this boutique was just an idea.

"You look like a whale. Where are you going?" Beauty is still Beauty.

I know I'm not that big, in fact I'm one of the few good-looking, sexy pregnant women of the season.

"I'm going to check out the boutique," I say.

"It's still not running today? Maybe you were meant to be a housewife, nothing more."

Just like her. What does she do except shopping and telling her workers to sell cars?

"Mpatho got involved, I lost interest," I say.

"Men love controlling women, especially the Mshazi ones. But don't let him kill your vibe, let him invest in you and put all that money in your safe place," she says.

"Safe place?" I ask.

"By safe I mean secret."

She clearly doesn't know Mpatho that well, nothing can be kept a secret from him.

"I will try to revive my spirit, let me go so that I will come back before Mpatho." I still don't trust Mpatho, I don't think he's into

this peace thing with his whole heart. I don't want to come back to a dead body.

"When you come back you will give me the Shabalala scoop. Did that man really cheat on his wife? The whole village pastor!"

"Ah Beauty, now you want neighbors to hate us." Shabalala is a good neighbor to us, I don't want to gossip about his personal affairs. "The girl was mentored by his wife in the choir," I'm only sharing this piece of information and leaving.

"I heard that, she's 20," she says.

"Yep, they say Shabalala devirginized her."

"I'm glad your grandfather died, I'm a widow now, I don't have to worry about 20 year old husband-snatchers. These girls will show you, married women, what made the cat climb on a tree." She's laughing.

I'm not worried, I know Mpatho is not Shabalala and he's not a pastor. And I'm just not the one to mess with. In this life I only fear prostitutes.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I'm not happy here. Malibongwe knows that and he knows what is the reason behind it all

But he'd rather leave me his credit card and ask me to go shopping instead of confronting the situation. His mother hasn't stopped, he didn't talk to her like he promised.

I wasn't planning on going shopping, I didn't want his money, I wanted to be protected by him. But as the day went up I realized how miserable I am here and decided to call Sphakamiso to come and fetch me. I want clothes, I'm going to town to shop and treat myself with pizza before coming back to hell.

I'm closer to Sphakamiso than I am to others. But he's been avoiding me lately. I don't expect anything from him. He deserves to be happy to have his mother home. And I heard that he met the Mhlongos, he can't be miserable because of me.

"Am I ever going to see Aphelele?" I ask.

He chuckles, "Aw, yes sisi. He will visit soon."

"I can't wait," I say.

I just wanted to break the ice.

This Tazz now runs smoothly, it doesn't make the noises it made when Malibongwe was driving it. Maybe Sphakamiso takes better care of cars, and human beings than his brother.

"Eish, sisi, can I pass by the shop? I need to check something," he asks after glancing at his phone.

"No problem, I can continue to town by feet," I say. Unified is just outside town, not even five minutes away, I will stretch my legs.

My phone beeps as we park outside Unified.

It's his brother with his big, pink ears. He's asking if I'm already in town. It's none of his business, I don't want him to come and follow me like we are a happy couple.

I respond: I HATE YOU.

I told him in the morning before he left. It's not true but I want this to sink in his big head. This man told me to sacrifice myself to keep peace between him and Nyambose, and to make MaVilakazi stay. So I have to be woken up every morning by his mother's noise and watch her going through our wardrobe looking for his clothes. Sometimes she gets in for no reason and sings while I'm trying to take a nap. I noticed that she's started calling him the same way I call him. It's the name she gave him and she will shorten it any way she wants, I know that's her reason.

Sphakamiso wants me to wait but I insist on taking a walk to town.

I did the right thing, had I been in the car I wouldn't have seen this new clothing boutique. I make my way inside, it doesn't look like anyone is here. They don't have any clothes inside except a few dresses at the front, by the counter. So they're not open, I guess.

"Hello," someone says.

I don't turn my head, I'm looking at the dresses, I think they're just samples. But I don't care, there's an air-con here, I don't want to leave.

"Those are our samples, we are not selling yet," the person says.

I take a deep breath, this person just doesn't know how not to bother people when it's hot.

"I'm looking, not stealing," I say turning to the person.

Now it makes sense, out of all people I could've seen today in this miserable state it has to be her.

“Lord, it’s you!” she’s just as disappointed as I am to see her.
“Follow our social media pages, we will announce when we are opening.”

I’m not going to follow any pages. Don’t they have chairs here?

“I’m just here for the air-con,” I say.

“The air-con won’t remove the headwrap that’s making you hot. Water or cold-drink?”

How kind!

“Water, please,” I say.

She tells me to sit behind the counter, there’s a chair.

Then she struts away in her stilettos and comes back with water. Pregnancy or no pregnancy, this girl will always keep her nails long and rock her long inches of hair. I don’t think I’ve seen her in the same wig, even though we’ve only met a few times.

“I didn’t know you’re opening a store,” I say. But it’s not like I was keeping up with the Mshazis, there’s no time to know anything when you’re miserable like me.

“I’m a slayqueen that dreams big and chase her dreams,” she says.

I guess she didn’t get over that. I drink water and look around. She’s doing well, this is bigger than Singhs shop, I’m sure they’re going to spend and make millions here.

“You look tired,” she says.

“I am,” I say.

“Then remove this thing.” She grabs off my headwrap. I don’t think she knows what it symbolizes and why I wear it. She was raised differently.

I don’t say anything, the headwrap is the least of my worries.

“I want to leave,” I tell her. I don’t think we’ve ever interacted for so long. It’s been over two minutes, I’m sitting in her space drinking water, she’s staring at me with her perfect face.

“Then go,” she says.

Like it’s that easy. By the way I’m not talking about leaving here, I will relax a bit.

“I don’t think I was made for the marriage life. I’m close to a mental breakdown and Bonga just doesn’t care, as long as his family is happy and my father thinks they’re good people.”

“Oh, that type of leaving. Is it his mother or Nombuso?” she asks.

I laugh at her guess, at least she knows them.

“Nombuso is weird, I don’t mind her. But MaVilakazi, just thank God that your husband is not a Mcineka, you’re never going to spend a day with her and she likes you. I have seen the devil with my own eyes.” This is not even an exaggeration, I will narrate all the events to her and she will have an idea of what I’ve been going through.

But I was wrong, the slaying queen in her just doesn’t see it the way I do.

“Has she ever invited his ex to his bedroom?” she asks.

“No, she hasn’t gone that far yet,” I say.

“Wanted to kill him? Stalked him and brought all the information to you so that you leave him? Constantly told you that you’re stupid? Does he say he doesn’t have money to buy a goat?”

My answer is no to all of them.

She laughs, “Then you haven’t seen the devil Miyanda. MaVilakazi doesn’t want you dead, she just wants her son. But I understand, you’re very stubborn.”

She doesn't know me to call me stubborn.

"I'm not stubborn," I say, defensively.

"If you want her to leave you alone give her son to her. Let her have him, don't fight and don't be stubborn. She will let go once she sees that you're relaxed and not going anywhere."

"But I want to go somewhere, Phume. I want to go home, I'm not an orphan, my family loves and appreciates me," I say.

"And you're choosing the Mcinekas over them. Let's call the marriage expert." She scrolls down her phone. Who is the marriage expert?

"Phume, I don't want strangers in my business."

"Don't worry, it's my aunt, she was married for 25 years to a serial cheater whose family didn't like the air she was breathing," she says.

It doesn't sound like someone I'd take a marriage advice from.

The woman answers, Phume is totally different from what I thought.

"Aunt Brandi, what would you say to a young girl who's hated by her mother-in-law. Stay and continue with the man or leave and find a better family?" she asks.

"Better family where? You, young people, think marriage is pap & vleis. Umakoti uyazotha emzini, you stay humble and respect everyone and everything, even your mother-in-law's chickens. Love them until they learn to reciprocate your love. The wife's family hardly ever loves the husband, especially her brothers. Do you know that all my cousins called Mzimela? Imbuzi yasemaweni even after he paid everything at home. But Mzimela never left me."

"But he cheated, aunty." She has no filter, gosh.

"Yes, and he always came back home to me."

Not this line bakithi!

Phume says goodbye and drops the call. I was waiting for the right time to laugh. Why the hell was that woman shouting? Indeed she's a marriage expert in her own department.

"Do women really put up with such?" I'm in disbelief. With my parents I witnessed true love, a good marriage that only ended because of death.

"Yes, the new generation is stupid and too loose," she says, laughing. "But seriously, give MaVilakazi her son. Operation Give-MaVilakazi-What-She-Wants."

Lord be with me, I don't know what she's up to.

Why did I come here?

She goes to the clothing rack that has their samples and takes one big dress.

"This can fit mother-in-law," she says, lifting the dress up.

It can definitely fit her. But, why are we getting her a dress, a beautiful one for that matter?

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MALIBONGWE

He already knows what to expect when she gets home. Maybe it was meant to be, that for his siblings to be happy with their mother his relationship will have to be at stake. She tells him that she hates him every morning before he leaves, then sends him texts to remind him, just in case he forgets. It's anger combined with pregnancy hormones, nevertheless his heart breaks everytime she says it.

Sphakamiso just arrived, she's with him. She's not interested in anything, even the gizzards from her favorite street vendor. But he brings them anyway, extra hot as she likes them.

He hears footsteps and holds his breath.

Sunglasses? Hat?

Miyanda wraps her head with a scarf, what is this? New look, new troubles?

"Hey babe," he stands and hugs her.

She kisses his cheek, "Mcineka, how was your day?"

"Ummm, good," he says, trying to read her face. Hopefully there's no poison in these shopping bags.

"What time is it?" she asks.

"3pm, I came home early because you didn't want me to see you during your shopping," he says.

"Okay, good." She puts all the bags on the bed.

Then she takes the hat off and wraps the scarf coming from her bag.

"I got your mother a dress and booked you guys a table at Milrose Diners. And I got you movie tickets," she says.

Something is not right.

"You did what?" He's confused.

"I organized you guys a date. Has she ever been on a date?"

What does she mean? His mother was a girlfriend in the 80s, his father was a traditional man who took out cows and paid for her instead of paying for a plate of ribs.

"I hid flowers because if she sees that I bought them she will go and throw them behind the hill." She opens the wardrobe and

takes out his shirt. This is serious, she wants him to take his mother out on a date.

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MaVilakazi was told to get ready, she was sewing her sons many torn shirts and trousers. Malibongwe didn't inform her that they will be going somewhere on time. He walks in as she contemplates between two aprons.

"Here, wear this, we are going somewhere nice." He gives her a dress.

She takes it with a frown on her face. This is a beautiful dress and her son guessed her size correctly.

"Thank you, my boy. I will wear this once and put it in my suitcase." All her beautiful clothes stay locked in the suitcase for big days that come and go without her wearing them.

It's Mkhuleko's turn to cook, this is a good opportunity not to eat at home.

They walk out, MaVilakazi looks elegant in her new dress. They have to bribe Yoli to stay behind and not cry.

Once she sits inside the car Malibongwe gives her the bouquet of flowers.

"This is for you, my queen," he says.

She holds the flowers and smells them. This is the first time she's ever received flowers from anyone. Malibongwe watches as she fights back tears.

"Ma please promise me you're not going to cry. This is a date, you're supposed to be happy, not teary," he says.

She's confused. "A date?"

“Yes, angithi sons are their mothers’ last true love. It’s our date today. Dinner, ice-cream stop and movies. And you won’t return home to these brats of yours, uzolala emashidini amhlophe, five-star hotel,” he says.

“Malibongwe!” She’s crying.

“Ma, you promised not to cry.”

“I didn’t promise.” She doesn’t stop, now he has to roll a tissue and give her.

Mothers are dramatic, tears are always on standby.

He smiles, shaking his head. It’s her first date ever, he should’ve done this a long time ago.

THE LEGACY WIFE

CHAPTER 120

Malibongwe checked her out of the hotel and took her to Spur for breakfast. The aim was to give her soft life for a day, away from the Mcineka chaotic children. But her motherly instincts kicked in, she started wrapping food for her youngest two.

“Ma, this is your personal shopping, yours alone,” Malibongwe says. He’s trying to tell her not to buy clothes for her other children instead of buying for herself.

“We can buy clothes outside, koMaShezi. They order beautiful, cheap clothes from Durban,” she says. She’s starting to worry about how much he’s spent on her.

“No, we are buying real clothes, not second-hand, even though you were a second-hand mom when you gave birth to me,” he teases.

She laughs, “I was in my early-twenties, still beautiful.”

“Yes, but you already had two other kids. And you’re still beautiful today,” he says.

“Only if all of them turned out like you,” she says.

“I know I’m your favorite.” He’s not, Mkhuleko is, but for today only he will hold the reigns.

They stop at the mall and start at Edgars. She will probably not wear anything he’s going to buy her because every beautiful cloth belongs in her suitcase, but he’s happy to spoil his mother. Buying grocery and paying household bills have been his only way of showing love to his mother. But this is epic, he should make time with others and just take the whole family out on a holiday.

“Did you sleep at home?” she asks.

“No, I was in the house fixing a few things. You should come and see my house before you leave,” he says.

“You’re going to keep the house empty?” -MaVilakazi.

“Sphakamiso will move in once Unified opens. It’s closer to town and he will work better away home, from our chaos,” he says.

“Work better?” MaVilakazi raises her eyebrows.

“Oh, he wants to get a degree, he’s applying this year for long-distance learning, he will juggle it with Unified,” he says.

“That’s nice, he’s always been the only one interested in education. What is your little brother’s plans?” she asks.

“I don’t know, maybe get a second dog.”

She sighs.

They have a few clothes in the basket.

“Your twin, how did she manage to sleep alone?”

Malibongwe frowns, then he chuckles.

“She slept,” he says.

“Without crying?”

“Ma!” he laughs.

“You should buy her those gizzards of hers to apologize. But stop giving her hot food and chillies to eat with. Her temper is too short for a crying baby.”

“Chillies make babies cry?” he asks, eyes widen.

“I was this close to giving your sister up for adoption.”

Why didn't she do it? He's laughing.

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SPHAKAMISO

He's closing and going home. There's nothing much he does, he just comes here to work on his researches and Unified budgets. It's better than sitting at home arguing with everyone. He's looking forward to the day his mother goes to Mrs Mhlongo, which will open a way for him to go 'home'.

“Hello,” the voice says at the entrance.

He knows this full voice, he lifts his eyes to her.

“Don't tell me your car broke down again?”

She walks in, with her arms folded, looking around. What happened to the short-hair? She's back on her long braids.

“This time it's me who broke down,” she says.

He raises his eyebrows. “You broke down what way?”

She laughs, her eyes squint as she does. She's cute, that he can't look away from.

"My heart broken, it was broken by another idiot. Do you fix hearts?"

He's never had a girl walk up to him with this kind of attitude. It's funny and frightening at the same time.

"I wish I did, but my skills ends on vehicles," he says.

"That's sad." He stands against the wall and releases a sigh. Maybe she really got her heart broken.

"I'm sorry," he says.

"Me too," she says.

Such a strange girl!

"I'm Zulu, your name doesn't matter. What is your surname?" She's always with the Mhlongos, it could be that they're related.

"Zungu," she says.

"Nyamakayishi! How are you related to the Mhlongos?"

"I'm not," she says.

"Okay, you're just a friend. What really brings you to this place again?"

"I was fetching the cake, there's a ceremony at home, tombstone things. Do you know where I can get a drink around here?"

"A drink?" He raises his eyebrow.

"Soft drink. Not alcohol, Nkatha would probably kick me out and rent me a one-room in a township and make me drive the Yaris again. Can you believe that was my first car? It wasn't even new, it was a second-hand, and he expects me to drive it in my 20s."

“Mmmmm!” he nods silently.

“A drink?” she asks.

“Oh, that. Wait for me to close here, I will go with you.”

He closes the shop and leaves with her. They could just walk to the tuck-shop across the road but she probably wants a soft-drink that comes out of the soda dispenser with ice-cubes.

“My ride or yours?” he asks.

This should probably come with notice.

“It’s a Tazz,” he says.

“Ohhhh!” She frowns, she looks confused.

“You know what, I have asthma. My car is this way...” She turns to another direction.

He laughs, this is the reaction he expected.

“I’m a mechanic, it doesn’t smoke and it moves smoothly,” he says.

“Okay, I trust you.” She takes out her sunglasses and wears them.

Probably hiding from the people she knows.

He wants to know more about the Mhlongos since she’s close to them.

As they sit to have a drink he starts asking questions but she likes her own topics.

“I want flare nails, lengthy like Cardi B’s,” she says.

“Is that your friend?” It probably is.

She raises her eyebrows, her lip curled.

“Forget it. What do you do?” He changes the subject, knowing who that person won’t help him.

“I study and live life,” she says.

“Nice,” he says with a low chuckle.

“I can’t believe you remembered me.”

“I didn’t, not right away,” he says.

Too truthful!

“Maybe I should give you a reason to remember me.”

This girl is sent to tempt him.

“Nokwanda, don’t play with fire,” he says.

“Don’t worry, my mother was an assistant chief fire officer and my father is a doctor. Shall we toast to that?”

Toast to what exactly?

But she’s not the type that wait for an answer, her asking a question is just a formality.

She clicks her can on his.

“To fire!”

Really???

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PHUMELELE

I did it, all on my own. We are having inhlambuluko, which says a lot about our personalities. It’s just a three of us, we haven’t lived together for more than a year but we’ve almost killed each other and said the most hurtful things to one another. But Beauty started it and I happened to end it.

We have to sit at the gate as the sun sets down and talk about everything and shake hands.

“You two started all this,” she says.

We can't start off with lies. Inhlambuluko doesn't work that way.

“By doing what Beauty?” I ask.

“Disrespecting me and saying I killed my husband.”

Who said that?

Okay, we did, but is she the first wife to be suspected of killing her husband?

“You didn't mourn him,” Mpatho says.

“You mean I didn't wear black clothes and sobbed for a year. Did you mourn your father?”

“Yes, I mourned him since the day Phume's mother married him,” he says.

My mother will always catch stray bullets, I have to live with it.

“Here is what I don't understand Beauty,” he sits leaning forward. “All of you had something against me. All women in this family. I was and I'm still the only biological child in this family. Is that maybe the reason behind it?”

“Hah! Why must I speak on behalf of MaShandu and MaZikalala?”

“Explain your part then,” he says.

She keeps quiet. I thought it's only my mother's and MaZikalala's side she can't explain. As soon as my mother died and that will was read, she started fighting him.

“Was it about the money?” Mpatho asks.

“Partly. I knew that you'd fight me over your grandfather's estate.”

“But he wrote a will too, I haven’t taken anything that was left for you.”

“Can I sell this house?”

Now she’s tripping.

“No, this is our home,” Mpatho says.

She laughs, “See, this is exactly what I’m talking about.”

“Look Beauty, I don’t disrespect you. If I’ve ever done so then I’m sorry. You’re the owner of the house, we will follow your orders and respect your rules. But please bear in mind that we are adults, not kids. And we love each other, whether you support our marriage or not. I just want to move on to greater things, we are the most influential family in this village, we should be ashamed of ourselves.”

“I agree with my husband,” I say.

Beauty rolls her eyes, I knew she would.

“Okay, I want peace as well, no more trying to kill me.” She looks at me.

Hhayi-bo, what is she talking about? I didn’t try to...phewww.

“I’m sorry, I regret it,” I say.

“You’re cruel, just like me and him.”

Nope, hold your horses madam!

“Me? Like you two? My pastor would be so disappointed,” I say.

Mpatho laughs, “What pastor?”

“Pastor Shabalala,” Beauty says.

“Not me seeing him at Hlophe Creche yesterday!” I laugh.

“He was probably looking for a new girlfriend, he likes them young and smelling like breast-milk “

I laugh out loud, forgetting that this is supposed to be private and peaceful.

“This is not a gossiping session. Can we continue?” Mpatho.

Really, the Shabalala scandals don't even qualify as gossip, everyone is talking about it, it's just public news that we talk about behind his back.

“Siyathelelana amanzi? Are we making peace?” he asks.

Beauty nods, “Yes. But one more thing?”

What now?!

“I'm young, Mpatho,” she says.

“You're 38 this year,” -Mpatho.

“Exactly, your mother was still a married side-chick at this age.”

Gosh, we are making peace for fuck' sake! MaVilakazi shouldn't be brought up, but I get her point.

“I'm going to date people,” she says.

“As long as you don't bring them to my grandfather's house, I don't see why I should have a problem with that. And be careful out there, there are diseases and scams that target rich widows.”

“You know that I'm clever,” she says.

Now we can shake hands and bury the past.

No, wait, there's something I'm forgetting.

“Beauty, never invite his ex-girlfriends to the house again,” I say.

“I agree with my wife,” -Mpatho.

She rolls her eyes. “I get it, ninesdina yazi!”

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 121

SPHAKAMISO

His belt has already been unbuckled when he second-guesses his decision. He's not cheating on anybody but he promised himself that he will take a break from girls and focus on building himself and his son. Yes, his body aches for a woman's warmth, but is really this the time? He hardly knows this girl.

"Nokwanda," he says, clenching his jaw as she runs her soft hand on his skin.

She looks up, "Yes?"

"Are you sure?" he asks.

This question is just a reflection of himself; he's not sure about this.

She doesn't respond, she takes down his pants in one pull and grabs his dick out, holding it like a pro. Okay, this feels good. She's rubbing it gently, enraging veins that just popped out visibly within a minute. This is it, he can't turn her down because his body needs this.

"I will wipe this black monster first, you've been sweating," she says.

She opens her bag and takes out a wet wipe. Could it be that she carries them around for exactly this purpose? The answer doesn't matter though. He balances his hands behind the desk and holds her braids as she takes him on like a bull, her tongue triggering shivers all over his body.

"Oh, God!" He can't help himself, the pleasure is ripping him apart.

She has to stand up before he empties his balls down her throat. He grabs her by her neck and hungrily sucks her lips. His other hand travels down and reaches beneath her short dress. His finger slides under her thong and dips in her wet coochie.

“My pull-out game is weak,” he says, breathing heavily.

He’s dying to be inside of her but raw is not an option.

“My father must’ve put one condom in my bag,” she says and pulls away, turning to her bag.

“Girl, you bad!” he smiles, looking at his wet fingers.

Her father is weird, no doubt. But at this moment he’s their hero.

They switch positions; her on top of the desk with her legs open and him standing between them. It’s been ages, he doesn’t have much faith in his holding-back game either.

“Mmmm!” he moans as he reaches the inner parts of her, rubbing him like a soft palate. He shuts his eyes, taking the pleasure as it comes, in bulks.

Nokwanda grabs his face and starts kissing him again.

When he tries to pull out so that he can regain himself, she tightens her inner walls around him and moans sexily in his mouth. He spills, every part of his body trembles, a deep moan roars from his throat.

She throws her head back and smiles with satisfaction. She controlled him to the end.

As he recovers from the orgasm quakes, shame engulfs him. Was he too quick?

“Hey, lover boy!” she says, licking the side of his face.

Did she just call her a boy?

Oh well, maybe he is.

“It was too sweet,” he says.

“Yeah, yeah, every man once said!” she laughs.

He pushes his hand between her legs and boldly looks at her in the eyes.

“I mean it, you’re too sweet. Your ex-boyfriend is really stupid,” he says.

Well, there’s no ex-boyfriend, she just came here because she needed to be somewhere. They clean up and open the door like nothing happened inside.

“I want ice-cream,” she says and looks at him with a lopsided smile. “Really ice-cream with a cone. Not your pitch-black one with 2kg balls between your legs.”

Her mouth is bigger than her; he laughs walking out behind her.

“You loved those balls slapping against you though,” he says.

“Well, yonke insipho iyawasha,” she says.

Such an ambiguous statement! With women you can never be too sure.

Here they are, now hanging out and having ice-creams.

“I love this place; small, dirty town where everyone minds their own business,” she says.

He laughs, shaking his head. Her compliments are never pure compliments.

“Kanti how long does it take for ice-cream to be served in this place?” She’s a little bit impatient too.

Luckily the ice-cream comes before she lays louder complaints about the services. She's having a tall glass of ice-cream with brown chocolate sticks dipped in it. He's not a fan, he will only eat because she questions everything.

She takes hers and a straw. "This looks yummy..." Something catches her attention, her face transforms into rage.

"Paper straw?" She looks at him.

Does it really matter if they're paper or plastic? "They do the same job," he says.

"I didn't want a paper straw," she says, pouting her lips. Before he can see where the big deal comes from, here comes the tears.

"Nokwanda, what is the matter?" he asks.

"I don't like paper straws!" She's throwing a fit over a straw. Crying like a child. He's never seen anything like this, not even with Yoli.

He hurries to the counter and asks if they have any plastic straws.

But she continues crying even after getting it.

"Hey," he tries touching her cheek but she turns her face away.

Okay, they need to go and eat this ice-cream in the car because this is getting them a lot of attention. He holds her bag and lifts her off the chair.

"Ang'sawufuni!" she leaves the ice-cream behind.

This is the highest level of craziness he's ever seen.

He takes a long, much needed breath after they get inside the car. Those were the longest five minutes of his life. Paper straw vs plastic straw? It doesn't even make sense.

She's quiet now, looking outside the Tazz window with her arms folded.

"I know we don't know each other that well and I have no business saying things to you. But you're not crying over a damn straw Nokwanda."

"I am," she says with a shrug.

No, she is not, he can see through her.

"You needed a reason to cry and the straw happened to be a good excuse," he says.

Mr-Know-It-All, right? She gives him an icy stare.

"Owning a car repair shop doesn't mean you owe people's thoughts. You don't know what's on my mind. I was crying for a straw." She's trying to convince him but it's not working.

"I don't own the shop, neither do I own this Tazz. It's all my brother's properties, I'm just an employee. I only own a 4 year-old motherless boy and Capitec savings account with a balance of R860," he says.

"Whaaaaat?" Her face transforms into total shock.

He knows that he's not her type but it's funny watching her realize that she just dished the coochie for a broke man. A sweet one for that matter.

"On top of that, I'm broken, I have identity issues and a flock of nightmarish siblings," he adds, just to make her pee on herself. Her facial expression is satisfactory.

He chuckles, "So Nokwanda, I'm the last person you should care to hide your pain from. Crying because of a paper straw is unrealistic to me."

"It's realistic if you are me," she says.

"A rich kid, you mean?" he asks.

“With family issues and a homeless mom who’s a pathological liar that has claimed to have over 10 type of cancers just to haunt me.” Now this is the real reason behind the tears.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he asks.

“No, take me to my car. I can’t believe you lied to me,” she says.

When did he lie?

“What did I say?” he asks.

“You said you’re opening your car repair shop. I thought you owned the fuckin’ thing,” she says.

“I’m opening it for my brother, throwing a family braai to celebrate having a shop-owning brother.”

How stupid is he? She rolls her eyes.

He’s laughing. Maybe she’s also stupid, just a little bit. She doesn’t even know the man she’s throwing herself at.

“I don’t care as much as you think yazi,” she says.

“You only care about paper straws,” he teases.

She hits his arm and starts laughing too. All in all, she came all this way to get fucked by a guy he thought was monied, went to McDonald’s for ice-cream and started crying like a widow over a straw. As if this day hasn’t gone wrong enough, this fuckin’ Tazz refuses to start.

“Does it still move smoothly, makhenikha?” she asks, annoyed.

He releases a deep sigh, “It will move, I just need a little push.”

“Do you know how many Instagram followers I have?” He’s got to be joking.

“No. Can they come over and push me?”

Wow, this one is for the books! She takes off her shoes and opens the door her side. But it's also jammed.

She turns to him, "Is the door locked?"

"I think it's another car door stroke, I will fix it tomorrow," he says.

Door stroke? Is this a punishment, maybe for how she hasn't been respecting her father?

"Jump to the back and use the back door," he says.

What the hell? Who does he think she is? A random girl from the backdoor of his neighbor.

"Okay, come to the steering wheel, I will go and push. Just make sure that you don't mix these wires under here because...."

Nope, it's okay, she will jump to the back and go push. It's God's punishment.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Today we are going to celebrate the opening of Unified. All of us are going. MaVilakazi hasn't been waking us up since her date with Bonga. I let my guard down and even planned to thank Phume for the brilliant idea.

But I just woke up to her voice talking next to me. She's sitting on our bed, Bonga's side. And he's standing, letting her do as she pleases. I'm not going to say anything, I get out of bed in my short nightie and look for something to wear.

"That's too short, usemzini," she says behind me.

I turn my head, indeed she's talking to me.

I look at Bonga, he doesn't say anything.

Okay....breathe...I grab a dress and put it on.

"Don't worry, I have already cooked breakfast," she says.

"Porridge?" I ask because I know her son will eat that porridge and then come to me crying of hunger.

"Yes, it's a tradition," she says.

"Okay," I lazily fold a scarf to wrap my head.

Am I expected to wash my face and brush my teeth with her staring at me like that?

"She's kidding," he says.

They laugh.

What's funny?

"MaMthethwa, it's not that I don't know how to make my children fancy breakfast too," MaVilakazi says.

I'm still lost.

They tell me to follow them when I'm done. They're on some mysterious ish. Bonga has been closer to his mother ever since the date. At some point I felt neglected. Even now he's giggling with his mother after she sat and woke me up with more of her shady remarks.

I find them in the kitchen. It smells good, like eggs and bacons. I thought she said eating porridge is a tradition that can't be unfollowed.

She lifts a lid off the bowl. So many eggs?

"They're undercooked. Personally, I think this is not the right way of eating an egg."

“Then who made them?” I’m confused.

“I did,” she says.

I don’t get it.

“I don’t know who gave you permission to eat eggs kwaMcineka before they give you indlakudla,” she says.

She no longer identifies as a Mcineka.

“I didn’t know,” I say.

“How would you have known when you act like you know everything?” This is a funny, narrowed way of looking at it.

“Maybe I would’ve done better if you liked me enough to guide me like a child. My father wouldn’t know everything,” I say.

She releases a deep sigh and doesn’t respond.

Toast? I can’t believe she made such an effort.

“You wasted my son’s money buying bread-burning machines,” she says.

I can’t help but laugh at that. It’s a brand-less toaster that I swiped with Bonga’s card because he can’t take me to Spur everyday.

“Bonga loves toast,” I say.

“Burnt bread? I’m sure if you tell him to eat soil he’d start loving it too.”

Really, how influential does she think I am to Bonga?

“He loves you,” she says.

First step towards healing is admitting. I’m glad she can say this with her mouth.

She takes one slice of toast and bites it. Why is she eating all of it? I thought the toaster was a waste of money.

“Khona kumnanjana mukwenze lento,” she says, eating the whole slice.

“I’m buying a washing machine next,” I say.

Now I’m waiting for the film to start.

“I know you’re capable of doing that.” This is a better reaction from what I expected.

“It will make his life more convenient since you’re going to leave because he’d then need to do his own laundry,” I say.

She chuckles, “I know you won’t make him do his own laundry.”

“Why?” She definitely doesn’t know me too well.

“Because you love him. By the way I loved the dress.”

My eyes widen. She knows?

“I know my son, even his own clothes that he buys are never the right size. How on earth did he buy me my right size?”

Oh, damn.

“Phume gave me the dress to give you,” I tell her the truth.

“Really?” A smile is creeping out of her face. “But I thought you didn’t talk to her, ngqongqoshe,” she says.

Now I’m a ngqongqoshe? I wonder which department I serve. Probably the minister of finance.

“We talked, I needed someone to talk to and she was there,” I say.

“How was the evil mother-in-law topic?”

I laugh, “Very hot.”

“You two should’ve met Mcineka’s mother.”

“Well, we met you,” I shrug.

“I’m not half of what that woman was. And I’m not going to be around as much as she was.” She grabs a plate and looks at me. “Is this the breakfast we eat now?”

“I don’t make the rules, I advance them,” I say.

“Omakoti bezinsuku zokugcina!” she shakes her head.

Deep down in her heart she knows that I’m not bad as she makes me.

“Sit down, I will make you advanced tea,” I say.

“Which one is that one?” She’s obeying and taking a seat.

Advanced tea? I also don’t know which one is that one because I’m boiling water as usual.

I’m glad we have found common grounds, sort of. Today we will open Unified, we all get along now. I hope Phume will be there too. Then tomorrow MaVilakazi will go and meet Sphakamiso’s biological father’s family.

Peace at last. Unity on par!

“Knock!”- Mkhuleko stands at the door.

I turn to look at him. His eyes are puffy red. I’ve seen everyone express their excitement over today’s opening Unified braai except him. I want to ask if he’s okay but he’s never straightforward.

“Come in, your mother made breakfast,” I say.

“And it’s not porridge,” MaVilakazi adds.

I laugh. Who’s the role model here?

Mkhuleko makes his way to the table. He doesn’t grab anything like he usually does when he sees food.

“I want to eat my mother’s porridge,” he says.

Strange, but I don't mind because porridge is a part of this family's tradition.

"Now you don't want advanced breakfast?" MaVilakazi.

"No," he says.

No joke is thrown in, he's not even trying to conceal his indescribable sadness.

MaVilakazi stands up, she's smiling victoriously. I still think my advanced breakfast is the most liked but she can have this round.

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 122

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I look at Nombuso and wonder if I got the right memo. It's just a braai, not a party, and she's dressed to the tee. Black, panel skirt and a white cropped shirt. Yes, cropped. The last time I checked she was insecure about her tummy. But today she's flaunting her Jojo tank in a cropped top and walking around with her head held high. I wonder how long she will survive on those platform heels. I hope she brings sandals in a bag too.

"You look nice," I compliment her.

"I know. When are you getting dressed? We have to leave in 30 minutes."

I don't understand, I am dressed.

"We will take pictures Miyanda," she says.

Umh, this is the first time she's ever slayed and she's already acting like a fashion police. She goes inside the house and comes out with red lips. Now she's putting color lipsticks?

I have to get in the car and wait sitting down because if I wait for everyone on my feet will start swelling.

As I approach the car Bonga opens the door for me. I'm not sitting at the front, okay.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

I don't respond, I get in the back and sit silently. MaVilakazi and I are okay, we buried the hatchet. But that didn't automatically dissolve my issues with her son. His lack of emotional support, empty promises and faulty communication skills have set me off. I still don't like how he handled the situation, and until we resolve that there will be no khi-khi and ha-ha between us.

Finally people are ready to go. I thought Mkhuleko would hop in the Tazz because Sphakamiso is a noisy driver that bursts loud music and stops for friends on the road. But he asks to swap with Nombuso and comes with us.

MaVilakazi is very happy to occupy the front seat.

"Pregnant women don't sit at the front," she says.

This was probably made up by her and Bonga.

"Where does she sit?" I ask.

"She stays at home," she replies.

I laugh out loud. I'm going to the braai, I'm not sitting here alone watching the walls. I mean, she's ran away from this home, it's not that interesting.

"Don't worry, you will have your seat later," she says.

"I don't care about the seat MaVilakazi. There was no car at home when I grew up. But why are you matching clothes with Nombuso?" I deserved to know if there was a color of the day.

"It was a coincidence and she's angry about it," she says.

I don't think this was a coincidence.

"Nombuso is now dating, useqomile, you killed her vibe," Bonga says.

That's funny, but I don't laugh because who laughs at their enemy's jokes?

"What about Yoli's father?" -MaVilakazi.

Who still talk about that person?

"He's an ex-husband, old news!" I say.

"And you're recent news?" she asks. MaVilakazi doesn't like me, she tolerates me, just like I do to her. But the difference now is that we can laugh about it when we go for each other.

"Yes, I'm recent news. Yoli's father is an ex-husband, now your new son-in-law will come from Nkandla," I say.

"I don't like people from that place, Jacob Zuma's people," she says.

I didn't know she was a politic person.

"But I'm not from Nkandla," I say. I'm confused because if her only problem was Nkandla people then why doesn't she like me?

"You are mistreating my son. Did he pay your father's expensive lobola for you to sleep in a separate blanket?"

Wow Bonga, wow!

Was there a need for him to tell his mother?

"Ma, can I play your Soul Brothers?" He's trying to silence her now.

"Before you play Soul Brothers, did you tell your mother that you forced me to stay kini and tell my father that I was happy whereas I was crying myself to sleep?"

“I didn’t say shout at him. You two can talk about this after the braai.” Now MaVilakazi doesn’t want to hear the reason we are sleeping in different blankets because I’m putting her son on a hot seat. Such a hypocrite!

“No MaVilakazi, I want to talk now while you’re here. Bonga fails to restore peace without choosing a side, that’s why we don’t get along. He’s either on my side, making you hate me more. Or on your side, lying to me and making empty promises.”

“That’s not true,” she says.

I don’t know why she thinks siding with him helps the situation.

“What is not true?” I ask.

“That I hate you. I disliked you for taking my son to your backroom, and I was wrong. I should’ve given you a chance and corrected you like a child,” she says.

Wait a minute!

“Is that an apology?” I ask.

“Yes, I’m sorry,” she says.

How can I frame vocal apology?

“Thank you,” I say.

“Now forgive my son too. He’s under a lot of pressure, sometimes you have to understand and be easy on him.” She’s asking for something else now.

Why must I forgive someone who hasn’t apologized?

Mkhuleko has been sleeping, he wakes up and asks if we’ve arrived. I needed someone to distract MaVilakazi from demanding forgiveness on her son’s behalf.

“Are you alright, my boy?” she asks.

“No, I’m hungry.” This is always the case with Mkhuleko.

We've almost arrived, however they're still going to braai the meat first.

"Okay, take this ubambe umoya." MaVilakazi passes a tied, black plastic bag.

Mkhuleko opens it and finds amagwinya. I can't believe MaVilakazi wrapped amagwinya while going to a braai. I wouldn't have thought about it, this is what makes her their mother.

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It looks like I'm the only one who's under-dressed. When Phume arrives I'm not sure if I'm at a fashion show or a repair shop opening. And the lady with her? Her weave is longer than my work experience. She's wearing a red split-thigh dress, her thigh is flawless. I look at Bonga, he mustn't dare look at her direction.

"She's beautiful," I whisper to Nombuso.

"It's the Mshazi widow," she says.

I look at the lady again. She doesn't look like a widow. And she's too young to have been married to that old man I saw on the newspaper.

They're making their way to us, it's where all the ladies are.

We exchange greetings, the lady sits right next to me. "Are you the wife?"

I thought she'd be quiet.

"The fiance, yes," I say.

"Has your man said anything about giving me my shares?"

Her shares? Who is she again?

“I don’t know anything about his business conducts,” I say.

She laughs and nudges Phume with her elbow. “She’s stupid like you. When your men die you two will find out that their businesses will be ran by side-chicks.”

Bonga doesn’t have a side-chick and he has his brothers who’d see things through for him.

“You also didn’t know shit, Beauty. Those documents you stole were useless,” Phume says.

“I have the livestock, his two properties and car dealership,” she brags and turns to me again. “I’m the reason Malibongwe is opening this shop, I hope I’m on the program.”

“Beauty, you’re not going to do that. I begged Mpatho to come with you, don’t prove him right and cause drama,”-Phume.

I need the loo. I pick my bag and leave. I live in a dramatic house, today is about celebration, I don’t want to be involved in any drama. I don’t know the lady from the man in the mood and she has the nerve to call me stupid.

“Heeeey,” -the voice almost gives me a fright.

It’s Mpatho, the last time we saw each other I wasn’t nice.

“Mr Mshazi, how are you?” I ask, flashing a smile.

“I’m good, you look beautiful,” he says.

I know he’s just being nice. His wife and that gogo-tshitshi look beautiful, not me.

“Thank you,” I say.

“Thank you too.”

For what? I’m confused.

Bonga appears behind him with a long face.

Mpatho is smiling. "Don't forgive him, whatever he did, he meant it."

What???

Bonga is staring at me like I took away his lollipop when he was a child. His face is so annoying.

"Are you going to the toilet?" he asks.

"Why are you announcing it?" I don't understand why he's telling the world that I'm going to the toilet. And must I report to him when I'm going to the toilet?

I walk away, Mpatho is amused. Their sibling rivalries have nothing to do with me, I have my own issues with Bonga.

I get inside and do my business. Then I search my bag, there's nothing, I even forgot my wipes. They didn't leave toilet papers here. Sphakamiso is responsible, he must've forgotten. What do I do now?

I hate my life.

His phone rings, he answers shortly.

"Hey, please bring me a toilet paper," I say.

"Are you sure you called the right person?"

I look at the screen of my phone. It's his number.

"Bonga, I'm sitting with my pussy wet, bring me toilet paper."

"Mmmmmmm."

"No, not that wet, I urinated."

"Okay baby, I'm cumming."

Really now? We are not even on good terms for him to take things like that.

He takes his time coming. It doesn't take two seconds for him to run his mouth to his mother but running to me when there's an emergency takes him two minutes.

He knocks outside, I slightly open the door and put out my hand.

"Can I come inside?" Bonga is crazy.

"Just give me the toilet paper mfethu."

"Were you peeing or doing number two?"

Only I get asked these kind of questions by a man.

"Bonga, I'm not playing with you!"

He finally gives it to me. I'm uncomfortable wiping myself with him outside the door asking to get inside. The sink is outside the toilet room, I walk out straight to it and wash my hands.

"Are you still angry at me?" he asks.

"No," I continue washing my hands.

He steps closer and holds my waist from behind. I exercise my breaths and turn to him. I know he'd want to address things here, Bonga has no timing.

"Can we talk at home?" I ask.

"I'm asking if you're still angry and you're lying."

Okay...another deep breath.

"Yes, I'm angry," I admit.

"MaVilakazi saw our sleeping arrangements, I didn't run to report to her. I'm not trying to destroy, I'm trying to build and it's hard," he says.

"I know, all I wanted from you was an acknowledgement of my feelings," I say.

“I know that you’ve been hurt. I shouldn’t have asked you to stay, even though I’m glad that I did because now you and my mother have made peace. What I didn’t want to happen is to destroy us along the way, you’re important to me, I should’ve protected your mental state especially because you’re pregnant.” He lifts my chin up, my face is getting softer as he locks his eyes on me. “I made a mistake, I’m sorry muntu wami.”

“Okay.” Jeez, I’m so weak.

He kisses my lips. His hand drops to my backside. This kiss is passionate, I missed his lips, but this is not a right place to kiss and make up.

“I miss you,” he says.

I miss him too but admitting it will invalidate my past feelings.

“I really, really miss you,” he repeats, his voice cracking with sadness.

His eyes are getting teary.

“Bonga!” He mustn’t dare cry.

“I don’t think you’ve ever been angry at me for so long. It’s been over a week, I’m not functioning Miyanda. I miss my partner, I miss talking to you, laughing with you and having sex with you.”

“I know, it’s been long,” I say, realizing that maybe people have been right about me being hard-headed. “How are you feeling? Today the shop is finally opening.”

“I’m happy, especially because you and my mother and Phume can finally be in the same space with no animosity,” he says.

“Yeah, but there’s a Mshazi woman who wants to know when you’re giving her share.”

He laughs, “Don’t mind her.”

Does he know how talkative that woman is?

“They haven't started, we have a minute here,” he says.

Here? This is a toilet, what do we have a minute for?

“No, I will make it up to you at home,” I say.

“MaNyambose, ngiyacela mama.” He pushes me against the wall and buries his face on my neck begging. Neck kisses are my weakness, he knows it.

But really, I'm Nyambose's daughter, engaged to be married and carrying my first child at 29. I need to keep my dignity intact. Imagine if someone comes here and finds two grown-ups having sex in the toilet like teenagers.

“Bonga,” I push his face up.

“Ya baby?” He looks at me, unzipping his pants with one hand.

He looks damn horny. I should've called Nombuso to bring the toilet paper instead. He turns me around to face the wall and lifts my dress up.

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SPHAKAMISO

He left Mkhuleko with Mpatho planning to spend some quality time in the toilet. Particularly because being in the same space with Mpatho is a natural disaster waiting to happen. Mkhuleko needs to take care of the meat. But when he gets closer to the toilet door he hears Malibongwe's deep groans and quickly reads between the lines and turns away. It's so wrong of Malibongwe to have sex with Miyanda, she's such a sweetheart.

He goes across the road to empty his bladder and returns to the shop as slowly as he can. He spots a Yaris pulling up, immediately his heart starts beating loud. Nokwanda can't be here, she knows what day it is.

The door opens, "Surpriseee!"

What the fuck?!

He stands like he's been electric shocked. Nokwanda walks up to him with a smile on her face.

"Has the braai started?" she asks.

His mouth finally opens. "Nokwanda what are you doing here?"

"I'm here to buy car things, first customer," she says.

Fuck, she's crazy. His whole family is here, and his ex. She's wearing close to nothing. Her short reveals her bum cheeks and sizes the shape of her vagina.

She tilts her head back. "You don't look happy to see me."

"I am, I'm just...phewww!" He pulls her for a mini hug. This will need a long explanation.

Mkhuleko lifts his head and frowns when he sees them coming.

"Who is that?" he asks before they even get close.

Sphakamiso holds Nokwanda's arm, he still needs to be a gentleman.

"This is Nokwanda," he says.

"The paper straw girl?" -Mkhuleko.

Now dig him a hole and bury him.

Nokwanda glares at him. "I'm a paper straw girl?"

"I'm sorry, he's a bum." He pulls her away.

He has to take her to the ladies to continue with the meat. But what does he say to his mother?

Mpatho comes back with a chair, for himself. It's only him and Mkhuleko making the meat, others have vanished, now this one is here with a young, naked girl. Is he going to introduce her?

Sphakamiso clears his throat, they don't get along, this is awkward but he doesn't want to paint that picture to Nokwanda.

"This is Mpatho, my mother's very intelligent, well-reasoning, mature first son," he says. This should be enough to send a message to Mpatho. They can put their issues aside for once, he needs back-up.

"Mpatho, this is Nokwanda, the girl I've been telling you all about," he says.

Mpatho looks at him and slightly shakes his head. This girl has never been talked about in his presence, he doubts anyone knows anything about her. But he has Sphakamiso's ex-girlfriend, whom they are still fighting over, he can be fair.

"Finally, we meet the beautiful Nokwanda who's stolen my mother's third-born son's heart," he says.

Sphakamiso grits his teeth. Stolen his heart? That was unnecessary.

"We've heard so many good things about you. How much you love him and dream of mothering a soccer team for him and cooking dinner for him everyday and...."

Sphakamiso coughs, "Okay, that's enough."

"I can go on if you want....like how you've started saving money to send lobola for her because she's a good girl."

"I asked you to stop, I've never said any of that, Nokwanda is just a friend."

Oh, how ungrateful!

"Sorry, I thought it was the other one. Is Nokwanda the friend who used to share her lunch with you at school and chase bullies away with a knife for you?"

He's doing too much on purpose. Childish motherfucker. No, they share the same mother, he's a childish fatherfucker.

"I've never told you anything about her," Sphakamiso says.

"Really?" Mpatho fakes confusion.

He takes in a sharp breath and turns to Nokwanda.

"Wow, Sphakamiso!"

Mpatho takes the tong and turns the meat. His job today is to turn and grill everything.

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 123

PHUMELELE

Sphakamiso brought a girl, he introduced her as a friend but I have a feeling she's more than that. He's moving on from me, that's terrible. But I'm happy for him if he's happy.

"She's a mini you," Beauty says. She has an opinion on everything.

"Eat your food, I've never dressed like that," I say.

"That's the only difference," she says.

I don't look like the girl, okay. And I never showed up to the Mcineka gatherings as a girlfriend.

The meat is good, I know Mpatho prepared it, everything his hand touches turn into something out of this world. He's been sitting and talking with MaVilakazi, without raising his voice. I'm

seeing a lot of progress in everybody. Sphakamiso and Mpatho were making the meat together. Mkhuleko is a bit reserved today, thank God. His energy can be too much. I'm glad he didn't bring Ruby too.

Mpatho comes to us and asks that I come with him. Apparently MaVilakazi wants to talk to me. I wonder what's up. I never know what to say to her. I feel like she has to play a certain script with me everytime because of Mpatho, not that she really likes me.

"I didn't wear your dress today, I didn't want to spoil it," she says.

My dress? I'm confused.

"I didn't know you loved me that much," she says.

Mpatho is looking at me confused too. It finally clicks that she's talking about the dress I gave to Miyanda. I thought that was a secret.

"Oh the dress, I'm glad you liked it," I say.

"Like? I loved it. You're not like your mother." This is the first time someone has ever said this to me. Weirdly, I take it as a compliment.

"Thank you," I say.

She looks at Mpatho, "You're just like your father."

OMG, I love this. I laugh out loud.

"Why am I like him?" he asks, he's not happy.

"You're stubborn, Nkosiyazi. I know if she was to ever leave you, you'd take her child away and make her life miserable too," she says.

He wouldn't dare, I'm not that type.

"No, he wouldn't," I say.

“You’re in love, mntanami. But I don’t think that will ever happen anyway, you’re a woman, a complete one,” she says.

“She is,” Mpatho says.

It’s a compliment season!

“Please come and have dinner with us, grandma Beauty has to officially meet you and talk to you on behalf of the Mshazis, I think a conversation is needed,” -Mpatho.

“Okay, I will come. I need to fix Sphakamiso’s situation first. Tomorrow I’m going to Mandeni, then I will come back and talk with Beauty before I go back home.”

“Thank you. Should I bring you a drink?” Mpatho.

“No, I already had Coke, I will watch you kids having fun,” she says.

Mpatho takes my hand, we go back to the sitting area, they’ve put on some music.

Miyanda is not bubbly, I don’t know why I thought she was a bubbly girl. She keeps to herself most of the times. But I know that if Beauty keeps talking she will fight. She’s the fighting type; it’s on her face and how she talks.

I take a seat next to her this time. “Your mother-in-law is very nice today.”

“I know, she apologized to me,” she says.

“As in she said sorry?” I just don’t believe it.

“I should’ve treated you better’ and all that,” she says.

“Maybe she’s dying,” I say.

We laugh. I think going back home put a lot of things into perspective, she’s so much better now. Her relationship with her kids has evolved beautifully.

“Mkhuleko is very quiet,” I say.

“He’s been like this since morning. I will collect bones for Ruby, hopefully that will improve his mood,” she says.

I think she’s perfect for the Mcinekas. The type of a wife that loves and takes care of everyone in the family, extending her love to pets as well. I don’t deal with a lot, just dishing for Beauty alone makes me want to jump in front of a moving truck.

“I thought you had your hair laid over the scarf at the back when I arrived.” I’m just noticing that she’s redone her wrap. This style looks messy, the first one was cute, it was giving young makoti vibes.

“Yes, I...I had...I wanted to tie it this way,” she says.

“Why?” I ask.

“Hhayi-bo Phume, why are you so invested? You change weaves everyday and I can’t change a simple scarf on my head?”

“Hah-ah, Nandi Mngoma calm down! Why are you so worked up, I’m just asking.” I can’t believe she’s losing her mind over such a simple question. Also, I don’t change weaves everyday, I own a couple of them, not a factory.

“Well, I went to the loo and asked Malibongwe to bring me toilet paper, the rest was history,” she says.

I almost fall off my chair. Is that doable? Having sex during a family braai. I read this girl wrong totally. I never saw her as a freak that bends over in the toilets.

“You’re brave,” I say, still surprised.

“We haven’t been on good terms, it had been quite some time and he couldn’t wait anymore.”

It doesn’t justify the risk of fucking in the toilet. They’re humble-looking freaks.

Where is Nombuso by the way? Yoli is on the chair, it looks like she's falling asleep there.

"Have you seen Yoli's parent?" I ask.

She looks over. "Lord, I forgot. She asked to watch Yoli, she's gone to see a friend quickly."

"Mapholoba? He drives her crazy," I say.

"You know him?" she asks.

"Yeah, I was Yoli's nanny too the other day."

"O-aunt abajolayo!" she says going to Yoli's chair.

I'm happy for Nombuso but I don't think the sneaking out thing will work. She has to introduce Mapholoba at home, even though it's not how things are done in our culture. But I think leaving Yoli with her family and taking her to Mapholoba lies on her brothers, especially Malibongwe. I don't know the exact order of things concerning Yoli because her mother was married to her father, but Malibongwe and Miyanda might be responsible for her if Nombuso decides not to give her back to her father.

MMaVilakazi announces that she's leaving. I don't blame her, she's the only elder here and her sons are getting drunk.

"Sphakamiso will drive you home," Malibongwe says.

"I think Mpatho is a better driver," Sphakamiso.

"I'm glad you know, but you're taking her home."

I no longer entertain anything that has to do with MaVilakazi's children. Miyanda and I got in Malibongwe and Mpatho's beef and they got along before us and we were left beefing alone. Sphakamiso's girl has left, she was already introduced to

MaVilakazi as a friend and I'm surprised MaVilakazi didn't judge her lack of clothing.

"Who said I want to be driven home?" -MaVilakazi.

"What do you mean Ma? You have three sons, excluding me because I'm the oldest, one of them will drive you home," Malibongwe says.

"Oldest to who?" -Mpatho.

"You can stand next to me, see if you can see the top of my head, awung'boni ngisho ukhakhayi kodwa ungimisela umhlwenga, nx!"

"Okay, okay!" -MaVilakazi.

God help me, I must not give my child any sibling, this looks like a lot of work.

"I called MaMbokazi, they reserved a seat for me at the rank, Mkhwanazi's van is about to leave," she says.

"No, you will not ride Mkhwanazi's car, Sphakamiso will take you home," Malibongwe.

"No, let my son have fun. All of you, have fun. I know my way home, I was riding Mkhwanazi's van before you were even born," she says.

"Okay, if you insist. I won't let them get too drunk," Malibongwe.

"Tell your sister when she comes back from umjolo that I've gone home."

Had she allowed them to take her home she would've taken Yoli with her because it's getting noisy and crowded for a child.

Beauty, out of the goodness of her dark heart, brings drinks and more meat to our table. I love her, she's a part of my family. If the Mcinekas can accept each other as they are, so can we.

“The girl that Sphakamiso brought is Thule’s child, her father is a GP somewhere in Ballito,” she says.

I can’t believe she has already done her investigation.

“Why do you care?” I ask.

“I don’t, I just felt like she looked familiar. Her mother has fallen, she’s out on the streets, I hear she lost her apartment too,” she says.

“Gosh, she’s waking up!” Miyanda complains. The gossip is waking Yoli up.

She’s helping me, I don’t want to hear about Sphakamiso new girlfriend, I have a life of my own.

I take out tissue from my bag to give Miyanda to wipe Yoli’s sweating face. Then something bursts, loud like a car tyre close to your ears. When it repeats the second time everything comes flashing back. Those are gunshots, everyone is screaming, Beauty is holding me as a shield not even knowing where the shooter is.

Miyanda is frozen. I’ve been here before, I grab her arm. She blinks twice and moves off the chair with Yoli, we get under the table. But among us there’s blood.

Beauty starts screaming again.

“Who’s shot?” I ask.

More gunshots follow.

This time it sounds like there’s a war above our heads. I can hear Sphakamiso’s voice clearly, I can never mistaken it for anyone else’s.

It take a minute for everything to calm down. If this was America there would be police sirens at this time but here, in South Africa, all I’m hearing is; “kwenzenjani bo.”

“Miyanda!” that’s Malibongwe searching.

We are under the table scared, what if he’s the shooter?

“Phume!” Miyanda yells.

I’m right next to her.

“Ingane Phume!” she starts crying.

The blood is coming from Yoli behind the neck. Miyanda's dress is now covered in blood. Yoli is still....asleep.

“Check her pulse,” I say and crawl out of the table to ask for help.

“Yoli is shot! Call the ambulance!” I don’t know how many times I repeat this.

When Mpatho’s strong arms grab me my voice has dried, my top is drenched in tears. They need to call an ambulance, the child got shot.

I’ve never seen Beauty crying, really crying like today. Mkhuleko is now holding Yoli, Miyanda is in Malibongwe’s arms.

“Mpatho call the ambulance,” I say hitting his chest.

They can’t just stand.

“Yoli is gone,” he says.

I doubt my hearing abilities and comprehension skills for a moment. Gone where? She was on Miyanda’s lap, now she’s on Mkhuleko’s. She was asleep when it all happened, I was giving Miyanda something to wipe sweat off her forehead.

I go to Mkhuleko and grab her from his arms. She weighs differently, more than she should. I call her name and shake her. She’s not responding.

No, this can't be happening. There was a bunch of people here, why shoot a child? I feel like I can't breathe anymore, Mpatho pushes a bottle of water on my lips.

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SIS NOMBUSO

She asked Miyanda to keep an eye on Yoli, Mapholoba wanted to see her. Her uncles were there too, so was her grandmother, nothing made her think twice before leaving. But when they started hearing gunshots her mind ran back to her family and her daughter, even though she believed it was a taxi war. Mapholoba asked her not to leave until things calmed down.

"They're not answering!" she sighs once again.

She's restless. Mapholoba is trying to protect her but her safety means nothing if her family is in danger.

"No Mnelisi, take me back to the shop," she says.

"Are you sure? Taxi wars are..."

"I'm sure," she says.

He nods and starts the car.

It's quiet on the road, which makes her believe that it was indeed a fight between taxi men. As they get closer to the shop she sees Mpatho standing out talking to someone on the phone.

"Pull up," she says, her heart beating loud.

Something is not right. The road is quiet because people are crowded here.

Mapholoba doesn't let her walk in alone, as much as he knows that he's probably the last person anyone would want to see.

There's a small body structure on the floor, covered with a blanket. Someone is dead, someone very small. Women start crying again, Nombuso is asking what's going on, where is her daughter. But nobody answers, Malibongwe takes her hand, Mkhuleko steps closer too. They're trying to talk to her but with everyone crying and the small body on the floor, it's obvious. She takes two steps towards the body and falls on the ground. Someone screams for a bottle of water.

Sphakamiso steps out of the crowd shirtless. He has a gun in his hand, the police are probably on their way to the tuck-shop to buy cold-drink and cigarettes then coming here.

"They killed my niece!" He's livid.

It wasn't just one person, they know who they are because Mpatho recognized one from Aunt Nomusa's funeral. But it's not safe to just go after them as an individual.

But Sphakamiso is too hot-headed, nobody is able to stop him.

"Let's wait for the police first," -Mpatho.

He's the last person Sphakamiso would want to listen to.

"Bafo!" Malibongwe tries too.

But he's not listening to anyone, he's going.

Mkhuleko stands in front of Phume, two people are already dead in his family, they can't afford another loss.

"Please talk to him," he says.

Phume's teary eyes squint. Sphakamiso is leaving, his emotions are too high, he's not thinking straight.

She hesitates; Mpatho is looking at her.

"Please Phume," -Mkhuleko.

She nods and goes after him.

“Phaka, please think about Aphe,” she says behind him.

He keeps walking.

“He can’t lose a dad too,” she says.

This stops him.

He looks back, “They killed a child.”

“I know, it’s cruel and they will get what’s coming for them.

Right now you have to come back, we are already dealing with a lot, we can’t be worried about you too.” She turns and walks back.

He follows her. Now they can all focus on Mapholoba, Malibongwe and Nombuso. Whose fault is it?

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 124

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I’m going home with the uncontrollable Sphakamiso and Malibongwe. Mpatho took Mkhuleko, they’ll drop him off. MaVilakazi is home, she probably forgot to charge her phone until the battery died. We have to break the news to her that her only granddaughter is now lying at the mortuary dead. Yoli’s father came, I’ve never heard so many insults in my life. Nombuso had to go with him to sit on the mattress in his house because Yoli will be buried there. If possible, MaVilakazi will be driven there today to sit next to Nombuso. Yoli’s aunts were already chaotic, I cannot imagine the emotional abuse the Mcinekas will be subjected to. It will be a lot for Nombuso,

dealing with the fact that her child is dead and bearing the blame from her family.

I'm still shivering, I don't know if I will ever be able to close my eyes and not see Yoli's small body covered in blood. She took her last breath in my arms, I didn't even know it. Maybe if it was her mother holding she would've stopped her breath. I suck, I hate myself for failing to shield a child. I don't know what I did, but I know that the bullet was for me. I was clear, nobody could've mistaken a pregnant woman for an enemy. They aimed at me but the bullet landed on Yoli's neck. She took my bullet, someone wanted to kill me.

I know Malibongwe probably wants to handle this for himself and I should allow him to be a man and do it. But Njabulo has to know that my life is in danger.

I call Nyambose, heads turn and look at me. They've been treating me like a high-risk mental patient, Phume like a retarded that skipped medication.

"Yebo baba," I say when Nyambose answers.

They relax.

"Have you been crying?" Nyambose picks on my moods even from a distance.

"Yes, someone tried to shoot me but ended up killing a child that I had on my lap instead, Bonga's niece. I'm not safe baba, please tell Njabulo," I say.

"No mntanami, you know that your cousin is out on parole. Have your in-laws done anything about it?"

What does he mean? Njabulo can protect me better than anyone. It won't take him a day to track those people down and kill them, slowly and painful.

"They're planning a funeral, the police came and took statements," I say.

“Okay, give that boy the phone,” he says, subtly demanding.

Bonga is driving but ‘arrive alive’ is the last thing he’s ever cared about, that’s why we are here today, he didn’t care about life. I hand the phone to him at the front.

Right now the last thing he needs is an old man shouting at him for an incident he couldn’t have prevented. But it is what it is, Nyambose is going off and cursing the fuck out of him.

We get home, Ruby jumps up and down happily. She’s just an innocent dog, despite of everything I’m going through I unwrap the bones I had collected for her and give her with a few pieces of meat. Yoli’s frenemy, she always bodyshamed Ruby and threw her toys at him, much to Mkhuleko’s annoyance. Their relationship was complicated, the three of them.

“Ma is not home,” Bonga says.

“Okay,” I say, slightly confused.

He walks a few feet away and calls someone. It’s the driver whose car MaVilakazi rushed to at the rank. They say she arrived at her stop, now the problem is that it doesn’t look like she came home at all. We are alarmed because her phone is off. She wouldn’t lie about coming here if she wanted to go elsewhere, her kids have accepted that she’s left her marital home.

“Let’s go to the stop,” I suggest.

We are all going, Ruby included, she’s leading the way.

I’m scared, I keep hoping we will bump into someone who will say they saw her alive somewhere, at a friend’s house or somewhere. But we walk until we arrive at the stop where she got off Mkhwanazi’s van. There’s no one here.

“I will ask KwaShabane,” Sphakamiso says.

Bonga and I wait at the side of the road. Emotionally, he's carrying a lot. I don't even know how we are going to start navigating the pain Yoli has left us with.

Sphakamiso picks something from the ground and stops. He turns back to us and lifts it up. It's a cellphone, their mother's. We cross the road to him.

This is confusing. I'm getting more scared.

Ruby starts barking, it's a bit dark, she's probably seeing trees. She runs off the road and barks at the hedge of plants, a yard away from the road. Her barks are getting annoying and scary, like she's being strangled by something there and dying too.

"Bafo, take Miyanda home," -Malibongwe.

Why must I go home?

"I'm not tired," I say.

They're having a silent conversation for a minute, then Sphakamiso turns to me.

"Let's go sisi," he says, gently taking my hand.

I feel dismissed, Bonga stays behind alone. Ruby won't stop barking. I feel like he's seen something, what I don't understand is why they don't want me here. I've already held a dying child in my arms, what could be worse?

We get home, I grab a chair and sit on the veranda. I know Nyambose would cry lack of mannerism if he saw this, but shit has gone down, the last thing I'm thinking about is that I'm a makoti here. Sphakamiso comes out with his own chair and sits next to me. He still has a gun, I never thought I'd ever be so close to it and not shiver.

"Did something happen to her?" I ask.

“No,” he says.

“Sphakamiso, I’m not a child. Is it the same people?” I know Ruby gave them a sign, Malibongwe saw something and maybe sent me home because I’ve seen enough trauma. Nyambose will probably make another phone call if he hears that something has happened again.

“Maybe, I don’t know,” Sphakamiso says.

“Is she dead?” I ask.

“Hopefully not. She was going to fix my identity tomorrow, she wouldn’t leave me in such a mess, and Nombuso just lost her child. I hate myself.”

Why does he hate himself? He didn’t do anything wrong.

“You couldn’t have foreseen what happened,” I say, comforting him.

“Yes, but I could’ve made sure that my niece dies a happy child. She wanted to see Aphelele, she asked for him everyday. But I had a grudge against her mother, that she mistreated my son, I never wanted them to see him again. It tortured Yoli, they grew up together, played together and laughed together. I was too heartless to think of her, an innocent child who had nothing to do with what happened between her mother and I. Now I will never be able to make up for that.”

I don’t know what to say. I understand how he feels and why he’s feeling guilty. But Yoli was still a happy child.

“Don’t beat yourself about it. What would make Yoli happy now that she’s passed is seeing you and her mother loving each other. You forgiving the past and making sure that Aphelele doesn’t forget about her,” I say.

“I will make sure, nobody will ever forget Yoli. And I will make sure that those who took her innocent life pay.” He’s hot-blooded, I didn’t think he’s this hard to control when provoked.

There's a car coming, I think it's Mpatho coming with Mkhuleko. He's MaVilakazi's baby, the apple of her eye, I don't think he will take it well if something has happened to her. He was already a baby this morning wanting porridge and riding in the car with his mother.

Phume and Mpatho come out of the car with him. They suspect something because we shouldn't be sitting outside like this. I should be resting, tomorrow Phume and I agreed to go to Nombuso. In our condition there's nothing much that we can do, we won't even attend the actual funeral.

Sphakamiso stands up and grabs Mpatho to the side. Phume looks scared, I would be scared too if I was her, these two don't get along because of her.

Mkhuleko stands behind us, Phume sat on Sphakamiso's chair. They don't say anything to us, Mkhuleko doesn't ask them anything either.

Sphakamiso gives him a gun. I'm about to eat someone alive.

"Why are you giving him a weapon?" I ask. Sphakamiso once shot Mkhuleko with the same gun, this is recklessness.

"He knows how to handle it," he says.

"A gun? He's 16 years old." I can't believe this.

"I'm 21 now," – Mkhuleko.

If he doesn't shut up this will go bad for him.

He clears his throat, "Yes, I'm 16, I don't know how to use it. But maybe if I hold it like this while they're gone I will feel better."

That's still bullshit, if this gun goes off I will personally go to the police.

They leave, Phume still looks uncomfortable, her breaths are heavy.

“They won’t fight,” I say.

She looks at me wanting to say something but doesn’t.

“Let’s go inside,” I suggest.

She gets up with the chair, Mkhuleko remains on his feet.

I fill the kettle with water and plug it to boil.

“Did something happen?” Phume, she finally asks.

“MaVilakazi is missing, I think those gunmen found her. They’re so heartless, an old woman and a child? That’s cowardice. If they wanted Malibongwe why didn’t they approach him directly?”

“If she’s dead what are you going to do?” she asks.

I don’t understand her question.

“What are we going to do,” I rephrase for her.

She blinks, flapping her long eyelashes rapidly like a battery barbie. She can’t back out, as much as she’s got nothing relating her to us her man’s mother is, or was MaVilakazi.

We drink tea, Mkhuleko comes to join us. We still haven’t heard a word from the searching party. Nombuso is waiting for her mother to come, she’s alone there. I will not count her ex in-laws as human beings, they had no sympathy towards her. I’m scared to call her, I don’t know what she currently thinks of me.

“You have to call Nombuso and check on her,” I say to Phume.

She sighs, “Where do I say MaVilakazi is?”

“Say she’s not feeling well, she will talk to her when she’s feeling better.”

I don't know how Nombuso will ever recover from this. I feel everyone's pain, but hers is just worse. If this was indeed done by the Mshazi helper's family, then I don't see her relationship with Malibongwe surviving this.

Phume steps outside to talk to Nombuso, leaving Mkhuleko with me. I thought he'd be broken, not that he's not sad, but him as the youngest seems to be at least sane than others. He held Yoli in his arms and prayed for her, when she didn't wake up he closed her eyes and wrapped her in a blanket and then called the police. Nobody was in their right senses. I was crying, Phume was screaming, Sphakamiso wanted to run after armed people with no back-up, Mpatho and Malibongwe were confused.

"They will come back saying she's dead," he says.

"Don't say that, your mother is alive," I say.

"I know that she's dead and nobody is going to sit on the mattress for her because you are still a Mthethwa, bhuti only concluded lobola. Nombuso has to sit for her daughter, she won't even be here for the funeral, she can't be told that Ma is no more in the state she is in, she will find out after some time, maybe after the funeral." He's more worried about the future than the presence.

I think he's only imagining the worst, I have hope that things will be alright.

Phume comes back, but now she's followed by Sphakamiso.

I stand up, we've been waiting for an update.

"I don't have good news," he says.

My stomach turns cold.

"Ma was bitten by a snake, Malibongwe and Mpatho are waiting for the police," he says.

“The police, not the ambulance?” Phume asks with a frown.

He glances at Mkhuleko, Mkhuleko’s eyes are dropped, his jaw clenched.

“She’s not...she’s not alive,” he says.

“Lord!” I sink down on the chair.

This day is cursed. So much pain in one family!

Where do we even begin dealing with this?

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MALIBONGWE

Their father died when they were old enough to see how things are done in the process of a funeral. They laid a reedmat on the floor and a blanket, then arranged her dress and head scarf and lit a candle. Sphakamiso and Mkhuleko had to sleep in the same room.

This morning was supposed to be better because the Mcineka clan has arrived. He hoped that elder women will take charge and tell them what to do. But instead, the Mcinekas have called for an urgent family meeting.

“Where are your brothers?” -Bab’ Dubula, he’s their father’s cousin.

“They’re cleaning,” he says.

“Why? Where is makoti?”

“She’s gone to see Nombuso and how things are going that side.”

“Let Bubu face her situation there, don’t stress her out, she will be told about her mother and get cleansed after she’s buried her daughter. For now just tell her that your mother is at the hospital, that’s why she’s not there with her.

“Okay baba, I hear you,” -Malibongwe.

“Now coming back to your mother’s situation, your mother cannot be buried in our graveyard, that’s why I’ve asked your aunts to put out the candle and fold up everything.”

“Excuse me?” He’s confused, unable to comprehend what these people are saying.

“Your mother had left, she said it with her own mouth and emptied her kist and left. I asked her to apologize, slaughter a cow, and come back to her kids. But she refused, she cannot be buried next to our fathers and forefathers,” Dubula says, scratching his grey beard with a match stick.

“She’s dead now, she deserves to be buried next to her husband,” - Malibongwe.

“The husband she left? That’s not how things work ndodana. Call your uncle, your mother will be buried back home where she had returned.”

He’s feeling a bit dizzy. This is not something he didn’t think about, that’s why he asked his mother to make things right. She died a Mcineka but she’d broken the patriarch world rules, rules that govern and oppress women in marriage, by returning back home. Men leave their wives and start new lives in big cities with side-chicks, then come back home gravely sick to be welcomed with open arms and buried with dignity. A woman leaves her marital home for one month and comes back to tense family meetings and ridiculous fine.

“Malume, there’s a problem,” -Malibongwe on the phone.

“What mshana? Your aunt and I are on the way.”

“They’re saying Ma has to be buried there, at the Vilakazis.”

“No, we gave your mother to your father, they paid 11 cows to change her surname.”

“What am I expected to do? Cremate her body and throw her ashes in the sea?”

“No mshana, even the ancestors would turn on me. It’s like fetching a stranger’s body and burying it next to my family.”

He drops the call.

“Bhuti?” Mkhuleko stands behind him.

He doesn’t turn because he can’t look broken in front of them, otherwise they will lose all hope.

“I’m listening,” he says.

“Nombuso wants to talk to you, it’s about Yoli’s funeral.”

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 125

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

The clout-chasers are still at it. Yesterday there was a family meeting between them and the Vilakazis. They ended up agreeing to allocate MaVilakazi’s grave next to her husband’s, on a condition that the Vilakazis pay a cow, which was ridiculous. Bonga agreed, he didn’t have a choice. But now another old woman they call mamkhulu has arrived and told them a cow cannot be slaughtered while there’s a death in the family. Then the new agreement was a goat to appease for MaVilakazi before her body arrives. Someone must’ve realized that it’s been too long since they ate meat so three chickens were added. I will be kind enough to roll a dumpling for them

and go to KFC to buy them a bucket, just in case the chickens aren't enough for them.

Bonga has gone through hell. The back and forth between families added more burden. I don't try to make him talk, I give him water to bath and put his dinner next to him, only to collect it later, dry and untouched. When he's ready I will be the first person to hear his inner-thoughts and feelings.

Phume has my number now, I have hers as well. If she wasn't here everyday with Mpatho I don't know what I would've done. The Mcineka elders are here but their presence is dead. I'm caught between constantly checking up on Nombuso and making sure that Mkhuleko and Sphakamiso are taken care of. I was scared of Nombuso, I thought she'd blame me, for some time I was blaming myself, but all she wants is for Yoli to have a decent funeral. That's why Bonga was called, Yoli's father has no money, no funeral insurance. So they wanted to buy the cheapest coffin and bury her mid-week, without too many people, exactly like a cat's funeral. Nombuso called Bonga crying, she's yet to find out who the killers were. Bonga promised to give Yoli a funeral the little princess deserves. But, there was Yoli's father's ego on the way. If I tell you that Bonga has been going through hell I mean just that, both here and at Yoli's. Yoli's father plainly refused to have his daughter buried by izinja, that's what the Mcinekas are to him.

Bonga is naturally soft. He can't argue; he says what he says, if the other person doesn't agree then he lets things be. That's why MaVilakazi had a third son, just when he was two years old. Because when Bonga fails to put his foot down and gets talked over, that's where Sphakamiso, the nonsense-intolerant, comes in. Yoli's father knows that he gets away with things if it's Bonga he's talking to. But with Sphakamiso he has no

choice but to listen. He ended up getting his financial status read for him and told that even though he only sent Yoli chicken change a month, Yoli ate cornflakes and cheese, he wasn't going to relate to his daughter getting the best version of things but that's what was going to happen. To some extent, I love Sphakamiso's unpredictable attitude. Yoli's father ended up going to the funeral insurance company close to them and getting a quote for Bonga. Yoli will be buried in a way that will put her mother's heart at peace.

Bonga comes to bed late at night, I saw some chickens going below the yard. I guess the rituals have started, today MaVilakazi's candle is burning and there's a woman sitting on the mattress, one of the Mcineka elders. These people are addicted to drama, I know tomorrow we will wake up to something else. It's like when they see Bonga they see a cash cow.

He'd already took a bath, I only give him water to wash his feet. His dinner is by the bed as usual, but I know that he won't touch it. I don't know how he's still functioning without eating to this day.

"What was the meeting all about?" I ask, leaving a basin of water in front of him and getting back in bed.

"You want to go and report to your father?" He's dipping his feet in the water, not looking at me.

"Why would I report to Nyambose?" I'm confused, where does my father get in.

"Well, since you report everything to him, every inconvenience, big or small."

He calls it 'inconvenience'? Someone shot a gun at my direction and killed Yoli. Has he ever had someone's child die in his arms?

"Then your father will have a field day shouting at me like a child. You were not the only one there, nobody ran to ask help from their families. Not that they don't have families, Phume and Beauty have families too. But you had to act special and take it to your village without giving us a chance to fix our issues."

Is this really happening? Like he's mad because I called my family in a state of trauma. Why has he been quiet about it if it bothered him? Or I'm just a thing for him to take out his frustrations on.

"I don't want your father to ever shout at me again," he says.

"Are you for real?" I'm in disbelief.

"Yes, I am. He must never shout at me again. I asked for your hand, he agreed, and I paid what he wanted. I don't want to be shouted at and called a boy by him everytime something goes wrong. I never promised him that I'm bringing you to a small heaven where Jesus eats breakfast and lunch and sits 24/7, watching. Ang'bhebhi mahhala, I'm not fucking for free like him."

I'm going to sleep in the main house, I'm not in the mood. I don't care what he's going through, I'm not going to sit here and listen to him taking out his frustration on my father. And by the way, he's not fucking for free. I mean, he is now, but he's been married once.

"Where are you going?" he asks.

"I'm going where I won't see your red, annoying face." I pull one blanket and a pillow, I will see where I sleep, even if it's the

floor. Nyambose will be pissed if he finds out about this, I'm still awake and stressed at this hour, in this condition.

"This is what you do Miyanda." He's following me for God knows what.

Vele this is what I do.

"You're not going to be daddy's girl forever, you have to grow up."

Me? I have to grow up? I'm grown enough to know where my limits are. I know when it's enough for me, I walk away to protect my peace. But he doesn't get it, he never will, because he was born into chaos. If growing up means subjecting myself into chaos, then I will pass.

"Miyanda," he grabs my arm.

We are in the veranda, outside the main house.

"Come back, you're making a scene," he says.

"No, you're making a scene, let go of me!"

"Baby?" Now his voice is low.

I'm not baby to him, I'm just a thing for him to shout at.

The door opens, he's still holding my arm.

Mpatho is still here?

He stops in front of us with a low sigh, "Please take it to your room."

They're not ganging up against me, are they?

"I'm not going to sleep with him," I say.

"Okay, go to bed, he will see where he sleeps," he says.

I can work with that, as long as this one is far from me.

"For real?" It looks like he's not happy with Mpatho's decision.

“Yeah, you already know what’s up, your relationship is the last thing you need them involved in,” Mpatho says.

That shuts him up.

I turn and walk away. Mpatho accompanies me and leaves me outside the door. He’s probably going back home to Phume. I feel like for the first time they need him to be Nkosiyazi, a big brother they lost before they knew him. I’m glad he stayed this late because maybe Bonga and I would’ve caused more drama and invited his greedy family.

I take my clothes off and get in bed. I want to talk to my father but it would prove what Bonga is saying about me. I just don’t know how to live like I don’t have a father. I don’t think I’m doing anything abnormal, he also calls Sphakamiso whenever he has a problem. I don’t have siblings, I have a father.

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I slept after 12am, I kept turning and tossing thinking about everything that has gone down since Unified opened. I don’t know who’s running the shop for them. Is the business even picking up after what happened there? That place needs to be cleansed.

It’s super early, if MaVilakazi was still alive she’d be here getting her son’s laundry. We didn’t get along but I didn’t want her dead. Even though she wasn’t excited for my baby, I wanted them to meet. But she’s not here today, her in-laws are. I have to get up and go make tea for the whole clan.

Yoli will come here and take these sweets herself if I don’t put any in my pocket. She always asks a sweet for eating her breakfast. Sometimes I feel like I’m her easy target, she never

does this to her mother, she eats and takes her plate to the kitchen. Not that I don't enable the behavior too, I love it when she follows me around and does what every other child does to survive, like eating food and wearing shoes, in exchange of sweets or a packet of chips.

"Morning," the person stands at the door.

Is everyone else standing at doors and greeting people so early in the morning?

"Can I come in?" he asks.

"It's your space, not mine, do whatever." I shrug and put more sweets in my pocket.

Why is he staring at me?

I walk past him, he holds my arm, gently this time.

"Yoli is not here," he says.

"How?" I don't understand.

He wraps his arms around me. "Yoli is no longer alive, remember?"

Fuck, no!

"I know," I say, my body trembling.

I hate that I'm this stupid, Yoli died in my arms.

"How did you sleep?" he asks.

I shake my head; I don't know for sure but I know it wasn't good.

"I'm sorry about last night," he says.

About that....what am I doing in his arms?

"You insulted my father," I say.

He exhales heavily and nods. "I'm sure it came out wrongly. I will never disrespect Nyambose, you know how much I appreciate him. But I feel like our relationship should be our relationship, and the Mcineka issues should stay in this yard unless there's a pressing need and we both agree that we need your father's input."

"There was a pressing need that day, I almost died," I say.

"Look baby, I know you will not see things the way I do everyday. I'm not saying don't open up to your father about things that bother you, but don't give your father a platform to think I'm less of a man and shout at me everytime I'm at fault," he says.

I don't call Nyambose everytime there's a problem, just most of the times. But I guess I have to respect his request and make boundaries.

"I love you," he says.

"I love you too. How are you feeling?"

"I don't where to start."

I lead him to bed, we sit down.

"Start where it hurts the most," I say.

"Yoli. I'm responsible for her death. Then my siblings, the younger ones. I have you, the Mnelisi clown is showing genuine support, maybe Nombuso will have him."

He calls Mapholoba a clown? Okay.

"Sphakamiso and Mkhuleko have no one. And they're the ones who needed Ma the most. Mkhuleko has a gift, Ma never followed any procedures, he's been living this dark life of knowing things and be unable to crack his way through him. He's carrying a lot of burden. Then Sphakamiso and the Mhlongo situation. Now I don't have any excuse, I cannot tell

them to go to their mother because she's not here. Mcineka is not here either. You've seen our family, I cannot count on them. Even now they want a cow from me because MaVilakazi emptied her kist and left, I still have to buy a cow for the funeral as well. Then we tap into infidelity issues, I don't know what the charges are for her cheating on Mcineka and giving birth to Sphakamiso."

"Bonga!" I feel bad.

I didn't know they want to hold him responsible for that as well. They're taking advantage of him, MaVilakazi has been alive for decades, why didn't they say all this to her.

"I'm stressed baby. Not because of finances, Mpatho is available to help, it's the emotional part of it." He blows out a heavy sigh and looks at me.

He looks so broken, my poor man.

"Does it make me a bad son if I feel a bit of resentment towards her?"

My eyes widen. His own mother?

"She knew the mess she was leaving behind, I'd understand if it was natural."

I'm lost.

"Natural?" I ask.

He clears his throat, "The things that happened."

"Oh, okay. I think you're allowed to feel angry, you're carrying a lot on your shoulders."

"Thank you," he nods, looking relieved.

I was on my way to make breakfast, now that we've made up I think I will be able to function.

He pulls me back and kisses my lips, then puts his hand in my pocket and takes out the sweets I had put for my imaginary Yoli.

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SPHAKAMISO

Salo has been calling, maybe five times a day, ever since he told her the news. Now more than ever he knows that he might never be accepted by Mhlongo's wife. What explanation will he give her? He doesn't even know how she got involved with a married man and what was the deal between the two of them.

To get his mind off things he gets inside the house and helps Miyanda with breakfast. There are five other women who just woke up and sat down with their smart dresses on. They're not pregnant, neither they're disabled. His phone rings as he's busy running Miyanda's errands; serving every breathing thing in the yard.

It's Salo, she worries a lot.

"Hi," he answers.

"We are outside," she says.

"Outside where?" He's confused.

"Outside. We asked around. Aphelele says there's a dog here, is it going to bite us?"

This is crazy! He puts the tray down and goes outside.

There's a white car, they're really here. He knows they're with Aphelele, he needed someone to brighten his days but didn't want to disturb his son from school to use him as a healing tool.

Salo is driving, she opens the door but when she sees Ruby behind him she closes the door. He chases Ruby away laughing and makes his way to the car.

She climbs out of the car, she's wearing heels and sunglasses. Hopefully she didn't bring Nokwanda with her because handling Nokwanda is not something one can do while mourning.

They hug, she smells expensive.

The other door opens, Nondu steps out.

They met once, they didn't know each other. This is the second time they meet, now as brother and sister.

"This is awkward, I'm no longer the only child," she says with a sigh.

Is she being serious?

"I hate you," she says. But she's coming to hug him.

It's a long hug.

"You look like him," she says.

This is good to know.

"Was he dark?" he asks.

"Dark as a moon," she says.

Salo clears her throat, "I think it's dark as night."

"Night and moon, same thing," Nondu says and looks back at him. "Aphe is missing."

He frowns, his heart beating hard. "Didn't you say he's in the car?"

"No, he's missing, I don't know where he is." She gives him a significant look.

Hide and seek! Damn, it's been so long since he was a hands-on parent. Aphelele is definitely hiding on the seats at the back but he will pretend to look at the tyres and in the air.

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 125

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

It's my first time meeting Aphelele, he's cute, all children are. He remembers everyone he knew, especially Yoli. He's been asking where she is, he brought two yoyos for them to play with. He's different from Yoli though; they behave differently. Yoli wasn't scared of people, except the Mshazis. This one is either following his fathers or sitting with his talkative aunts. The other one looks normal, Sphakamiso's sister. She has box-braids that look like they've outlived their duration and a floral dress on. She's simple, yet beautiful. Salo, I know her name, is a bit glamorous. You know the type that wears engagement rings and carry their iPhones and car keys. They're warm people though, they came with breads and six packs of cold drinks. That's how normal people show up for the mourning family. Unlike the Mcineka extended family members that came carrying their big bags only, yet they expect to be served bread and tea three times a day.

Bonga hadn't seen them, he's coming in. It's weird, husband's children meet their mother's fling's children. But them coming here have made things better because at least now we know that there's no animosity from the Mhlongo side.

"We are happy to see you, with our prodigal son," he says. Aphelele has left his aunts to stand between his legs.

"He couldn't wait to come," Salo says.

“It’s a pity he sees us during these dark times, when his partner-in-crime is no more. And his grandmother who was planning to come and meet your family to talk about the past.” He’s been hiding the infidelity issue from Sphakamiso because we know how hard he takes this identity dilemma. The last thing he needs is to feel like he’s a burden to his brother.

“MaNkosi will wait, there’s no rush. She wished to be here to show support but nobody has come to her to introduce Sphakamiso, she only knows about him because of Nzuzo. Things have to be done the right way.” She sounds matured. I think she delivered that well, it makes sense.

Bonga looks at Sphakamiso, “Can you check how the tent people are doing?”

Dismissal means something needs to be discussed behind your back. Sphakamiso knows this, he takes Aphelele and walks out.

It’s about the damage payment demanded by the Mcinekas. Mhlongo, who ‘intruded the Mcineka kraal’, is now dead. He didn’t have a son, just Nondumezulu, Sphakamiso’s half-sister. Nobody is going to take that responsibility, I don’t see how the wife is going to agree to come and pay damages for her late husband’s infidelity. This leaves Bonga in another dilemma.

“I’m sure the solution will come once you and my mother talk. Yes, she’s hurt, but she’s not a monster. Sphakamiso is innocent in all this,” Nondumezulu says.

“That’s why I don’t want to stress him, I don’t want him to find out what these people are saying. He’s already been through a lot. Once we’ve passed through all this I will come and see your mother,” he says.

Now that I’ve met the Mhlongos I have hope for Sphakamiso. All his wishes will come true. I believe who MaNkosi is reflects through her daughter. It’s not going to be hard as he thought,

the only problem he might have is the family his mother was married to, the Mcinekas.

“So, how did the snake bite her? Is it something common in this place?” Salo asks.

This question, yeer.

“No,” Bonga says.

“That’s really sad. But you will be fine guys. I know for now it feels like the world just crumbled down, I was in the same situation not so long ago. God doesn’t take and not restore. You just need to hold each other’s hand and stand together as a family,” -Salo with the words of encouragement.

“Siyabonga MaMhlongo,” -Bonga.

I really hope they will stand together and be extra kind to Nombuso, she needs all the support she can get.

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On Friday afternoon the body arrives with Malibongwe, the Mcineka uncles and one woman. A van stops behind them with a goat, before they enter the yard they have to make amends in the presence of the family. Malibongwe thought he had it all figured out. Yes, he’s angry at his mother but he still wanted to protect her relationship with his siblings. But now the elders are calling everyone, all her kids included. Mpatho has put the past behind, he’s been here mourning with the rest of them. Only Nombuso is missing, she’s burying Yoli tomorrow as well. Her father insisted on the same day, he was probably doing it on purpose to punish them. Even though they’re not allowed to, Miyanda and Phume will wake up in the morning and go to Yoli’s funeral, they won’t go to the cemetery though.

“Your mother wronged this family, in more than one way,” one uncle says, repeating what has been said the whole week.

“We know baba,” -Malibongwe.

“Kufanele sivale umkhokha omubi, sishweleze kwabadala.”

Malibongwe nods, his breath held up. Mpatho is kneeling behind him, Sphakamiso on his right, Mkhuleko on the left.

They burn impepho on the lid and bring it close to the goat’s face. This can be done silently, the ancestors know what this apology is for, there’s no need for announcement.

But, some people just can’t shut up.

“MaVilakazi mfazi kamfowethu sikukhumula intambo esemqaleni, we are untying the rope around your neck and...”

Sphakamiso cuts him short, “Sorry baba, what did you say?”

“Be quiet,” the uncle says and continues. “MaVilakazi mfazi kamfowethu, please look forward, don’t look back. You left by your own hand, may it be the first and the last time such bad luck happens in this family.”

Sphakamiso looks at Malibongwe, his eyes suddenly bloodshot and filled with anger. Malibongwe told him to take Miyanda home because he suspected that she’d been shot by the same people who shot Yoli. He obeyed, then when Mpatho came with Mkhuleko they returned to the taxi stop, only to find Malibongwe with their mother’s dead body. By then he’d already called the police to the scene, he told them she’d been bitten by a snake. She was in the bushes, that was easily believable.

“Ma killed herself?” Sphakamiso asks.

“I have...I was going to tell you when the time is right,” Malibongwe says, stuttering.

“And which time is that?” Mpatho.

They're interrogating him, it wasn't supposed to be like this, the timing is wrong.

Sphakamiso gets up and leaves. Mpatho is on his feet.

The elders try to calm down the situation but emotions are already too high.

"You have no right to withhold such information, we are her children too, you're not her only child Malibongwe," -Mpatho.

"I know, I wasn't trying to exclude anyone. Can we just do this first?" He's begging. This is not the right time to fight and argue, they're in the middle of the ceremony.

Mpatho walks away, he's leaving, going back home to his wife. He will be attending Yoli's funeral tomorrow, the Mcinekas can bury their mother in peace.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Today wasn't the day for all of this. Yes, this is how they are, natural fighters. But today was about bringing their mother's spirit home, for that unity was needed. Mpatho just left, his mother's coffin still outside the yard. Sphakamiso left too, he's walked in his room. Bonga is here following him, asking him to come back. I know they found out, I also freaked out when he told me but I understood his intentions. He didn't mean to hurt anyone, he just wanted them to remember and celebrate their mother in a good light, one last time.

"Sphakamiso," I walk in to find them in a heated argument.

“Guys, not today please!” I’m begging, if those people hear this noise they won’t mind charging Bonga for it.

“Sis Miyanda did you know about this?” He turns to me.

“That’s not important right now, guys please go back outside to your mother’s ritual.” They’ve left Mkhuleko alone, a child for Christ’ sake.

“Our mother? It’s Malibongwe’s mother, his alone. If that was my mother Malibongwe wouldn’t have lied to me and she definitely wouldn’t have taken her own life a day before fixing my identity. I struggled in front of her. Her husband abused me in front of her. Her daughter abused my son in front of her and him.” He turns his eyes to Bonga.

Are we doing this? Now?

He’s tying his laces, I don’t know where he’s going.

“I’m only good enough as a brother when I’m your employee; mopping your floors and turning engines. Other than that awung’boni, awung’thandi, you are just like them. But I don’t blame you, vele we don’t share the same blood.”

I get that he’s upset but this is not necessary, mostly not true either. Bonga doesn’t respond, I knew he wouldn’t be able to because when cornered with words he never get anything out. When Sphakamiso walks out I can see how hurt he is. But there’s no time to nurse anyone’s feelings.

“Babe, you have to go,” I say.

He takes a deep breath and leaves. I know they will talk about this and work it out. I just don’t know when, I think this one cut deep and he’s going to bear his fault with MaVilakazi’s sins, they will redirect all their anger towards him.

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PHUMELELE

I expected him to come home late but he just came home. I was in the kitchen busy making myself a bowl of amasi, when I follow him to ask how everything went he's coming out with a box. Something is not right. I follow him outside to the backyard.

Why is he burning that box?

"Are those your mother's letters?" I'm quite surprised, I thought they were like a legacy thing and he was keeping them for the next generation or something.

"Malibongwe's mother, he's her only child," he says

I'm actually lost.

"Did you guys fight again?" This might be the only explanation.

He doesn't respond. I guess they fought, the timing is too wrong this time around.

"Did you even wait until the body arrived?" I ask.

"I did," he says and takes me away from the flame coming from the burning box.

I'm anxious, they've been getting along so well planning this funeral. Even with Yoli's killers Mpatho has taken a side and it's not the side of the woman that partially raised him.

"What happened?" I ask.

He puts me on the chair, like I'm a frail old woman.

"Can you believe that she killed herself?"

I don't understand. Yes, she was poisonous but she wasn't literally a snake.

“MaVilakazi was a snake?” I ask.

“No, she committed suicide, MaVilakazi killed herself.”

She was old, how was that even an option?

“Did she hear about Yoli?” I ask. It would make sense if she heard and couldn’t bear the pain.

“Maybe, who knows what that last unknown caller was saying to her?”

What is that supposed to mean? This man is too angry, he’s not giving me anything.

“There was an unknown caller in her log?” I ask.

“Yes, they spoke for 2 minutes before the snake bite her. I mean, before she found a rope and killed herself,” he says.

“That’s confusing. But it could’ve been someone unrelated to the situation.”

“And Aunt Nomusa’s people just knew that Bonga was hosting a braai, where and when, and they tried to take out Miyanda?”

It doesn’t make sense. I mean, they could’ve heard from the streets and MaVilakazi could’ve killed herself because she was tired of the changing climate. She was getting along with Miyanda that day and I don’t think their issues were that deep.

“She had no reason to want Miyanda dead. And how on earth would have she convinced Aunt Nomusa’s people to target Miyanda instead of Malibongwe, the actual killer?”

“Even if Malibongwe pulled the trigger in front of her she would’ve said Miyanda put him up to it. I’m not saying she did it, I’m just questioning her actions. I hate her, I wish you didn’t make me look for her.”

But he was eventually happy. Also, now he has siblings because I made that decision.

“That’s not fair, you had forgiven her and you two were working on your relationship,” I say.

“She didn’t want any relationship with me, right from the beginning. I was stupid, I’m already in arranged marriage, I didn’t need an arranged, unwilling mother on top of my problems. Tomorrow we are going to Yoli’s funeral.”

I was going there, but not with him.

“Inkosana yakhe izomngcwaba yodwa, her prince will bury her alone,” he says.

He’s angry, I think this is one decision he’s going to regret in life. Not attending your own mother’s funeral???

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 126

PHUMELELE

We attended Yoli’s funeral, Miyanda was already here. She’s friends with Mpatho in a way, I know that she’s one part of Malibongwe that he truly adores. But there’s been some tension between them. Coming back from the graveyard we were located in a room, as the in-laws, even though now it’s just a past tense. One thing about Miyanda is that she fights her man’s battles, I knew she was going to say something about Mpatho not going to MaVilakazi’s funeral.

“You, Sphakamiso and Nombuso weren’t there,” she starts by mentioning. We were not aware that Sphakamiso skipped the funeral too. Aphelele is here with Miyanda, it was very thoughtful of her to bring him along.

“Malibongwe will bury his mother in peace,” Mpatho says.

I understand why he's mad but I also think they could've gone to say goodbye.

"That's not fair though, you're all making him carry your mother's sins. I'm not saying he was right, he did what he thought was right, and his fears became true when you all decided to write her off after finding out that she took her own life."

I must throw in my two cents, I think she's missing the point.

"But that's not the real issue, Malibongwe kept his siblings in the dark about the death of their own mother. He acted like he's the only child that matters. I'm not saying Mpatho is justified to miss the funeral." Why is he staring at me like that? I was against him missing the funeral from the onset.

"So this is to punish him?" Miyanda asks.

"They're hurt, they can react however they want. Are you trying to tell me that you don't see anything wrong with what your man did?"

"Of course I'm not saying that but...."

Nombuso walks in. Is she supposed to be walking up and down already? I don't like this brave face she suddenly has, I want her to cry as much as she wants.

"Your man didn't come," she says to Miyanda.

Another problem, she doesn't know about the funeral back home.

"He had an emergency," Miyanda says.

"Sphakamiso and Mkhuleko too? And my mother?"

Miyanda drops her eyes.

This is hard to keep, she won't understand why her brothers couldn't attend her daughter's funeral.

“Nkosiyazi,” she turns her eyes to him.

She’s close with him but he’s been scared of communicating with her during these times.

“Yebo sisi,” -Mpatho.

First time he’s ever respected her as the oldest.

“What happened at home?” she asks.

I almost freeze, I look at Mpatho, he’s dumbfounded.

The Mcineka monsters, I mean elders, made it clear that she will be told once she gets home.

“It’s your mother, she was rushed to the hospital and it’s not looking good,” Miyanda lies without a flinch.

Nombuso frowns, “What happened to her? Was she sick?”

“Yes, it was her diabetes,” Miyanda.

“My mother doesn’t have diabetes.”

“It’s recently discovered,” -Miyanda.

“Oh, please charge her phone when you see her, I need to talk to her...and your man.” The last part sounds cold, like a threat. I hope her and Malibongwe will be okay.

She asks if we’ve been sorted with everything and then takes Aphelele from Miyanda and leaves with him. Their relationship wasn’t good but Aphelele is an innocent child, he’s forgotten about everything and just excited to see his aunt.

“I will have a conversation with him,” Mpatho says.

I thought we were angry at Malibongwe.

Miyanda sighs out in relief, “Thank you.”

He’s only doing this because he has a soft spot for her. Funnily I also raised concerns and couldn’t get him back to his senses. But as long as they work things out, I also don’t want him to

bottle things up. He's lost his mother, the person he longed for his whole life, I want him to mourn that instead of being angry at Malibongwe.

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I know I shouldn't but I'm worried about Sphakamiso. I know he wouldn't just leave his son behind, he's hurting wherever he is. But when you're married to a lion it's not everything you can talk to your man about.

I'm sitting on the kitchen chair trying to figure out how I'm going to convince him to have a conversation with Sphakamiso, just to know how he's feeling. I feel like they're going through a similar pain. MaVilakazi died without meeting Beauty to discuss Mpatho's identity issues. Even though that will be handled by MaNhleko and her husband, I still think she was selfish to just leave knowing how much Mpatho needs her. Same as Sphakamiso, she needed to take him home first.

Beauty walks in, I had forgotten about her. She went to MaVilakazi's funeral, without anyone asking her. We are slowly acting like a family.

"Hey," I sit up straight.

She takes her sunglasses off. I don't know why she was dressed up like it was her day. Village funerals don't need attires and hats, you just need to know how to cry loud and hide plates of food in the tent.

"What a show!" she says.

So there was drama, that's just like MaVilakazi.

"What happened?" I ask.

“Apparently she committed suicide.”

Old news, why does she think Mpatho didn't attend the funeral?

“So this is how she gave birth; oldest child, her daughter, she got her from her husband. Then Mpatho from your stepfather. She went back to her husband and had that yellow thug. The family says her husband went to Durban to look for a job, but moghel couldn't live without vitamin D, she went to Mandeni and came back with Sphakamiso. Before she retired she gave her husband one last child. I heard one aunt whispering that she had impene.”

I didn't like MaVilakazi, I'm sure the feeling was mutual. But I don't like hearing this about her, now those aunts are pretending like Mcineka was a good husband. The only thing MaVilakazi failed to do was to use contraceptives.

“Bekunembuzi yenhambuluko outside the yard,” she says.

This is a different level of gossip. I think once you start talking about people's alter issues and proceedings your gossip skills have underlying mental issues. This is not appropriate at all.

“All families have issues Beauty, us too,” I say.

“I know but at least we had nice stews in all our funerals. I don't know who was cooking, maybe the pregnant wife, that chicken tasted like sponge. I even wondered if they didn't cook with the same water they had washed the corpse with.”

Mpatho walks in. Thank God now this gossip can end.

“Hey Beauty,” he says, opening the microwave to get his food.

“Hey. How was your niece's funeral?” Beauty asks.

“Sad, but it was a funeral she deserved, Malibongwe did a good job,” he says.

“I wish I can say the same about his mother's.”

He doesn't say anything, I know he regrets not attending.

Beauty goes to her room to freshen up.

This one sits next to me and eats. How do I start this conversation without triggering his insecurities?

"What do you want to say?" he asks.

I've been staring at him.

"Nothing," I say.

"Forever hold your peace."

Jeez, why am I scared? It's not like he will beat me.

"I'm worried about Sphakamiso," I say.

"I'm also worried about Vuyolwethu, Nelisa, Bridget and...."

All those are exes?

"You're so childish. Sphakamiso lost his mother and he's out there, God knows where, feeling unloved because of how she did things. I know you're heartless but you know that kind of pain. Do better." That's it, I'm done talking.

"Do better? I'm not MaVilakazi."

Maybe my hand is listening to him.

"Phume don't start a fight, today is not a good day."

"I'm not starting a fight. I'm just saying you can check up on him, I'm sure if it was Mkhuleko you would've looked for him. Malibongwe's hands are full, he can't do everything by himself." I can't believe I'm speaking in his favor, Malibongwe doesn't even like me.

"Sphakamiso doesn't like me, he probably wouldn't even pick my call," he says.

"I'm sure he will, I doubt anyone has spoken to him about anything, let's just try."

He takes a deep sigh. "Call him, ngizothini."

I don't know why he's acting like I've placed a gun on his forehead. I look for Sphakamiso's number and use his phone to make a phone call.

When he picks up I give back the phone because I don't want him misreading the situation.

"Sho," he says.

"Who is this?" – Sphakamiso.

"Mpatho. Where are you?"

"I'm at the hotel," he says.

On this day? I'm shocked.

"What hotel?" Mpatho.

"Bayside, Durban."

"Okay."

No, he can't end it like that, we called for a reason.

I nudge him and whisper to him, he's got to ask if he's okay there. He could be at the hotel planning suicide.

He clears his throat, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," -Sphakamiso.

"You missed both funeral and left your son with Miyanda without even asking. They're worried about you," he says.

I grab the phone and block the speaker with my hand.

"Can you be his brother for once?" This shit is long overdue.

Obviously Sphakamiso is not going to take the first step mending their relationship because he didn't fuck up 80% of it, Mpatho did. It's time they grow up, they've got no mother now.

I give him back the phone, he looks a bit annoyed.

“I’m worried about you,” he says.

“I’m not fine but I will be, I just need time. I already called Nombuso, we are good, she knows that I loved Yoli.”

See, it’s not hard getting someone to talk if you show genuine care.

“What about MaVilakazi?” he asks.

“I was never a priority to her, so I don’t care, I’m going to figure things out.”

My heart breaks but I heard that he already have a relationship with his siblings from the father side, hopefully elders will welcome him warmly too.

“It will work out. I wish she’d fought for you to have a relationship with Mhlongo. There’s nothing worse than not experiencing having a certain parent because of one parent’s stubbornness. I hope Aphelele don’t go through what we went through looking for one parent.”

This is a different topic, one we didn’t call to discuss. I just hope Sphakamiso’s doesn’t drop the call because he made it clear that he doesn’t want Snehlanhla in Aphelele’s life, out of fear that she’d go back to drugs and dump the child again.

“She wants to meet Aphelele, she’s still in rehab, she’s doing good,” Mpatho says.

“All this effort just to have me forget about Phume? You have a lot of time on your hands, son.”

Sigh! There we go again.

“It was her who wanted me to help Aphelele’s mother,” Mpatho says.

“Why?” he asks.

“Sphakamiso you can’t be this stubborn forever. Help is help, even if it comes from the enemy. Whether you like me or not, Aphelele will be happy to meet his mother for the first time. This shit will be complicated if you leave it under the carpet for too long.”

I hear a heavy sigh. I know this comes from Mpatho’s heart even though I made the suggestion. I haven’t gone to rehab to see Sne but he’s been there twice. A huge part of him feels guilty for Aphelele’s misery, because if his father had a job half of the things he went through wouldn’t have happened.

“Give her my number the next time you see her,” -Sphakamiso.

“Alright. Who are you with there?” Mpatho asks.

There’s a female voice in the background.

“That’s the hotel staff member, I’ve got to go.” He drops the call.

What the fuck? On the day of his mother’s funeral. Grief doesn’t send people under the skirts, he’s a whore, he was born one.

I’m so disgusted.

“You heard him, he’s fine,” Mpatho.

“Yeah, thanks for reaching out.” I actually thought he was out there hurting but it turns out he’s on vacation with a girl.

“You’re so caring,” he says.

Weird compliment. I look at him and instantly know that something is up.

“Are you hungry?” I ask.

“No,” he says.

“Horny?” I ask.

“No. But I’d appreciate you worrying about me the same way you do with other people.”

I know how he’s doing, I’m with him day in and out. He simply wants to be mad about me saying I’m worried about Sphakamiso, now he’s looking for any small hole to pick on.

“You’re next to me Mpatho, for once please just relax, there’s nothing to be dramatic about.”

“How am I being dramatic? I’m sitting down, talking calmly with my wife who look pissed by something that’s happening in Durban.”

I’m not pissed, he’s dramatic. I’ve been there for him, from the very first day. Miyanda knows, we even planned to have a spa trip, that’s how physically draining the Mcineka funeral preparations were. So I’m not going to have Mpatho saying I don’t worry about him whereas everything I’ve been doing has been for him. I don’t remember him giving me the same support when my own mother died, he can take a seat.

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 127

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Nyambose said they were not going to come to the funeral for safety reasons. I found that dramatic but understood where he was coming from to some extent. So I’m surprised to come home to a big blanket and reedmat coming from the Mthethwas as a farewell gift to MaVilakazi. Bonga says Mam’ Zonke was here, so Nyambose changed his mind. I’m sure she wondered where I was, I didn’t tell them that I was going to be at Yoli’s funeral.

Surprisingly, the Mcineka relatives have all left, except for that one old woman who ended up sitting on the mattress. It's said that she's waiting for others to have their immediate cleansing and then cleanse tools that were used in the grave, uk'sula amageja, and leave like the rest of them. Those people just came to dictate, ask for ridiculous fine that they were scared of asking from MaVilakazi, and stress the fuck out of Bonga and leave. They couldn't even stay one night knowing very well that the children here are not in harmony. I mean, Nombuso hasn't been told, Mpatho didn't attend the funeral, and I'm still lying to Aphelele everytime he asks me where his father is. He doesn't know me, we just met a few days ago and now I'm the only person he's seeing.

I put Aphelele in his pyjamas, he will sleep with me because I have no hope that his father will come home.

"Are you hungry?" I ask.

He nods, "Yes."

Do kids ever say no to food?

"Okay, let me go and dish rice for you, I'm sure there are still left-overs." Gosh, and the dishes. I saw three piles outside the veranda and big dirty pots, all waiting for me. They didn't do shit. Even the neighbors and MaVilakazi's friends, I judge them.

"No Miyanda, I want 'nudees'," the little one says.

"What is that?" I've never heard of nudees before.

Or is it nudes, naked pictures, with a foreign accent?

"Nudees," he repeats.

I'm confused.

Bonga walks in, I hope he will rescue me.

“Tell your father what you want,” I say.

He looks at Bonga, “I want Miyanda to do nudees.’

“Don’t call her Miyanda ever again, it’s mama,” -Bonga.

I really didn’t mind, kids learn as they grow.

“Ngiyaxolisa mana,” he says, without being asked or told.

Isn’t he like 4? Gosh, he’s so well-trained. Reminds me of Sphakamiso on his good days, he can be so humble and good-mannered.

“It’s fine boy,” I say, brushing his head.

Bonga smiles proudly. “Ufuna izikelemu lezi zabo.”

Izikelemu? It’s food for Christ’ sake.

“Noodles?” I say.

Aphelele’s face brightens, he smiles like his father. “Yes mama, nudees.”

This child, I almost stripped naked and took pictures thinking he wants nudes.

I make his noodles and feed him. After eating he just wants to listen to a story, someone must’ve introduced him to bedtime stories. I have no child appropriate stories to read for him. I don’t think his fathers own any copy, even a magazine one. I have illegal PDFs of Fifty Shades Of Grey, I can’t read that for him. So I tell him a random story of a cat, he falls asleep in no time.

I actually wanted to have a conversation with Bonga. I know he’s tired, he has to find a space to sleep. Maybe he will crash with Mkhuleko or take Sphakamiso’s room.

He's lying in bed, staring at the roof, wrapped deeply in his thoughts.

"Babe are you good?" I ask.

"Yeah." He takes a deep breath and sits up.

I know he's not good. A lot has happened and he just buried his mother, missing his niece's funeral while at it.

"I want us to talk," I say.

He nods.

"I had a conversation with Mpatho about him missing the funeral. He was offended, Bonga. Greatly offended. I guess Sphakamiso was too, maybe Nombuso will also be offended. I know what your intentions were, but unfortunately that's not how Mpatho sees it. I think you should stop trying to explain and just apologize to him. Maybe acknowledge that he's your brother and he's older than you."

"Yeah, ngiyakuzwa," he says, rubbing his forehead.

I believe he's learnt his lesson, next time he won't hide anything.

"Maybe use that time to address the past as well. I feel like the time for the constant fighting and the back and forth has ended, your mother is gone. I don't think Mpatho has ever had anything against you. In his heart you're his young brother, he just doesn't have a platform to be a brother to you because of the past and how you've already assumed the prince of MaVilakazi's role."

I genuinely like Mpatho, like I like Sphakamiso and Mkhuleko. Even though he cannot exercise his role as a brother to them but I know he's protected Bonga. From the onset, he chose Bonga, a brother he'd just found out about, over a woman who took care of him from teenagehood. Even now I know that he's

going to stand with Bonga against those shooters who killed Yoli. He's loyal and kind, I want Bonga to fix that relationship.

"I'm not MaVilakazi's prince," he says.

"I know, you're playing your role as a Mcineka. But your relationship with MaVilakazi was better, if I wasn't in the picture it would've been the best. But it was still better than others, maybe that's why your siblings are mad at you and feeling like what you did was intentionally to exclude them. Make peace, right now is not the time for you to be alone."

"I'm not alone, you're here with me." He takes my hand and kisses it.

I will always be by his side but I don't think I'm all he needs in life.

"Count on me baby," I say.

He nods, these days he can't even smile and show me those dimples. He's exhausted, it's written all over his face.

"But you need Mpatho as Nkosiyazi now. See what your family did to you, you guys only have each other. And you're lucky to have so many siblings, unlike me who will only depend on relatives when my father is no more."

"Ngiyakuzwa," he says.

I kiss his cheek. My cutie, he looks good even when he's sad.

"Check up on Mkhuleko before you sleep," I say.

"He's fine but I will talk to him. Are you going to manage with mommy duties?"

"Aphelele is a big boy, I'm sure he won't give me any trouble."

He gives me a goodnight kiss and leaves.

Aphelele is already fast asleep, hopefully when he wakes up Sphakamiso will be back. Taking care of him is not a problem

but I feel like he's used to certain people, he might end up getting uncomfortable.

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Malibongwe arrives at the Mshazis early in the morning. He wanted to start here and then pay Unified a visit. Sphakamiso runs the shop but he might no longer be interested after what Malibongwe did. His words were hurtful. For Malibongwe fighting with Mpatho and Nombuso is a norm. Mkhuleko never really fight with Malibongwe because of the age difference. But him and Sphakamiso have bumped heads only a few times and it has never been comfortable. He still holds a grudge against him for what happened to Aphelele. In his mind Malibongwe could've done or said something. Then the shop situation, Malibongwe thought he was doing a good thing by giving him all the reigns. He's not an employee, they haven't discussed any contracts. He took it as a family shop, ran by his brother and taking care of everybody's needs, including Sphakamiso's tuition fees next year and his fatherhood expenses.

Phume opens the gate for him and leads him inside the house. They used to like each other back in the days when she was Sphakamiso's girlfriend. He liked their relationship; he looked after her if Sphakamiso wasn't around. They were not friends, neither were they close, but she knew that he liked her and believed in her. But now she can't say the same, he blames her for the break up.

"He's still in the gym, I will call him," she says offering him a seat.

He sits down, "Thank you."

“How is Miyanda?” she asks.

“She’s fine, thank you.” His body language gives it away; he’d like not to have any type of conversation with her.

“I saw Aphelele, he’s grown,” she says.

He takes a deep breath, “Yeah, he is.”

“I can’t believe he’s my nephew, such a small world,” she says, intentionally striking a conversation.

“Yeah, very small, Mpatho is our brother too,” Malibongwe says.

She chuckles and leans behind the couch, looking at him. He holds that against her, like she had a choice.

“You know that it wasn’t my fault, right? I gave him a chance again and again, even after he hurt me the way he did, and it just didn’t work out.”

“Because he didn’t have money Phume, say it.”

“And he had a secret child. I gave him my innocence and my heart. He knows that, I was never with him because of money because he never had any. He fucked us up and we have both moved on.”

His eyebrows furrow. Sphakamiso hasn’t moved on, what is she talking about?

“We called him, to check how he was holding up, and he was at Bayside Hotel in Durban. No singles ever go there, he’s obviously dating that girl,” she says.

He doesn’t know ‘that girl’ but he will find Bayside Hotel.

“Mkhuleko and I buried our mother alone and he’s in hotels?” He’s sweating within a minute.

Mpatho walks in, he heard half of their last conversation. They're discussing her relationship with Sphakamiso. It's been decades, yet he's still the top pick and a topic.

"You can talk about him outside," he says.

Phume looks at him and releases a deep sigh. She kinda knew that she was triggering something yesterday but she hoped that he'd be mature for once.

"Don't be weird," Malibongwe says, standing up.

"How am I weird? You came all the way here ngosuku olumnyama to talk about a relationship that died decades ago." His chest is drenched in sweat. He was coming to get a bottle of water but now all he wants is to punch someone on the face.

"I started the conversation," Phume says.

He looks at her, of course she started the conversation because she's thirsty for Sphakamiso, or is it Phakaaa ngezwi lobufebe?

"I was addressing the tension between Malibongwe and I. You know that he hates me, right?"

Malibongwe sighs, "I don't hate you."

"I know you do, but it's fine. Talk to your brother, I will make tea." She walks away.

Malibongwe turns to Mpatho. "What did I do?"

"Hhayi-bo, do I look like I live inside her head?"

"You live with her," he says.

"Come and live with her too, you will know."

"What's up with the attitude? You're supposed to be the older one. I came here in peace, I'm not here to fight anyone. I don't have a problem with her, we evolved." This is the best way he can put it, they both evolved, so did their relationship. He can

no longer relate to her, she's also moved on to a relationship he's not a part of.

"What do you want?" Mpatho asks.

He mentally prepared for this all night. He's here to humble himself.

"I'm sorry," he says.

"Miyanda told you to come here and act apologetic. What are you sorry for?"

"The whole thing. I wasn't excluding you because you're not important, I just didn't want you to be angry at her, your relationship was good on her last days. But I guess it didn't work the way I thought it would because we are here anyway."

"Malibongwe you had a better and longer relationship with her, and yes I'm not a Mcineka, neither am I that close to be a Vilakazi nephew. But I deserved to know. What annoys me the most is that I was there that night and I never left your side even when your uncles and aunts talked shit about me and Sphakamiso and intentionally excluded us from the funeral arrangements. Look, I know that you're a piece of shit but that was low."

"I'm a piece of shit?" He chews his bottom lip and then shakes his head. He didn't come here to be insulted. He's apologizing, is that not enough?

"You are a piece of shit. What are you going to say to Nombuso?"

That's another topic, the one he'd rather not think about.

"I don't know," he says, taking a deep sigh.

He hasn't been able to sleep peacefully ever since Yoli died.

"How did they know where to find you?" Mpatho asks.

“Maybe you told them,” Malibongwe.

He clicks his tongue. “Udakiwe!”

“I don’t know, I don’t have a lot of inside enemies.”

“What about MaVilakazi?”

“No. For what?”

“Because you disobeyed her and brought Miyanda home.”

“They had made peace, she apologized to her in the morning, that same day.”

“And she was targeted by a bullet later. Did you track that caller’s number?”

Malibongwe shakes his head, “I deleted the number and destroyed her sim card.”

“Why?” -Mpatho.

“Because I don’t want to know.” It has crossed his mind. He attempted to call the number once and a man answered, he sounded young. He dropped the call without saying anything, then he deleted and destroyed the sim card.

“How are you doing after everything?” Mpatho asks.

“I don’t know,” he shrugs.

“I will handle the investigation and Aunt Nomusa’s family. But it puts me in a difficult position because Phume is loyal to them, she loved Aunt Nomusa, we both did.”

“Thank you,” he nods with relief. He hasn’t thought about justice or revenge, there’s been a lot going on to even think about the killers. Of course Yoli’s death can’t go in vain but it will be complicated because her death was unfortunate like Aunt Nomusa’s, neither one of them deserved to die.

Phume comes back from the kitchen with her mug of tea and a huge piece of chocolate cake on the plate. She joins them on the couch and eats.

Malibongwe looks at Mpatho. Weren't they getting tea too?

"I probably did something. I will walk you out," Mpatho says.

Malibongwe stands up with a frown. Miyanda usually reacts right away if he does something, this thing of promising tea and then realizing later that you are angry is a form of abuse. But Mpatho knows his woman and her delayed reactions, he looks unbothered.

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 128

It's before the check-out hour when Malibongwe arrives at Bayside Hotel to enquire about a certain guest. It takes a lot of convincing, he has to prove that he's Sphakamiso's brother before they show him the room. He knocks twice before a young girl opens. He knows her from somewhere, he just can't remember well.

"Is Sphakamiso here?" he asks.

"Yes, come in." She steps aside.

The shorts she's wearing are too short and she seems not to mind at all.

Sphakamiso only has a towel wrapped around his waist, when Malibongwe walks in he gets up from the bed. This is a surprise, an unpleasant one.

“Why are you here?” he asks, glancing at Nokwanda who’s standing confidently in her short pyjamas listening to their conversation.

“I can ask you the same. Who is this?” Malibongwe.

“I’m Nokwanda,” she answers for herself. “We met at the braai before the shit-show.”

He’s taken aback. Now he remembers seeing this face at the braai but they didn’t meet, he had just made up with Miyanda, he didn’t have time to mingle.

Sphakamiso looks like he’d rather not have her opening her mouth, it’s good for other things, not talking.

“Does she know that you lost your mother and she was buried just yesterday?” Malibongwe asks him.

“I know. My deep condolences to the family as a whole,” - Nokwanda.

“Thank you,” Malibongwe says, then he looks straight at his brother. He came here to take him home but this situation makes his blood boil. If Sphakamiso was here trying to deal with grief he would’ve understood because people mourn differently, but he’s here with someone’s daughter.

“Did you sleep with her?” Malibongwe asks.

“Since when do you ask me a question like this?”

“I’m asking you now, did you sleep with her?”

He looks away, his jaw tightened. He’s not going to reveal such, especially with Nokwanda present, he doesn’t kiss and tell.

Malibongwe looks at Nokwanda, “Did he sleep with you?”

She looks at Sphakamiso for a hint. Is it a secret or not? For her sex is not a taboo, she was raised by an open-minded father.

“We used protection,” she says.

Malibongwe blows out a sigh and walks towards the window with his hands on his waist. He’s pissed, Sphakamiso knows it.

He turns back and looks at Nokwanda. “Does your mother know that you’re here?”

“She’s kinda banned from our lives, I live with my dad. He knows that I’m in Durban.”

“Having sex with a mourning guy?” Malibongwe asks.

She glances at Sphakamiso, a bit confused. “Ummm, no, not all the details.”

She’s clearly not in touch with her traditional roots, otherwise she wouldn’t be here looking unbothered. But Sphakamiso knows, he was old enough when they lost Mcineka, they were taught how things are done.

“Wena, you’re sleeping with someone’s daughter the night after your mother was buried. Is that how you were taught growing up?” He walks back towards them.

Nokwanda throws her arm around Sphakamiso. He releases a sigh of relief when Malibongwe stops.

“Uzoyigeza ngani le ngane?” -Malibongwe.

He doesn’t answer. That’s the last thing he thought of, he just needed company and Nokwanda came through and they did what they did to try and forget about reality for a moment.

“Sphakamiso you’re not white, I don’t even think you have white friends. You know very well that you cannot get in contact with a girl during this period. Missing the funerals was your decision, totally up to you, nobody could’ve forced you to attend. But this!

You don't love this girl one bit because there's no way you can transmit isinyama to her."

Nokwanda's eyes widen. Say what now?

Seeing the position he is in, Sphakamiso quickly comes up with the solution.

"I will get a chicken and cleanse her," he says.

"Whoah!" Malibongwe claps his hands in disbelief. "You will do what? You will get an animal and do a ritual on someone's daughter, not even knowing if that aligns with umsamo wakubo and her ancestors. Are you out of your mind?"

"What must I do then? Ngenzenjani?" Sphakamiso asks, frustrated.

He's answered with a long, icy stare. Nokwanda has gotten uncomfortable, this is actually bigger than she thought, they're arguing about her. And the stuff being argued about is scary.

"You will tell her father what you did, he will guide you," Malibongwe says.

"What? Ngeke!" He shakes his head vigorously. Over his dead body, he's not calling a man to tell him that he's slept with his daughter. That alone is like taking a gun and turning it on yourself, it's suicide.

"You will call him. Ntombazane, give him your father's number," Malibongwe says to Nokwanda.

Sphakamiso is shaking, she sees that but she's got no choice. She takes his phone and gives him to unlock then puts in her father's number.

She calls him and talks to him first.

"Hey, can you talk.....Sphakamiso, a special friend that I'm with wants to talk to you," she says and waits for response before giving Sphakamiso the phone.

“Sawubona Manzini,” he says and clears his throat.

“I have to attend a patient. How can I help you?”

Another deep breath, phewww.

“If you get time, I’d like to meet and discuss something.”

“Is this about my daughter?”

“Yebo. It’s a complicated situation that needs your input. I’m sorry to just call and keep you from your work, it’s just that...”
He’s rambling on and on out of fear.

“Tomorrow, 12h45. Be on time.” With that said the call is dropped.

Sphakamiso looks at Malibongwe, “I’ve set up a meeting.”

“Good, now we’re going home. You both get dressed, I will wait down at the reception.”

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He was blasted for the late arrival but eventually went through all the immediate rituals. Miyanda didn’t look mad, in fact her and Aphelele were okay. Aphelele only asked where he was, when he gave him a pack of biscuits he went back to Miyanda in the kitchen.

Now he’s with Mkhuleko, they haven’t talked in a while, he feels guilty about that.

“How have you been holding up?” he asks.

Mkhuleko sighs, “Good. I’m just worried about Ruby’s birthday next week.”

“How do you know her birthday?” Sphakamiso asks. Ruby was adopted, she came here as a grown-ass puppy that chased after chickens.

“I guessed it,” Mkhuleko says.

“Okay. Do we have to celebrate it?”

Mkhuleko frowns, “What kind of question is that? We celebrate Aphelele’s birthday.”

“Fine, I will wait for the official invite.” They will have no choice but to bring gifts.

They sit in silence for the next two minutes.

Then Sphakamiso asks, “Do you miss Ma?”

“Yeah, but she was with me for good 21 years. I was lucky to have her and feel her love. She wasn’t perfect but a lot other kids grow up without mothers. Now all we have to do is make her proud and remember her by her best moments.”

It’s still a hard thing to process because for Sphakamiso, her death brought a different side of things. He kind of resents her, more than he’s done before. Maybe being a motherless kid is better than having a mother who doesn’t give shit about you.

“What about Yoli? You were her favorite uncle,” he asks, changing the MaVilakazi subject.

Mkhuleko doesn’t answer, he keeps his eyes on the ground. Sphakamiso puts his arm around him but he shakes him off and gets up. He goes to his room, probably to cry.

Sphakamiso remains sitting, he’s hurting too. Yoli’s death left a huge gap in their lives. It will take take time for them to forgive.

He follows Mkhuleko and finds him lying in bed on his stomach, crying. He doesn’t know what to say, right now it’s just them and Miyanda, there’s no elder. He sits next to him, maybe his

presence will help. But he's not stopping, his cry pierces through his heart.

He walks out and makes his way to the kitchen.

Miyanda is with Aphelele, he's taken over Yoli's role of being her tail. He stands, leaning on the wall with his hands in the pockets.

"Are you okay?" Miyanda asks after looking at his face for a split second.

"Mkhuleko is crying," he says.

She snaps her brows, "Why? What happened?"

"I asked if he misses Yoli," he says.

"And then left him crying after provoking the emotions out of him? Really, Sphakamiso?" She wasn't mad about him leaving her with Aphelele without asking but she's mad about this. She throws away the dishcloth and storms out.

Aphelele stays behind, he looks worried for his father. "Will mama beat you?"

He forces a thin smile, he still wonders how him and Snenhlanhla were able to produce this innocent gem. "No, she won't beat me," he says.

"Okay. I want khepsi," -Aphelele.

"There's no KFC around here. I will get it for you tomorrow, okay?"

Miyanda walks back in, she forgot her head scarf. Only God knows why she took it off, it's not that hot. "Just fry chicken pieces," she says, her tone is a bit harsh.

"But that won't be KFC," he's confused.

"Really? He's 4, fry the chicken Sphakamiso."

This is the first time he's ever made her angry. She wraps her head and walks out to go and check on Mkhuleko.

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It's the day, he has to meet Dr Manzini at 12h45. He can't be late, he wishes he can slow down the clock. Nokwanda comes from a well-off family, almost like Phume, his ex.

"Bhuti," he says walking up to Malibongwe.

He rarely ever refer to him as bhuti.

Malibongwe only looks at him.

"Can I borrow your car?" he asks.

"What's wrong with the Tazz?"

"Ummm, nothing."

"Then hop inside and go, you don't want to be late." He says that and leaves him there.

Even if Dr Manzini was going to forgive him, the Tazz engine's rambles will put him off and annoy him. But he doesn't have a choice, Malibongwe has decided that he's not going to accompany him and he's not lending him his car.

He's scared, he doesn't even know where he will begin explaining what happened. Nokwanda keeps telling him that her father is open-minded but he knows that no father likes having his daughter smashed.

As he starts the car something crosses his mind. Mpatho has been so hell-bent in helping him get his life in order, putting him Snehlanhla in rehab and all that. The only way to find out how genuine he is to ask him to help him again, with this situation.

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They're 10 minutes late, Mpatho had to make speeches first. Luckily Phume wasn't home when he got there, nothing was awkward. He just told Mpatho what happened and asked if he could come with him. Mpatho wasn't dramatic about it like Malibongwe but he rambled about being a businessman who only attended scheduled meetings before he agreed.

"I'm not going to say anything. Do you see how dark he is?" Mpatho says as they approach the man sitting with his daughter in shorts with mugs of coffee in front of him.

"You're not going to speak?" Sphakamiso asks in shock. What is the reason for him being here then? He didn't ask him to come and be mute.

"No. Was I there when you smashed his daughter?"

"But you agreed to come, mos."

"I will come in only if he beats you too bad, now shhh!"

They're too close. As they take seats Mpatho recognizes Nokwanda from the braai. He knew that something was going on between these two. Friends with benefits sort of.

Dr Manzini looks at his watch. "I have to get back to work before 1:30pm. Sanibonani, thank you for asking me to come here and then keep me waiting like a fool. What is going on?"

Nokwanda squeezes his arm. They talked, she told him that Sphakamiso is scared of him and he promised to be nice.

"Ummmm, Manzini....first of all I'm very sorry that we are late. This is my brother, Mpatho. I'm Sphakamiso, the one who called."

"Okay."

He blows out a sigh, a drop of sweat runs down his spine.

“Nokwanda was with me since Saturday, at the hotel,” he says.

“And? Surely you didn’t call me here to tell me that you were with my daughter at the hotel.” This man sounds and looks impatient. Didn’t Nokwanda say he’s open-minded?

“The thing is, I lost my mother and she was being buried on Saturday. I shouldn’t have been in contact with her, intimately. I didn’t know that, so I want to know what I can do to cleanse her.” He holds his breath. Dr Manzini takes time studying his face, then looks at Nokwanda.

“Did you agree?” he asks.

Nokwanda nods, “I didn’t know it was bad luck.”

“Okay.” He looks back at Sphakamiso, “I will cleanse her myself.”

Such a relief!

“You will pay for the process,” he adds.

“How much?” Sphakamiso.

“R1000,” Dr Manzini.

Mpatho chuckles, “I thought she can just get a chicken or even better isqunga to bath with.”

“That’s the problem, nobody asked you to think here. God forbid, but if your little brother makes my daughter pregnant know that I will make her terminate that pregnancy and take her to a traditional healer to cleanse her and then take that baby’s spirit to the forest where nobody knows and tell it that’s where it belongs. Then it will find its way to him, wherever he is, trust me by then it won’t be a kind spirit.”

Sphakamiso's mouth has dropped open. He's never heard something so cruel coming from a parent's mouth. Terminate his baby and take its spirit to the forest?

Dr Manzini stands up, Nokwanda too, she's beyond disappointed.

They leave. Mpatho grabs the coffee left behind and leans back on his seat.

"You better stay away from this girl if you don't want any baby ghosts haunting you in future. I want this coffee with some biscuits," he says.

"I need water, two glasses," Sphakamiso.

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 129

SIS' NOMBUSO

She had a few errands in town, it's her first time outside since the funeral. It may seem distasteful but she rang Mapholoba and asked him to drive her to the bank where she'd asked applied for Yoli's life insurance to be debited from her grant every month. Her and Mapholoba haven't really talked about what happened, there hasn't been time, but he always checks up on her. For obvious reasons he couldn't attend the funeral.

"Do you want to sit down and have a drink before going home?" He's indirectly asking for a conversation. Now he needs permission for everything, there's some tension between them.

"Yeah," Nombuso agrees.

She's wrapped in black mourning outfit and it's steaming hot outside.

They get in a fast-food store to grab a snack and cold drinks. He's scared, if she looked broken he would've known how to comfort her. But she has a solid face, very closed off like she doesn't even want anyone to talk about what happened.

"Coke?" he asks.

"Yes," she nods.

"Shwarma or burger?"

"Both," she says.

He goes to the counter and places his order. It's one of those Indian owned places, usually chaotic, but today it's a bit quiet.

When he returns to the table Nombuso is staring at her phone. Then she sighs and lifts her face. Obviously there's a problem.

Not to sound jealous or anything, but he's got to know.

"How long before you go home?" he asks.

"They said I must stay at least two weeks. I also don't want to leave my daughter's grave fresh, I want to be close, just in case..." She stops, because it's not going to make sense.

"In case she wakes up and comes back home?" -Mapholoba.

"Yeah," she blows out a sigh. "I'm stupid, aren't I?"

"No, I know that feeling. Trust me, it will get better with time."

Get better? This will never get better, Yoli will never come back.

"Something happened to either Malibongwe or Ma," she says, tapping her fingers on the table thoughtfully.

"Why are you saying that?" His chest turns a bit dry.

"I can feel it. My mother wouldn't miss my baby's funeral, she was going to be there the same day she died if everything was okay. Malibongwe just sounds off, Miyanda is not straightforward either. They sent her to stand in for them.

Mkhuleko calls me everyday and never talk, he always just cry until his airtime runs out.”

Mapholoba takes a deep breath and takes a sip of his drink. He’s not eating, he hasn’t had appetite ever since that shooting happened. There wasn’t anything he could’ve done to prevent what happened but if it wasn’t for him acting like a small boy who just started dating Yoli would’ve been in her mother’s arms that day.

“Ntofo,” he says.

Nombuso, regardless of the situation, shoots him a look. She’s fallen in love with this name, nevertheless he must always feel some type of way using it, and if he stops using it she will assume that he’s pet-naming someone else.

“My heart is in tatters. The weight of agony in my heart, chipping on my soul everyday, makes me wonder how it’s like for you who carried her for nine months. I never got to know her but in my heart she was already my child. I took her last moment with you...” This is not the direction she wants.

“You didn’t know Mnelisi,” she cuts him.

“Yes. But I feel like shit, I don’t deserve to be sitting on the table with you. Ngik’zwise ubuhlungu Ntofo, so much pain!” He’s holding back tears because they’re in public.

“I’m trying to hold it together Mnelisi. Can we not be both broken? Yoli was special, she still is, I don’t want to be a mess. I love you, I don’t blame you, you didn’t pull the trigger.” She’s holding his hand.

“Okay,” he says, his voice low.

She locks a stare with him. With the families involved things will be hard anyway, he’s one good thing she has left, he can’t be broken.

Her phone rings, it’s the same person who texted.

“It’s Yoli’s father,” she says, sounding exhausted.

“He wants you to come back home?”

She nods, “Yeah, I have a timetable, my brothers are no show, I’m just his toy.”

“Give them time, please be strong Ntofo.” He wraps her left-overs and lifts her off the chair and gives her a kiss on the forehead. He’s driving her back, even though he’d like to spend more time but he’s already put her in too much trouble.

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There’s a rondavel she’s allocated to. The two-bedroom house she helped Yoli’s father build has been occupied by his girlfriend who’s heavily pregnant. She doesn’t mind sleeping in the old, single bed because in three weeks time she will be back home.

She’s preparing for bed when he walks in.

“Mchunu says he didn’t see you at the taxi rank. How did you get home?” He’s coming just to ask her that.

“I took a flight,” she says.

“Nombuso!” His face changes.

He walks in and closes the door.

“Lo mjolo is the reason why my daughter is dead. Had you been a good woman and a good mother she’d be here with us.

“I’m going to respect her spirit and ignore you.” She stands in front of the mirror stirring her flat-tummy tea.

It’s strange how she’s suddenly interested in keeping her looks appealing.

“You’re more interested in looking like a slut than mourning your daughter.” He always finds something to say. Always.

“I thought it was a hippo. Can a hippo be a slut?” She tilts her head to the side thinking. Maybe with her level of education she will never know.

“That man you are sleeping with and your brothers killed my daughter.”

Now he has the attentio he’s been looking for. She turns, rage crashing her veins.

“You couldn’t afford a funeral Thokozani. A funeral, you failed. That pregnant girlfriend of yours who eats wild fruits, you can’t even take care of her cravings. Your mouth is definitely bigger than your pocket and your future. Leave me alone.”

“What did you say?” He steps closer and grabs her neck.

“Baba kaYoli, I swear if you put your hands on me...” But he’s already done.

A slap has landed on her cheek. She’s in disbelief. Yes, he hates her for cheating on her and ending their marriage, then her finding love again and losing Yoli the way she did. But to actually slap her? He’s started a war.

“You asked for it. Why are you talking to me like that?”

“How did you talk to me?” She’s crying.

“Nombuso, you killed my daughter, now you’re giving me attitude. You don’t even care, you’re still busy with that man, you both killed my daughter on purpose.”

She sits on the bed calming herself down. She has to go home but to do that she has to be calm because anything can happen now that he’s learnt to put his hands on her.

“I only wanted to know how you got home but you started insulting me,” he says, still standing by her bed.

He wants her to take the blame because deep down he knows that he shouldn't have put his hands on her.

"I'm sorry," she says.

Now he's relieved.

"It's okay, just watch how you talk, my emotions are all over the place. I will ask them to bring you a thinner blanket, it's hot."

"Thank you," she lies down.

He takes a deep breath and walks out.

She listens to his footsteps descending and then sits up with her phone.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I woke up earlier than usual because Bonga hinted that he has a meeting in Durban in the morning. I prefer making him breakfast every morning and watching him eat before he leaves. Everyone is still asleep, even Aphelele who always manages to hear me getting out of bed. I have no 'nudees' order. So I'm surprised when I see the door opening, I haven't even wrapped my head properly.

It's Nombuso.

Now I'm shocked.

"Nombuso?" I rush to her and take her bags.

Is she okay? Her eyes are red-rimmed and swollen.

"I didn't know you were coming home." Nobody did actually.

“I know. Surprise, surprise!” she forces a chuckle.

I can see that something is just not right.

“Where is Ma?” She looks around then stares directly at me.

This is not how she was supposed to come home.

“Please sit, I will call Bonga.” I can’t even think straight, I put an empty cup in front of her and rush out.

I don’t know how Bonga is going to handle this, I really don’t.

He’s just woken up from his sponge on the floor, Aphelele is still sleeping comfortably on the side of bed he hijacked.

“Nombuso is here,” I say.

He frowns, “Here? Where?”

“In the kitchen Bonga, with swollen eyes, she’s asking for MaVilakazi.”

“Fuck!” He bangs his hand on his head, this is hard for him.

Unfortunately I can’t help him, I can only go there to be a comforter on standby.

“They said they were going to be here but now they’re gone.” He’s referring to the relatives, those people who were here making rules all week long.

I follow him out, as we approach Nombuso is outside the veranda. Didn’t I distract her with a cup of tea?

“Whose fresh grave is that?” She’s pointing at the Mcineka gravesite. It’s not far from the yard, that’s how most rural villages are.

I freeze behind Bonga. She’s seen the grave, she wants us to go straight to the point.

“Let’s get inside the house,” Bonga says.

She pushes his hand off. "Is that my mother?"

He takes a deep breath, "Yes."

"What? My mother is dead and none of you told me. She was even buried without me?" She breaks down and cries. You can hear from her voice that she's done a lot of crying.

"It wasn't the right. Yoli and her passed on the same day, Yoli's father insisted on the same day for the funeral too. It was going to break you Nombuso."

"And this doesn't break me? Are you serious Malibongwe?"
She starts wailing.

Everybody wakes up. It's a morning scene that's making neighbors call Bonga to ask what's happening. I try to calm her down but she's hysterical. Now I'm crying too because I feel helpless.

Sphakamiso asks for a moment with her, we give them space after failing. Anything Bonga says trigger her, she's angry and I can understand where she's coming from.

I feel a hand grabbing on my dress. It's Aphelele, the people he lives with are fetching him tomorrow and I can't say he's had a great stay.

"Do you want nudees?" I ask.

He shakes his head. This is the first, he looks traumatized by the tears he's seeing on my face.

Bonga picks him up, we go inside the kitchen. I don't think he's interested in anything but when given a lollipop he takes it.

Then we hear Sphakamiso going on full blow of rage.

What now?

Sphakamiso needs a lot of energy when angry. Bonga walks out to them. There's going to be pin-downs, gun grabbings,

tears and a lot of “ngizombulala mina”. This is my second month living here, I haven’t experienced half of what MaVilakazi experienced, but I already feel like I’m going to have a mental breakdown.

“Sphakamiso, Sphakamiso, uyahlanya yini? I said I will handle it,” that’s Bonga shouting. It takes a lot for that man to raise his voice, Sphakamiso must be out of control.

“You don’t know how to handle anything Malibongwe. Nobody put their bloody hands on my sister. There’s nothing to talk about, ngiyomshaya,” -Sphakamiso.

Someone hit Nombuso? At a period like this?

Bonga needs to release him, the person deserves what’s coming.

“You’re not going anywhere. Yoli is not even one week old in her grave and you already want a war.”

“Her father started the war,” - Sphakamiso.

"Yes, but let me handle it, if you go there to attack you will ruin things, Yoli’s spirit rests there."

"Fokof man, ngiyekela!"

There’s some commotion, Nombuso starts screaming at them. It must be a physical fight, Aphelele can’t see it.

I call Phume, there’s nothing I can do, bahlula unina wabo a long time ago.

“Is Mpatho home?” I ask.

“Hey Miyanda. It’s 6:25am, he’s home.”

“His brothers are fighting,” I say.

“Huh? What the hell?” She now sounds fully awake.

I hear her waking him up and drop the call.

My main priority right now is Aphelele and....

Where is he? I haven't seen him since I woke up. Everyone is outside except him and Ruby.

I call his phone. This is one hell of a family, the ones outside are still fighting.

"Mkhuleko where are you?" I ask when he picks up.

"In my room doing push-ups," he says.

"What? Do you hear what's happening outside?"

"No, I have headphones on, I'm listening to Big Zulu. Do you think Malibongwe will fund Ruby's birthday?"

"No, he won't." I drop the call.

There's an incoming one, it's Phume.

I don't know whether to call this a WWE stadium or call center, a lot is going on.

I answer her, they're on the way.

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 130

PHUMELELE

Nombuso is a mess, my heart goes out to her the most. When arrive Malibongwe has Sphakamiso pinned on the ground. I don't know why they're fighting, I know neither one of them as violent. Mpatho attends to them, I go to Nombuso. By now she knows that we all lied to her, what I don't know is how much she hates us.

“Let’s go inside, you don’t need all this noise,” I say.

She comes with me. We find Miyanda with Aphelele inside the kitchen. I don’t know if anybody has ever told her, but she’s a natural when it comes to kids, they also gravitate towards her than any other female present. Aphelele doesn’t even know her that well but he’s snuggling on her legs as she cooks.

“Have they stopped?” she asks.

“Mpatho has separated them. What happened?”

She looks at Nombuso, Nombuso doesn’t say anything.

Okay, nobody is going to tell me.

“Nombuso, I thought you’d be at Yoli’s father for a while.” I look at her, she’s not wearing her mourning attire and she looks broken, last time I saw her she looked very strong.

“Excluded from my own mother’s death? Even you, Phume! Niyafana namadodeni, you’re all just like your men,” she says.

I don’t think she understands the amount of pressure they’ve been through, especially Malibongwe. I’m glad Mpatho is not a Mcineka, this clan has a lot of shit and I don’t think I’m the kind of wife that people can walk over all in the name of being family elders.

“Do you really think you could’ve handled it? Both tragedies?” I ask.

“I don’t know, but I know that I should’ve been informed like her daughter.”

Nombuso is just being Nombuso. It would’ve been the right thing to do but they were scared she wasn’t going to be able to handle it all at once.

“Siyaxolisa ke, I apologize on their behalf as well,” Miyanda says.

“I don’t know if I will ever forgive them, this is why I didn’t want to have siblings.” It’s just the pain talking, they’re nothing without each other, as crazy as they are.

“Are you okay though? I was shocked when I heard that you are here so early in the morning,” I ask.

She blows out a huge sigh. “Baba kaYoli slapped me last night, that’s why there’s a fight outside.”

That’s crazy. Why would he slap someone who just lost a child? Their child.

“Why is the fight outside, not at his house against him?” I don’t understand.

She has brothers, I don’t know how many, but I know that MaVilakazi made sure that she increases the population. Why the heck is Yoli’s father still sharing oxygen with us?

“Sphakamiso wants to go and fight, Bonga wants a more level-headed approach,” says Miyanda. I’m surprised she hasn’t gone outside and kicked Sphakamiso, phela Miyanda carries Malibongwe’s fights on her shoulders like a life jacket.

“Level-headed? Yoli’s face needs to be rearranged, that’s level-headed,” I say.

“Then what happens when the family turns against us? Nombuso still needs to go there and take off the mourning clothes, traditionally. Then Yoli will need izibani, Nombuso will also want to have access to her daughter’s grave. Let Bonga go there and tell his family what happened. I’d suggest that he goes with the police.” She looks at Nombuso, it might be uncomfortable for her.

“Do I have to open a case and go to court?” Nombuso asks.

“Unfortunately, yes. I’m sure it will be a lot, you don’t need that.”

Exactly, she can't be stressed by South African police officers asking if there are any fingerprints where she was slapped. Dealing with Yoli's father personally is a way to go. But taking what Miyanda said into consideration about that family, maybe they don't need to deal with him themselves.

"Whether Bonga goes there and talk to his family or not, we have to make him pay," I say.

Miyanda looks at me, eyes widen. Nombuso seems shocked as well. I know we can't beat a man, especially me and Miyanda with our huge tummies.

"We can pay someone to kidnap him, maybe for a week, and they just beat him up until his body turns black and..." A strong hand grabs my waist.

It's Mpatho. Did he really need to walk in and disturb us?

"She's kidding, she watches too many movies," he says to them.

But I wasn't kidding, that's doable.

He kisses my cheek, "You will drive yourself home, we are going to go and see usbari real quick."

"You and who?" I ask.

"And Malibongwe, Sphakamiso will stay behind."

I don't think they're even armed, I'm disappointed.

He moves to Nombuso and hugs her. "Can we talk?"

"No, I hate you," Nombuso says, still in his arms though.

"I know, but I need to talk to you, it's important."

"Fine," she follows him outside.

Maybe they want to go with her. I don't think it's safe for her to return there, Yoli's father is mentally disturbed.

“You need to keep in mind that you’re pregnant. You will break that baby’s leg fighting,” Miyanda says.

“A baby with a broken leg? I’d die. It’s just that I hate men like Yoli’s father, he reminds me of my biological father, that man abused my aunt.”

“I’m sorry. I trust Bonga to get Nombuso justice, even if it’s not through violence but I know that he will pay for what he did. And whether the baby has broken legs or missing eye, you wouldn’t die, drama queen.”

No, I’d die, I know myself.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I’ve been anxious the whole day waiting for them to come back. Sphakamiso has calmed down, he took his food and ate, right now he’s gone with Aphelele to buy ice-block. Nombuso is with them, I’m relieved. If she’s here, at home, we won’t have to worry about her safety. I also think she has a good support system here; we can definitely takes better care of her.

Bonga walks in, I can see that he’s exhausted.

“Hey, how did it go?” I ask.

“I don’t know. How are you?” He pulls me in his arms and kisses my cheek.

He’s probably hungry too. I doubt he’s still going to Durban.

“Is Nombuso at least happy with whatever decision taken?” I ask.

“Yeah, for now. We will have another meeting with them,” he says.

“Any punishment he got?” I ask.

“He will get his punishment but in whatever we do, we have to play it safe. I just hope Mpatho sticks to it,” he says.

So they’re planning lowkey revenge

“Okay, I will dish up, others also haven’t eaten.” I kiss his lips and leave him undressing.

We’ll all have lunch together, I don’t know when last did everyone sit on the table at the same time. Hopefully there won’t be any fight between him and Sphakamiso because Mpatho is no longer here to separate them.

Aphelele arrives just on time with his father, I send him to fetch Mkhuleko from his room. That one avoided any sort of drama today, no matter how loud the noise got he didn’t bother coming out.

Nombuso joins first, she’s put her attire back on.

“When are you due?” she asks.

“On the 28th, I’m a few weeks away.”

“You need to have a break now, from tomorrow we will re-rotate cooking turns and adjust your spot because you can’t be sweating in the kitchen with this huge stomach.”

Oh, okay. I think I’m seeing a new Nombuso here.

“How is Mapholoba holding up?” I ask.

“He’s broken more than me. Has Malibongwe said anything?”

“Well, he calls him a clown but I don’t think he’s holding anything against him.”

“A clown? He cried blood anytime someone said something bad about you.”

“I’m special,” I say.

She laughs, it’s good to see her out of misery for a second.

Others join as well, Sphakamiso walks in last. The only seat left is the one next to Bonga, I think he did that on purpose. He sits and doesn’t look at Bonga.

“I will update you after we’ve eaten,” -Bonga.

“No, I’m good.” He’s still angry.

“You’re not the person to step on the wrong side of the law. You have a great future than all of us, and a child. Be angry at me all you want but I will not allow you to be controlled by emotions in front of me.”

Mkhuleko slurps his water loudly on purpose, he wants this confrontation to end. He wants Zimbali serenity in a township. I don’t think there can ever be complete peace and silence in this family.

“We are talking,” Bonga scolds him.

“I have an announcement to make,” he says.

I think I know what it is; Ruby’s birthday obviously.

“Go ahead, sizothula thina ngoba k’shuthi asibalulekile.”

Bonga has spent 21 years with Mkhuleko but it seems like he still doesn’t get him. I mean, Mkhuleko doesn’t care, he’s going to grab the opportunity with both hands no matter how it’s given to him.

“Next week is Ruby’s birthday,” he says.

“Inja?” Bonga asks with a frown.

“Don’t call her like that. Yes, she’s an animal but calling her inja sounds like an insult. Remember humans were once monkeys.” Now he’s defending that Ruby is a dog, wow.

“Okay. Are you going to send her to SPCA to spend her birthday and the rest of her life with other human beings like her?” Bonga asks.

I can’t hold myself, I laugh. He thinks Mkhuleko is giving Ruby away? He’s throwing her a birthday party and it will be funded by someone on this table.

“I’m throwing her a party,” he says.

“What?” -Sphakamiso.

“Usuyagula ke manje,” -Bonga.

I can’t say I didn’t expect this reaction, anyone would be shocked.

“I’m formally inviting everyone,” he says.

Nombuso clears her throat, “I don’t think we can host parties yet, not with a fresh grave outside.”

“I know, it won’t be here, the venue is at the Vilakazis.” He gets up and starts giving hand-written invitations around the table. Each card looks like an essay paper.

My eyes quickly run on the details. Gifts? How can someone requests and specify on what gifts should be brought.

“What is this? Incwadi yezibizo?” Sphakamiso asks, looking at his own card with irritation.

Nombuso and I crack up. It does look like incwadi yezibizo, so many requests.

“Is it Ruby’s birthday or yours? I’m seeing size 9 Nike sneakers,” Bonga asks.

I’m lucky Ruby asked me only headphones and perfume.

“It’s Ruby’s,” he says.

“Me, new Samsung phone? Do I look like a millionaire to you?” Sphakamiso is pissed by everything. “Sis’ Miyanda don’t laugh. I’m using usgedlemba with a battery that dies with 70%. Why would I buy Ruby a new Samsung phone?”

“Ruby with two legs and low-fade haircut,” Bonga says in a low voice.

I look at Nombuso’s thinking she got a lenient one. But nope, Ruby wants a brand new watch.

“I will send Mpatho and Phume theirs later. She has to be there with you, you two are better together more than apart now.” He says and takes his food and starts eating.

I know I will not get clarity from his statement today but one day I will understand.

“So this royalty-themed party with cake and sound system, who is going to pay for it?” Bonga asks.

Let me just drink my water and mind my business.

“Ummmm....you,” he says.

“Hhayi-bo, imhlola ke le. Did you say me? Malibongwe?”

CHAPTER 131

PHUMELELE

The party will start late because of us; we were caught in traffic with the cake. I thought it was delusional when we received invitations because not even my mother’s rich friends’ pets get birthday celebrations. But I guess Ruby is special, I was told that she likes music, which is very weird for a dog, so I bought this Yamaha amplifier as a gift. It was quite expensive, I wasn’t

going to buy it but his brother insisted. For Ruby's convenience he said, Mpatho was asked for PlayStation. I don't know if both him and Mpatho were bewitched by the same person, Mpatho didn't find anything strange with the whole birthday party for a dog and gift requests.

And we had to hunt for a cake, Mpatho paid for it as well. Now we are heading to the Vilakazis. I'm not a fan of MaNhleko, we are going home as soon as the party ends. The theme was royalty, I respected it, I'm dressed accordingly with my beautiful gown and fascinator hat. The theme is one thing Mpatho disrespected, he's in a black singlet and joggers, I don't think Mkhuleko will be happy. Anyway, I can't wait to see Miss Party.

We are very late, I won't lie, almost two hours late. Mkhuleko rushes to us as we park. Surprisingly, he's just in his casual clothes too, he didn't dress up as he asked us to.

"I thought you said we must dress up," I question.

"Ruby is already dressed, she's also wearing dusty pink ribbon, like your dress."

What the barking fuck?

"Maybe you should sit with her at the front and be her partner for the day," he says.

I don't insult people but this one deserves it. I just can't because his brother is here and I kinda have to respect that he's my brother-in-law.

"Ungang'bhedeli mina. Doesn't Ruby have dog friends?" I ask.

"No, it's just us. Aphelele has gone back to Durban and he didn't really like Ruby. The person who liked her was Yoli and she's not here," he says. I can see behind the strong face he wears that he's still broken by Yoli's death.

I feel sorry for him but I'm still not going to be Yoli's partner. That would simply mean that even if Ruby gets married I'd be expected to be her bridesmaid. Mkhuleko doesn't respect me.

We get inside, there's a full décor and guests, weird as it may sound. But it's just the family, no outsiders, at least nobody is going to spread this around. We exchange greetings, I sit down next to Nombuso, she looks better now.

"Are we going to get real food or dog food?" I ask. I've never been to a dog's party before, I don't know what to expect.

"I'm just as clueless," she says.

"But you're Ruby's aunt." I mean, she was present when the preparations were made.

I should've brought my own food, just in case I'm presented with bones on the plate.

Miyanda is sitting with his twin. It doesn't look like she likes being here. I wouldn't blame her, especially because of how she left the last time. But I'd hope that she's had a conversation with MaNhleko to iron things out.

Drinks come with finger foods, there's soft background music keeping us lively. This is not just a proper party, but a top-notch classy party. However in all of this I'm not seeing Ruby.

Nombuso comes back, she went to the loo.

"Where is Miss Party?" I ask.

"He's still looking for her."

Looking for her? It's her own damn party, we've been waiting for hours.

Mpatho comes over, he looks worried.

“Wasn’t she chained?” he asks Nombuso.

“I don’t know. It’s probably the ancestors sending her away, they’re appalled by what’s happening here,” she says.

I’d agree with that. They should just let Ruby be, we will continue with the party in her absence. It’s not like she was going to look beautiful anyway.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

The party has started even though Miss Party herself is not here. We’ve had the main course, there’s a lady who was hired to cook. I still can’t believe we are here for a dog. I woke up not feeling good but for Mkhuleko’s sake I came.

Bonga gets sick too if I’m sick. I’ve tried telling him to go and mingle with others, maybe help look for Miss Party as well, but he doesn’t want to leave my side. Everyone is having a good time except us and I hate being that person who come with weird vibes.

I will go to the loo and change my seat, maybe he will go.

“Where are you going?” he asks, holding my arm and getting up too.

“Just going to pee,” I say.

“Okay, I’m coming with you.”

Jesus, now we look weird doing everything together.

We walk outside, I can feel eyes behind us.

“You know that you don’t have to baby me, right?”

“No, I have to. How does your back feel now?”

“Still aching but I will push through until the party is over then we will go home and you will give me a long massage,” I say.

“With my hands or....?”

“Bonga, we are at a 1 year old's party.”

“She’s a dog, she’s probably somewhere else turning bins.” He didn’t want this party but because Ruby means so much to Mkhuleko and he’s just lost his mother, he ended up paying for the party.

The toilet is outside the yard, he waits two feet away from the door while I go inside. I sit and relieve myself, I roll the toilet paper and wipe. As I lift my panty up I feel wet again, I wipe myself. It doesn’t worry me at first but as we make our way back to the marquee, I’m feeling moist again.

“I need the loo,” I say.

He turns with a frown, “Again?”

This is why I wanted to come alone, I hate explaining my personal business.

“Yes, you can stay behind,” I say.

“No, I’m coming. Is your tummy runny?”

“Yes,” I say to shut him up.

We turn back. I want to wear a pantyliner, I don’t want to be uncomfortable the whole evening.

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SPHAKAMISO

Mkhuleko is babied a lot. Everyone is hurt by MaVilakazi's death but just because he also likes a guava tree behind their home it doesn't mean that he's going to throw a party for it. This is not mourning, Malibongwe and Mpatho are turning Mkhuleko into a spoilt-brat, that's just it.

The party has started and Ruby has done what dogs do, she left the yard, nobody knows where she went. Mpatho then told him to come with Mkhuleko searching for Ruby. He didn't tell him to fuck-off, which was a fitting response. Now they're on the streets asking people about the dog like it's a missing person.

"Sawubona baba, did you see a black dog with birthday cake icing on the forehead?" Mkhuleko asks the man they're bumping into on the streets.

"Does it have a pink ribbon around the neck?" the man asks.

"Yes, that's her. Did you see her anywhere?" His hope rises.

"Yes, there was a funeral at the Nxumalos, I saw that dog there hunting for food."

Sphakamiso breaks a chuckle, this is funny.

Mkhuleko looks infuriated by this.

"There's food at home, it's her birthday, I went out of my way making this day special for her and she's out there acting like a dog orphan." He's annoyed like Ruby is a child that has a fully functional brain.

"It's a fuckin' dog," Sphakamiso says, laughing.

"Siyabonga baba. Can you give us directions to the Nxumalos?" he asks.

The man directs them, they're not too far. They see the homestead with a big white tent just as they turn around the corner.

Sphakamiso stays behind as Mkhuleko enters the yard. He doesn't want people to think he's mentally deranged as well, he will wait here.

His phone rings.

Guess who? His biggest nightmare at the moment.

"Hi," he answers fearfully.

"Hey stranger. Why am I not answered on Whatsapp?"

Phewww, he's been trying to stay away.

"Nokwanda, you heard what your father said."

"He was kidding. I'm going to Durban this week, I will have a flat to myself for two days. Do you want to come over?"

"Nokwanda, no!" He doesn't want to take any risks.

Doctors can save and take lives. It can go both ways.

"You don't want me?" she asks.

"No...."

"No you want me or no you don't want me?"

God, this chick!

"You know that I want you but I don't want your father on my back, that's why I just want to..."

She interrupts, "I only asked if you want me or not."

What can he say? He likes her company and the sex is amazing.

If he dies, he dies.

"Okay, I will come," he says.

“See, it’s simple. But you just want to make it look like ngiyak’shela, we are just friends with benefits.” She’s a bit annoyed.

“Why are you trying to hurt me?” he asks.

“I’m not. I just feel like we are both grown, Nkatha said that to make sure that you don’t think about making me pregnant, which is impossible anyway. There’s no need for you to ignore me when I’m talking to you. You’re not my boyfriend, I’m not your girlfriend.”

“I heard you the first time Nokwanda, we are not dating,” he says with a faint sigh. She’s being dramatic for no reason.

“Okay, see you if you come. If you change your mind let me know early so that I can get someone else,” she says.

“Someone else? Is that something you can say to...” He looks at the screen of his phone, it looks like he’s now talking to himself. She’s dropped the call.

How can she say that? He might not be her specific other but he deserves some respect.

Mkhuleko appears, they’re both angry for different reasons.

“This girl is disrespectful. I’ve never been anyone’s replaceable toy,” -Sphakamiso.

Mkhuleko shakes his head and responds: “What annoys me the most is that I found her being chased with a stick from the kitchen. Over funeral left-overs! Can you believe that? She has a party, I went out of my way begging Malibongwe and Mpatho to fund this party.”

“And she keeps throwing it on my face that I’m nothing to her. I’m not saying I was right for ignoring her but she heard her father’s threats,” Sphakamiso says.

“Ruby doesn’t respect me, she’s ungrateful. Where is the ribbon I put on her? Nx.” He picks her from the ground and walks with her in his arms.

Sphakamiso frowns and looks at him. “You’re talking about the dog all this time?”

“I’m very disappointed in her,” Mkhuleko says.

“Maybe you will learn a lesson: dogs aren’t human beings,” - Sphakamiso.

They head back to the Vilakazis. It’s already late, this party was a failure, but at least people enjoyed music and ate good food. And the gifts, everyone respected him except Sphakamiso who didn’t come neither dressed accordingly nor with the requested gift.

He puts Ruby down hoping they will make a grand entrance but as soon as she touches the ground she runs towards uphuthu that MaNhleko served her chickens in front of the kitchen.

Now Mkhuleko just gives up. Ruby is not the girl he thinks she is; she doesn’t know what’s popping.

“I’ve been waiting for you,” Miyanda says coming from behind, almost startling him.

“Ummmm, did I do something wrong?” He’s asking because her tone is different from what he’s used to.

“No, but I need your help,” she says.

“Anything sisi,” he says, a bit freaked out.

“I need to take a nap in the room but your brother won’t let me breathe away from him. Just keep him away and make him relax. Tell me when it’s time to leave.”

He nods, “Okay, I will do that.”

She smiles and turns away. She knew that she can count on him.

CHAPTER 132

Mkhuleko twisted his ankle and made a big deal out of it, asking Malibongwe to warm water for him and soak his feet. In as much as Malibongwe understands that he's grieving, it's starting to feel too much. Right now he's here babying him, it's been two hours since he saw Miyanda.

Mpatho walks in. Ever heard of a Zulu saying; lo muntu ulethwe yinkosi? This is exactly what he needed; someone to rescue him.

"Keep an eye on him," he says, standing up.

Mkhuleko with his 'twisted ankle' jumps up from the bed.

"No, Mpatho doesn't know anything about injuries."

Malibongwe raises his eyebrow, "And I know? Am I a nurse?"

"I just...I prefer you, Mpatho is not a good person, I don't trust him."

"Aww, I'm not a good person after buying your dog a cake?" Mpatho asks. Offence is really taken because, what is so hard about a twisted ankle?

Malibongwe stands confused on what to do.

"Let me have a look." Mpatho lifts Mkhuleko's left leg.

"Ahhhhh! Don't hold too tight," he cries.

Malibongwe frowns, "I thought it was your right leg."

Was it now?

He remembers and pulls the leg and gives Mpatho the other one.

“Have you been keeping me here for a game?” Malibongwe asks. He’s fuming. There are a lot of things he could’ve done in these last two hours.

“Miyanda is sick and I haven’t seen her in hours because of you. Are you that selfish?”

“No bhuti, it really was twisted,” Mkhuleko continues with his lies, furtherly making him angry.

“Don’t fuck with me!” -Malibongwe.

Mpatho stops them with his hand. It doesn’t have to turn ugly, he knows how they are now and today is just not the day.

“Mkhuleko, did you twist your ankle or not?” he asks.

“I did didn’t,” Mkhuleko says.

“Did or didn’t?” -Mpatho, a bit irritated.

“Did didn’t. Is this a gang-up? Sis’ Miyanda asked me to keep him away because she needed to rest,” he says.

“What?” Malibongwe is beyond shocked.

“Lying and keeping someone away are two different things. What the fuck is wrong with you?” Mpatho reprimands him, but not as hard as he should.

Malibongwe is now just disappointed, by both him and Miyanda. There was no need, he was just looking out for her, as her father would want.

“Where is she? No matter how irritated she is by me, she needs to come home with me. Find others too, we have to go home,” he says.

Mkhuleko gets up and properly walks out.

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PHUMELELE

I noticed that Miyanda wasn't okay but dismissed that because I thought she was just uncomfortable with MaNhleko. But now Nombuso is fetching me saying she's crying in the rondavel where she went to take a nap.

"Where is Malibongwe?" This is the first thing I want to know.

"No, she doesn't want him there. You know how he is with her, he will overreact."

I'm not sure about this, Malibongwe knows her more than any of us. She fills a bottle of water then we rush to the rondavel.

Indeed Miyanda is in pain. MaNhleko has laid a blanket for her on the floor. She's sweating and holding her back in pain.

"Is she in labor?" I ask.

"Yes," MaNhleko says.

Nombuso almost drops the 2l of water. She's surprised just like me.

"Let's take her to the hospital then," I suggest.

"No," she refuses herself. "I'm going to be fine. Can I have water?"

"Miyanda this is not the time to be stubborn. Let me call Malibongwe, we will all go with you."

She shakes her head.

Gosh, this girl is stubborn.

I kneel next to her and hold her hand. Yes, we've had our differences in the past, but now I can call her a friend even

though we are not that tight. Her and I don't meet up to talk about Twitter scandals and Real Housewives Of Durban, with us it's always serious issues being discussed. I really don't want anything happening to her or the baby.

Then I hear my name being called outside.

It's Mpatho, they're all outside the door.

Something in me just flips; I want them away until we say we need them. Just a second ago I was opposing Miyanda on this.

"Tell them to go away," I tell their sister.

I don't know if it's because I'm holding Miyanda's hand too tight, I'm feeling sickly uncomfortable.

I can hear the argument outside. I know Mpatho can respect my word, but Malibongwe? I'm not sure he'd want to be away from Miyanda after hearing her cry.

"I need water too," I say reaching to Nombuso's water.

I fill a glass and gulp it down.

Maybe I shouldn't have drunk water because now it feels like I added fuel to the fire. I have sharp pain. Is this hand-transmitted pain or what?

"Not you too MaMzimela!" MaNhleko says. She's coming to me, leaving Miyanda rolling her back against the blanket.

I want to get help, I'm in pain. But not the hospital.

"Am I in labor or just suffering from Miyanda's witchcraft?" I don't understand what's happening.

She's sweating. I think she's scared, but she doesn't want us to be taken out of this rondavel until we are okay. I also don't want that.

"Nombuso get a basin of warm water, two towels and scissors."

Scissors?

“MaNhleko!” she mustn’t try me.

I’m not here to give birth.

“See your tummy,” she says.

I look at it, it’s very low. I’m feeling more pain with each minute.

I don’t even want to think it’s this baby causing me so much pain. I have enough enemies, I don’t need unborn ones.

“Phume, I’m dying,” Miyanda cries.

Hers is worse than mine.

I sit next to her and hold her hand despite my own pain. It’s weird how we moved from hating each other to completely trusting each other.

“You are not dying, I’m here,” I say.

The door opens, Nombuso is back. But behind her there’s an unwelcome guest. At this point I’m even naked, why is he forcing his way in?

“Malumekazi, I need to know what’s going on,” he says to MaNhleko.

“They’re in labor, go outside,” MaNhleko says.

I hate hearing that I’m in labor because I don’t want to give birth yet.

“Today? We have to take them to the hospital.” He panics and rushes to Miyanda.

This is exactly what she didn’t want.

She pushes him away after he kisses her forehead.

“I will be fine,” she says.

“Let’s go, today is not your due date.”

“It’s fine Bonga,” she says.

It takes forever for him to leave. I’ve been holding back because I didn’t want his attention to shift to me because I’m indecent and my legs are wet.

Nombuso pushes him out.

MaNhleko looks at me and screams; “Her water has broken!”

I cry out loud, I’m just freaked out.

“Phume?” that’s Mpatho outside.

Another problem loading. They won’t understand why we don’t want to go to the hospital because we also have no valid reason except that it feels okay and meant to be here.

Nombuso goes outside to him.

I’ve felt so much pain that now I just want to take a nap.

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Malibongwe is angry. It doesn’t make sense why they’re locking them outside. He had agreements with Miyanda. After he had his financial break the only thing he wanted was to make sure that her pregnancy is smooth and comfortable. She wasn’t going to deliver in a public hospital, let alone at home. Mkhuleko was born in a rondavel, their mother had a lot of complications afterwards, she had to spend a month in the hospital.

“Nooooo!” that’s her screaming.

He gets up, wanting to go there and break the door.

“Relax! You’re making me nervous as well,” Mpatho stops him. Phume isn’t crying a lot. He’s only heard her once and he heard her instructions very well. The last thing he want to do is disrespect her at this time; she doesn’t want him around. But when she asks for him he will be there quick as a lightning.

“The doctor didn’t say today, it’s only the 5th, that’s why she’s in pain,” Malibongwe says.

“Giving birth is not easy, due date or not. Can you shut up? I’m trying to be calm and you’re not making it easy,” Mpatho says.

He returns back to his spot.

Mkhuleko comes to them with his birthday girl behind him.

“I forgot my earphones in the car,” he says to Malibongwe.

Malibongwe takes out the key and gives him.

“Where is Sphakamiso?” Mpatho asks.

“He ran away,” Mkhuleko says.

Sphakamiso couldn’t stand hearing all the screams.

Mkhuleko goes to Malibongwe’s car and opens the front door and puts Ruby inside. Then he turns to the driver’s side and gets in. Before they know it the car is moving.

“Does he know how to drive?” Mpatho asks in panic.

“Yeah, but he doesn’t have the license yet, so he’s just teasing us.”

Mkhuleko reverses out of the yard. Why does it look like he’s driving away?

“That’s a lot of teasing,” Mpatho says.

They both get up on their feet and watch him drive away in Malibongwe’s car. He doesn’t have a permission, neither does

he have a driver's license. Ruby is sitting in the front like her father owns the car.

"Mkhuleko is out of control," Malibongwe says, blowing out a sigh.

"Let's just hope...."

Miyanda screams again.

It's time to hold back Malibongwe again.

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MaNhleko has to hold Miyanda's legs, she's about to pop this baby out. Nombuso is supposed to be looking after Phume but she's shaking like a leaf. MaNhleko knows that one of them is carrying a special child because this is exactly how MaVilakazi also came back here and suddenly went to labor, giving birth to Mkhuleko in the same rondavel. Miyanda asked for a place to take a nap, when she showed her the room she'd stayed in before, Miyanda refused and pointed at this rondavel. MaNhleko had her eyes on her but then suddenly Phume was in labor too.

"I think I'm giving birth," Phume says.

"What? No!" Nombuso jumps up and heads to the door.

"Yey wena! Uwumfazi, who do you think is going to help your brother's wife?" MaNhleko.

"But...no, I can't," she nervously shakes her head.

"Lay another reedmat there and put a blanket on it," MaNhleko instructs.

She does as told, then comes back to Phume.

"What must I do?" she asks.

“Nothing. Just sit here, I will tell you if I need help,” Phume says.

That’s better. She sits, not too close.

Miyanda is a screamer. Phume is a moaner. It feels like being in labor ward in November when people are giving birth to little Valentines.

“The head is coming out, pushhhh!” MaNhleko to Miyanda.

She’s crying, then all of a sudden; “I want Bonga.”

“No, MaMthethwa, push the baby out!”

“I want Bonga,” she cries.

Phume lifts her head to reprimand her.

“Miyanda push!” she instructs, also pushing herself.

She’s giving Miyanda lessons, practical ones.

But the more she does, the more Nombuso is getting breathless. What is this she’s seeing?

“Miyanda push,” Phume is in her nurse mode.

MaNhleko glances over and instructs; “Hold her legs.”

The baby cry is heard from MaNhleko's side first. Miyanda has given birth. As soon as the baby comes out she runs out of energy and closes her eyes.

“MaMthethwa are you okay?” MaNhleko asks in panic.

“Yeah,” she says faintly with her eyes closed.

Just after MaVilakazi cut the umbilical cord the electricity goes off.

“Loadshedding!” Nombuso says.

“Run and get the candles,” MaNhleko yells.

“No, Phume’s baby is in my hands.”

MaNhleko finds her way to the reedmat in the dark and puts Miyanda's baby down. She finds her way to Phume, with the little eyesight and moon shining through the small window, she's able to grab a scissor and help her.

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Nombuso has never sweated so much in her life. When she comes back to the rondavel with two candles and the babies bags MaNhleko has already put both babies on the blanket she laid aside. Phume has her eyes closed, she's conscious but too fatigued.

After they light the candles MaNhleko starts cleaning the ladies.

"Wipe the babies and wrap them with their blankets, then tell the boys to start the car outside," MaNhleko instructs.

Nombuso wipes both babies, they're crying.

She took both Miyanda's and Phume's bag, they have the babies' necessities.

"Which is which?" she asks.

MaNhleko looks at her with a frown.

"What do you mean? Wrap the babies up."

"I'm doing that. This is Miyanda's blanket, so which one is her baby?"

Oh, that! Was it the one on the right or on the left?

MaNhleko's confused face freaks Nombuso out. She has to know, she has to!

CHAPTER 133

PHUMELELE

I wake up knowing that I've given birth because I can feel that my lower body is not okay. I tore when I pushed the baby out, I felt it. I'm glad I wasn't awake to feel it being stitched. I'm in the hospital, alone. I don't even know how long I've been here.

"Nurse!" I yell.

"Hey," the voice says.

I turn my eyes, he's here sitting next to my bed with a wrapped baby in his arms.

"Is that...?" I lower my voice.

He smiles, "Yes, our son."

I haven't met him. I don't know how he looks like. Heck, I didn't even know that he's a boy.

Mpatho comes to me with him wrapped in a white blanket. He puts him on my chest, before I even look at his face I know that this boy is my world. I can feel it, this is the last piece of the puzzle, I'm complete now.

"Hey precious boy," I peel the blanket and look at his face.

He's sleeping. It's a whole human being, he looks so cute and innocent with his pink face. I have fallen in love again. This is my heart in a human form.

"He's so beautiful," he compliments.

"He takes after mommy. When did we get here?"

"Around 9pm," he says.

"And now, what time is it?"

"I think 3am, you've been sleeping for too long."

“Were you scared?” I ask.

“No, I trusted you. You’re the strongest woman that I know. I bow down to you, yesterday you proved that to everyone.”

I didn’t really have a choice. It was either I cry with Miyanda or make MaNhleko’s job better and be the calm one.

“Where is she? Our nurse,” I ask.

“MaNhleko? We left her behind, she was tired.”

“And Miyanda, where is she? Is she okay?”

“Miyanda is okay, she was already okay when we got here. But Manzolwandle has to be checked by doctors,” he says.

“Who is that?” I’m confused.

“Her son, Mkhuleko sent his name via Whatsapp.”

“It’s nice. What’s wrong with him?”

“It’s his feet, he has bilateral clubfoot.”

“I don’t know what that is.”

“His feet are twisted.”

Oh lord, no!

“Miyanda is a strong girl, don’t worry about her.”

Strong? I don’t know, she already went through a lot delivering the baby, now he’s got some defect? I don’t know what I would’ve done had it been...

“What’s our son’s name?” I ask, looking at him.

“Khulasphinde,” he says.

I swear my mother could’ve chosen a better husband for me.

“Do you know how much pain I went through? Not crying doesn’t mean I wasn’t in pain. So this is not Khulasphinde because I’m definitely not getting another baby.”

“Okay. Let’s cancel Khulasphinde. Imangothando?”

“Imangothando. Did we stand by love?”

He laughs, “We actually did. If it wasn’t for love I know you would’ve left me a long time ago. I cannot count how many times we’ve fought. With you my craziness just spiral out of control, and you are also not easy.”

“Alright, I approve. When am I getting a kiss? Pushing this guy out was not easy.”

“Now sthandwa sami.” He had to wait until I ask.

He kisses my lips and picks Imango’s little hand and kisses it too.

I guess this is my perfect family.

“Have you told the great-grandmother Beauty?”

“Yeah, she’s coming in the morning with your toiletries.”

I feel Imangothando moving, then he cries. His voice soothes me, even though he’s crying. The nurse walks in, I hope she’s going to be patient enough to teach me everything. I don’t even know if it hurts him to lie on his stomach.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I first held Manzolwandle when Nombuso gave him to me in the car on our way here. Neither her nor MaNhleko had seen anything wrong with him when they cleaned him and wrapped him up. Nombuso was just surprised as us when the nurse noticed. It’s scary to think that if not treated my son might struggle or not be able to walk at all. What’s giving me hope is

that we have resources and the funds. We are seeing a pediatric orthopedist later today.

Mpatho walks in, all smiles.

“Is your other half awake?” I ask.

“Yes, she’s up and we have a name, Imangothando.” Now this explains it.

“Oh, that’s a nice name. Mine has two long Zulu names; Manzolwandle and Nkosiyazi.” Yep, Bonga stood by his word and named our son Nkosiyazi as he had promised. But the twist is, Mpatho is happy about it, not offended.

“Where is my beloved enemy?” he asks.

“He went out to get me apple juice,” I say.

“How is he?” He cares about this particular enemy.

“Not good Mpatho. Even before we found out about Manzi’s condition he wasn’t okay.”

“Yesterday was traumatizing, and more for him because he was already holding in so much pain in his heart after losing loved ones and putting up with drama from both families. He was triggered; he thought he was losing you.”

I understand but I don’t regret not wanting him there. I know he would’ve felt worse seeing me go through the whole process.

“And you, how do you feel?” he asks.

“They say he can be fine, so I’m good. But even if he doesn’t, I will take care of him. I love my son, nothing is going to change that. I know God wouldn’t put me through this if he didn’t trust me.” I actually find it laughable that I was telling Phume that she will give birth to a baby with broken legs, freaking her out, and now I’m here.

“I’m glad it’s not Phume because we talked about something like this and she was completely freaking out. At least I grew up eating pap and stones, I will go to traditional healers and witches if I have to,” I say jokingly.

“Don’t say that Miyanda. This is not a curse or punishment for what you said, God gave you a special blessing,” he says.

“I know.” I’m not that scared. I can’t wait to meet Imangothando,” I say.

“Ah, Khulasphinde is a cutie.”

Khula-what???

“Did Phume approve of that name?” I laugh out loud.

“Please don’t tell her I said that.” He’s so naughty.

But they can actually do it again, Phume was brave in there. I only heard her moaning and I was crying my lungs out.

My phone rings.

It’s Nyambose. I haven’t told them at home about Manzi’s condition, I only told them that he’s a boy and he’s healthy.

Mpatho takes Manzi and stands by the window with him.

“Nyambose,” I answer.

“Mntanami, you’re no longer updating us. Have they discharged you?”

“No baba, there’s something doctors still want to assess,” I say.

“Is the baby sick?” He’s already worried.

I didn’t want to stress him out but I guess I have to tell him the truth.

“Manzi has twisted feet baba,” I say.

“How? Is it a disability?” he asks.

“Kind of, but they can treat it, if not he will have surgery,” I say.

“Aw, mntanami. Are you okay? Is anyone with you?” He sounds too worried.

“Yes baba, I have all the support I need. Don’t worry, I will keep you posted. Please tell Njabulo that I reject the name he proposed, my son can’t be Magic, he’s not a thug.”

He laughs, “But he’s already told everyone.”

Njabulo wants us to fight, this baby is not even one day old.

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MALIBONGWE

He’s been holding it together the whole day. One, because he has to be strong for Miyanda and Manzi. Two, indoda ayikhali, a man doesn’t cry. But as soon as he gets home he goes straight to bed and switch the light off.

It doesn’t make sense. What hasn’t he done right by the ancestors? Wasn’t he paying for two funerals not so long ago? And his mother’s sins too. Is it because he listens? Manzi’s condition should’ve been detected with ultrasound. But nothing was strange, Miyanda’s doctor assured them everything was okay.

How did his feet turn and twist within a month time? They said if his bones can’t be fixed with exercises he will have surgery. His son, just born yesterday, now has to go through all that pain. What sin have they committed as parents?

There's a knock. It's Mkhuleko with his food, Nombuso sent him.

He walks in after getting no reply and switches the light on. Malibongwe is in bed, weeping. But he quickly wipes his face and sits up. He's not even mad about the car anymore, even though Mkhuleko did piss him off.

"Uyakhala?" Mkhuleko asks if he's crying.

He drops his head and doesn't respond.

Mkhuleko puts his food next to him and stands, staring at him.

"Ruby's party didn't need to happen. I didn't need to do all that. But you don't respect my gift, you don't respect my word, just like everyone," he says.

Malibongwe wipes his nose, "What are you talking about?"

"The fact that I can't come up to you as my brother and the head of this family and tell you that you need to take Miyanda to the Vilakazis because she needs to be with Phume when she gives birth. I have to come up with something first, something crazy because I'm crazy. It says a lot about you."

Malibongwe looks at him, his red-rimmed eyes squinted. "You knew that she was going to go into labor yesterday?"

"Yeah, I knew. But would you have believed me if I told you?" He chuckles and takes a step back. Then a deep breath. "You apologized to others but you didn't apologize to me for not telling me how Ma died."

"Is this what this is all about?" Malibongwe frowns.

He's confused, he's hurt.

"Not at all, I didn't need your apology. I'm just highlighting how you undermine me and my input. If you had helped me with my gift maybe I would've been able to help you and Mpatho. By the way our uncle is not a Vilakazi, there's no son there, our

grandmother cheated. Manzi is the child that's going to rebuild that home," Mkhuleko.

"Manzi? He's a Mcineka, our mother was married. Why would he be appointed to rebuild the Vilakazis?" He's both confused and angry. They cannot twist his son's feet and then expect him to rebuild families.

"You will find out and you will know. Now eat your food and stop crying, Miyanda who's appointed to deal with this is not crying."

WTF?

Does Mkhuleko still remember how old he is?

CHAPTER 134

PHUMELELE

Beauty came with Mpatho to fetch Imango. For once we are a big happy family. I have learned to trust Beauty, I think Mpatho was the main issue between us, now that they're okay there's peace at home. Beauty being Beauty, she came with a make-up set to doll me up before I leave the hospital.

I'm getting raised eyebrows as we make our way out of the hospital. People believe that one has to look homeless to be a good mother. I'm going to wear my wigs and do my nails. No Imangothando formed against my beauty shall prosper.

He doesn't cry a lot, I've learnt how to hold him properly. Mpatho is a pro in nappy-changing. Beauty takes him, I still can't sit properly because of the stitches. We are going home.

I kind of feel sad for Miyanda. We gave birth together and came to the hospital together, but now I'm leaving without her. I saw her, we talked for a few minutes. I didn't expect her to be that

strong, she's not even too bothered by whether they will be able to fix Manzi's feet or not. He was asleep when I went to see his mother, I didn't see him. Him sleeping was also the perfect excuse because I'm a bit scared to see his feet. I don't know if it's painful but I know that it will break my heart to see.

Both Beauty and Mpatho are with me, I didn't think I will come home to anything special. But when we arrive and I hear Ntombi's voice inside the house I instantly know that I have a special surprise waiting for me.

"Guys, seriously? What is Ntombi doing here?" I'm happy, I'm anxious to see what's going on.

"We are throwing Imango a welcome home party," Beauty says.

"It was supposed to be a surprise," Mpatho says, a bit disappointed.

I laugh, because why would he still trust Beauty with secrets?

I walk in, Ntombi welcomes me at the door with screams.

"Oh my gosh, your stomach is still big!" she says, staring at me with widely open eyes.

I didn't see a single mother who lost the baby tummy instantly.

"Don't worry, I have spoken to my surgeon, she will be fixed," Beauty says.

I'm not sure what she's implying because I'm not going to have a cosmetic surgery. I will have a flat tummy again if God allows, if not then Mpatho will suffer the consequences of nutting inside me.

It's not really Imango's welcome party, it's mine, because I'm the one experiencing it. It's a cozy family setting with a few gifts.

“Am I allowed to have friends coming over to see him?” Mpatho asks.

“No. He’s still too young, they will see him in pictures.” When do his friends ever come over?

I still have a beef with Zamani so they mustn’t try me. I don’t want their dark spirits around my son.

“Okay, let me go and take pictures with him.” He takes Imango from Ntombi’s arms and goes to our bedroom. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him this happy, it’s like he’s losing his mind.

“Your baby is so cute,” Ntombi compliments.

“He looks like my husband,” Beauty says.

I roll my eyes. When did mkhulu ever look cute like Imango?

Ntombi looks at her, “You also look beautiful and different now.”

Really? I haven’t noticed.

“Is it not my lips?” She’s happy, pursing her lips in a show-off. “I had fillers. My surgeon said she can transform me into a Beyonce.”

Oh no, we have a new problem. This one will end up looking like the Real Housewives of Beverly Hills. Unfortunately for now I don’t see the difference, her lips just look like they were teased by bees a little, now that I’m paying attention.

She finally gives us space. I know Ntombi has been dying to know how everything went down. This is the first thing I’ve ever done before her.

“Mpatho is happy,” she says.

“I know, I don’t think he’s even going to work this week. He named him Khulasphinde, can you imagine?”

She laughs out loud. "Maybe you didn't scare him enough. Did you insult him and ask the nurse to kill you?"

"No, I didn't, there was no nurse nje. That's the problem, I didn't scare him enough, he thinks it's just a walk in the park."

"Do me a favor, don't fall pregnant again. We have to plan a wedding, remember?"

Phewww! I don't know when was the last time he spoke about that. He refuses to be a Vilakazi and pay lobola from there, that's the reason we've been stuck in one place.

"When is he paying lobola Phume? You've done everything that a woman should do," Ntombi asks.

She's my friend, I know it comes from a good place.

"A lot of things have been happening, we haven't had that conversation in a long time. Nobody is pushing him, unlike Malibongwe because Miyanda has a family. I don't have a family, if he decides not to, he will end up not paying anything." It hurts that I'm thinking this way. I'm not blaming him, I think me not having a family is also adding to his delay.

"Then when you two are dead Imango will be told that his mother wasn't paid for and all that stuff. I think you have to push him to do the right thing," Ntombi says.

"All because you want to attend a wedding Ntombi?" I laugh.

She's looking forward to this day more than me, the actual bride.

"No, I'm doing my job as Imango's godmother. I don't want him to have any obstacles when he's grown, like Mpatho." She has a valid point.

I will have a conversation with Mpatho, just not today because today is Imango's day.

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MPATHO

Malibongwe wasn't taught dependency. But at times like this everyone needs a shoulder to cry on. His may not be the most desired one but he's going to the Vilakazis early in the morning to see if Malibongwe needs anything before going to the hospital.

Nombuso was outside feeding chickens but when she saw the car she disappeared. Is she avoiding him for a reason? They're not letting what Yoli's father did to her slide, they will make him pay.

Nombuso was the first sibling he got close to so seeing her run away from him hurts. He parks outside the yard and heads to the main house.

There's a difference now that MaVilakazi is gone. A huge one.

A part of him misses her; the times they spent together and the times they could've spent together.

He finds the right person in the kitchen. Manzi has revealed the weak, emotional side of Malibongwe. He's not taking his son's condition well.

"Hey," Mpatho walks in.

"Sho," he responds and sits down with a bowl of porridge.

For the first time even arguing each other over nothing will not change the atmosphere in the room.

"How is Miyanda?" Mpatho asks.

"She's okay...brave than me," he says.

“I saw that, she’s one strong girl. I just came to check if everyone still got both their eyes.”

“Well, we are fine. Only Mkhuleko and I had an argument, but we are fine now, he cooked me this porridge,” he says.

“Let’s hope his maturity lasts. Where is the other one?”

“Umnakwenu? He went to the shop,” he says.

“This week you were going to the Mhlongos. Are you still going?”

Malibongwe heaves a long sigh, “I don’t know Mpatho. Miyanda needs me, I have to deal with Manzi’s situation first.”

“This keeps getting postponed and that boy’s anger gets worse. Allow me to talk to MaNhleko, then if she needs me I will go with her. Focus on Manzolwandle and Miyanda. Also to avoid any outburst from Nyambose.”

“You can do that for Sphakamiso?” Malibongwe is a bit shocked.

“Yeah, I know how he feels. I will talk to MaNhleko and we will decide when she will go there and inform you,” he says.

“Thank you. I feel like my head is going to crack.” Mkhuleko is just another situation. He heard him loud and clear yesterday; something has to be done regarding his gift.

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PHUMELELE

Imango and I are ready for bed. His father came home late and ate dinner alone because Beauty and I had long eaten. Imango has been a bit restless, maybe it’s because I changed him from

breastmilk. The nurse said 6 months, Ntombi, the expert of everything, said it's going to be hard for me to change him once he's old. And the general information out there is that breastmilk babies are clingy to their mothers. I'm planning to get a nanny to help me. It's been hard for me to rest the last two days because he sleeps well during the day and stays up at night.

"Is he asleep?" Mpatho asks like he's coming down the hill. No manners, no common sense.

"Shhhh, he just slept!" I softly shush him.

"I want to read him a bedtime story," he says.

"He's 3 days old Mpatho!" God intervene.

"Dr Grey says they can hear."

Maybe Dr Grey's children could hear at this age but I know that my Imango can't hear yet.

Right in the middle of our argument we hear a gun going off.

I look at Imango's bums, that's where it's coming from. I just changed his nappy for crying out loud.

"It's your turn," I say.

"He's not done." He puts the book down and comes to massage Imango's tummy, motivating him to poop more. I need to Google when one can start potty-training him.

"When you're done changing him we need to talk," I say.

"Did I do something wrong?" Men will always be uncomfortable because they're what depletes the ozone layer.

"No," I put him at ease.

He enjoys being in a father zone, even if it means wiping poop.

He's still anxious when we sit in the lounge to have a conversation. I made coffee, it's a bit cold.

“Let me put you out of the misery, this is about lobola,” I say.

“Okay, what about it?” He’s asking.

I’m offended that he doesn’t even know what is it about lobola that we should discuss.

“I have learned how to cook, how to iron and give the best blowjob. And I have given you a son. It’s time you sort out your things and do right by me,” I say.

“Oh...okay.” It looks like he’d like to give it a thought. But he doesn’t voice anything out.

I have said my piece, Aunt Brandi needs to ululate, it’s long overdue now.

CHAPTER 135

PHUMELELE

Imango woke up with tantrums today. It looks like I will need a nanny earlier than late. Being a mother is going to need a lot of patience. It’s tricky when he refuses milk because he’s still too little for me to strap on my back.

“Maybe he’s bored, he’s been inside the house since yesterday,” his father throws in his two cents.

“Or maybe he’s annoyed by how loud you talk,” I say.

“Or how short-tempered you’ve become,” he says.

I don’t need him to mock me right now.

He takes Imango, I sit down on the bed fighting back tears. Imango stops crying immediately. So I’m a bad mother, that’s what this means. Mpatho is the only parent he recognizes.

“I’m sorry sthandwa sami. I know you need a nap, I’m not going anywhere today, don’t stress.”

He leaves with Imango, five minutes later I’m served a cup of coffee and a sandwich. I’m eating, taking a bath and having a nap. I need a rest and it’s been only 4 days.

I’m woken up by Mpatho. It feels like I’ve only slept for five minutes.

“What is the time?” I ask.

“11:36. I’m sorry to wake you up, I have to go somewhere.”

Nooo! He promised me that he’s not going anywhere today.

“Uyaphi?” I ask.

“I’m going to see MaNhleko about something. When I come back I promise, I will take care of Imango and you will rest.”

I need a nanny, ASAP.

This person is already dressed up and Imango’s bottle is not even full.

He kisses my cheek and leaves Imango asleep next to me.

I need a snack, I better go make it now while he’s still asleep.

Beauty is sitting on the couch with her legs crossed. What kind of a great-grandmother is this?

“You’re finally awake,” she says.

“As if I had any sleep.” I roll my eyes.

“I’m going to Cape Town, coming back on Wednesday. I need a break.”

“A break from what?” I don’t understand.

She’s one person with no problems in this world.

“From great-grandmotherhood,” she says.

It has to be a joke. She holds Imango twice a day, for less than five minutes. If there’s anyone who needs that Cape Town vacation it’s me.

“He’s been only here for four days,” I say.

“But he’s cried for the whole year. I’m leaving tonight, I’m waiting for Emily to send a car.” She’s seriously leaving. I can’t believe this, so if Mpatho happens to go somewhere I will be all alone.

I don’t even make that snack, I return to my room and lie next to my son. I’m angry, I’m hurt, Beauty should’ve waited at least a month. We sorted things out, I thought she was going to support me but it looks like she’s not that bothered.

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Beauty has left, I didn’t say goodbye, she didn’t care. Sis’ Theh comes and offers to look after Imango while I go and do whatever that I need to do. It’s a favor but I don’t want to make a habit of it. She was hired to clean, do laundry and cook when necessary. I will hire a nanny, looking after Imango was not on her contract.

My phone rings. I’m in the kitchen finally making something to eat.

I don’t know this number, if it’s the insurance companies they will collect Nombuso’s sweet and sour because I’m not in a good mood.

“Who is this?” I ask.

“Mango-mango’s father.” It’s Mkhuleko.

“Mpatho is not home,” I say.

“I’m not here for him, open or I’m going to climb this fence.”

“Relax, hhayi bo.”

I open for him. I think he’s here to see Imango, he’s the only one who hasn’t seen him. I was skeptical about Sphakamiso but there wasn’t tension when he saw him at the hospital.

He walks in, looking at me suspiciously.

“Is he a twin?” he asks.

“Are you here to bodyshame me or what?”

“I just saw that your tummy is still big and assumed that maybe they left a twin inside.”

“Is Nombuso also carrying a twin?” I know I shouldn’t bring her into this but what the fuck is he asking me?

He cracks up, laughing. Sometimes I forget that he’s not a sane person.

“Where is Mango-mango?” He’s changed the name into his own thing.

“Have a seat, I will get him.” I bring him a glass of juice and then go take Imango from Sis’ Theh.

He’s still taking a break from crying.

Mkhuleko takes him and looks at his face.

“Ah, he looks like me.”

I’m not sure about that.

“Ngizomkhunga,” he says with a smirk.

I'm expecting to see a wallet coming out but instead he's taking beads out of his pocket. He's already sized them to a baby's wrist.

"Is that all?" I'm a bit disappointed, I thought it would be money.

"This is more than silver and gold. Look how good they look on him!"

"They do, thank you," I say.

"They mean a lot, you know." He stretches out his arm and shows me his, they're similar to Imango's. I guess they're really special.

"What do they stand for?" I ask.

"The smart one. Well-connected one. Handsome one. Sexy one...." He's going to shower himself with endless compliments, that I know.

"Where is Ruby? The beautiful one," I ask.

He laughs, "She's home. I will organize for them to meet. Ruby meets Imangothando!"

I shouldn't have asked, I have opened a can of worm.

"But it has to be special. I will ask Mpatho if he can sponsor it when he comes back from Mandeni," he says.

"Mandeni?" I'm confused.

What would Mpatho be doing there?

"Isn't he meeting with MaNhleko today to organize when they will meet Sphakamiso's stepmother," he says.

This is news to me, Mpatho hasn't told me anything.

"I didn't know that," I say.

"Well, he's going to sort that out."

"Did he talk about when he's going to pay lobola for me?"

“Don’t you guys talk?”

“We do but it looks like not about everything.”.

“He must pay it quickly. Are you going to be MaShandu or MaMzimela?”

This question hurts me a bit. I know where he’s coming from because my mother was married to Mpatho’s father and she was MaShandu.

“Imango is special, he’s their spiritual brother,” he says jokingly, probably because he sees that I’m hurt.

‘Their’ excludes him. I also don’t know why he’s calling him a brother, not a son.

“I’m also special,” he says.

I laugh, “Of course you are.”

“I’m the only surprise child at home. I mean surprise, surprise. Nombuso is 36, Mpatho 33, Malibongwe 31 and Sphakamiso 28. They’re not far apart. But me, I’m 5 years away from Sphakamiso, my mother thought she was done and I came.”

“So that gap makes you special?” I’m really interested in this.

“I was born with duties, Vilakazi duties. I was appointed by the greatest but my father was a hot-head, he didn’t allow me to go and stay at the Vilakazis because he married my mother and didn’t owe the Vilakazis anything. So that was that.” He sighs and picks Imango’s little hand and counts fingers.

I do feel like this is deep and I want to hear more.

“Was there any solution?” I ask.

“Not really. But as soon as there is another son at home I will be free from the Mcineka ancestors, that son will take my place as uthunjana, and I will go and fulfil my duties.” He’s explaining and I hear him, but somewhere somehow I’m lost.

“Are you going to go and become a sangoma?” I ask.

“I will undergo training from my grandfather, the one who gave me this gift, then I will become a healer as ikhehla lakwaVilakazi,” he says.

“Congratulations. Is that appropriate?”

He just laughs.

“You have a messy background,” he says.

“Me?” God help.

“Your mother was MaShandu, she never introduced you to neither her ancestors nor your real father’s. Did she visit home?”

I hate these type of questions.

“Not really, they hated her for what she did to my aunt,” I say.

“You can’t be your own mother’s daughter-in-law.”

Jeez!

“I know, I’m not her daughter-in-law,” I say.

“Whose daughter-in-law are you going to be?”

“MaVilakazi’s,” I say.

Is he trying to deny me? MaVilakazi knew that I’m her daughter-in-law.

“Is MaVilakazi even recognized here as a babymama?”

Why am I getting all these hard questions?

“She is not but I’m her daughter-in-law,” I say.

“It doesn’t make sense Phume, you’re all a mess here. Everyone does too much; your mother, his father, and now you and him.” Another one comparing me to my mother and Mpatho to his father.

“Him and I talk,” he says.

“About what?” I’m curious.

“Everything. Even though I’m not any help but I do know things and I see them. I don’t want to use the word heartless, I will say dangerous, that’s Mpatho. And the fact that you understood him is beyond me.”

“What did I do?” I ask.

“The baby...did you tell him not to do it?”

“What baby?” I’m lost.

“Really, you don’t know?” He laughs.

But I get a feeling that this is a serious confrontation.

“It was wrong and as they always say; the sins of the father will be laid upon his children. Messing with outsiders is one thing, but your own family? You guys went too far, only Mango-mango can survive this place, this aura. Manzolwandle is too fragile and he’s already received the beating.”

I’m still confused but I think this is about Beauty’s baby, just that we’ve already talked about a lot of things, my head is buzzing.

“What beating did Manzi receive? From who?” I ask.

“You will understand once I’m gone. I’m here, Mango-mango is here with his cute face, that’s why you’re confused. Two handsome men in front of you,” he says.

“Mkhuleko please, I’m not joking. I want to know if what Mpatho and I did will affect Imango. I don’t mind apologizing to the ancestors, in whatever way they want.” I know I will die for Imango and I’d kiss anyone’s ass if it’s for his survival.

“It won’t mean a thing. Mpatho doesn’t only have the baby’s blood in his hands, he did a lot,” he says.

My mind quickly go back to what Beauty said about him killing Mshazi and my mother. He denied it, just like he denied having anything to do with Sphakamiso's police attack. If he really caused their deaths then we have a long way to go. Surname issues, lobola payments and million cleansing and apologies to the ancestors.

"Is my son going to be safe?" I'm now scared.

Imango cannot pay for our sins, it's not fair.

"Your son is safe where he is, just sort things out quickly, do what you need to do." He stands up with Imango in his arms.

"This guy can sleep, yoh! Please take good care of him."

I nod, "I will."

CHAPTER 136

PHUMELELE

I'm a bit pissed that he's running the Vilakazi errands without telling me. I love Sphakamiso and I want him to find closure but Mpatho needs to fix his mess here before he runs to others.

"Is Imango asleep?" he asks walking past me.

"He's sleeping. Where are you coming from?" I ask like a wife who has been cheated on for years.

He frowns, "What do you mean?"

"I mean where has your ass been? Fixing people's problems and leaving your own?" This is not the best approach, I'm just angry and acared.

He stops, wearing confusion on his face.

"Did I do something wrong?"

Phewww!

“Sit,” I remove the pillow for him.

He comes and sits, looking a bit nervous.

“Mkhuleko was here, he gifted Imango beads. Apparently you’ve been talking to him, even about the things I don’t know about.”

“What are those things?” He’s acting clueless and I don’t have time for games.

“Did he talk to you about our sins, especially the one where you terminated someone’s baby’s life, affecting Imango?” I ask.

“Nothing is going to happen to my son,” he says with so much confidence.

“Mkhuleko, the seer, has advised that we fix ourselves and our past quickly. And I’m sure he’s had that conversation with you too. I’m not going to take risks Mpatho. Did you kill your father?”

“Hhayi-bo sisi!” He raises his eyebrows.

Look, I know Mpatho, I know his acting skills.

“Yes or no?” I ask.

“No,” he says with a straight face.

“I know that you’re lying.”

“Okay.” He sits leaning forward, “How did I kill him?”

How should I know? I’m looking for answers because I don’t have them.

“This concerns our offsprings, love. If you have done more than terminating Beauty’s pregnancy in this family just tell me. I won’t judge you, I just want a way forward.” I’m begging him like he’s a child.

“Beauty’s baby wasn’t family,” he says.

“Beauty was your granddaughter’s wife, those affairs didn’t mean anything solid. I don’t care how anything makes us look, I will own up to my part.”

“Look Phume, our son is fine,” he says.

“What if he’s not?” I can feel tears burning my eyes.

There’s stubborn, then there’s Mpatho.

“But he is. Why do you want me to own up to the things I didn’t do? Your mother could be a suspect too, if we have to look into my father’s death.”

“So there’s something that can be looked into?” I ask.

He blows out a sigh and stands up, unbuttoning his shirt.

“I’m done with this conversation,” he says.

The problem here is that we don’t have elders. I don’t have anyone to report to. Something in me just can’t take Mkhuleko’s words for granted.

“My head is buzzing. On this hand you’re demanding lobola, yet you fetched it from your aunt. On the other hand I’m expected to repent from the sins I never committed. What is wrong with Imangothando? Can’t we have peace for a week. Just one!”

“I thought you were done with this conversation,” I say.

“I am done,” he says.

“Then shut up!” Why the hell is he still talking?

He laughs out loud. Not the cheering kind of laugh.

He’s mad.

I walk out, I need a minute out of his presence.

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I have a phone stuck in my hand. I have no one to call.

My phone rings. Wrong time! I have no time for social chit-chats.

Miyanda's name flashes on my screen, I almost dropped.

It's actually the right person.

"Hey," she says.

"Hi," I say and keep quiet.

I actually have so much to vent about but words are just stuck in my throat.

"Phume???" she says.

"I'm here," I say, clearing my throat.

"I'm asking about the birth certificate. Have you done it for Imangothando?"

I didn't hear her the first time, I have a lot in my head and a lot to say.

"I'm still planning to go, whenever his father avails himself. Are you okay?" I ask.

"No, are you okay?" she asks me instead.

"No, I'm not," I say truthfully. "I'm dating a 33 year old baby, he's thrown all his toys out of the basket because I brought up his past."

"Okay, let's calm down. It's too early for you guys to fight. Is Imangothando okay?"

"He is fine," I say with a shallow sigh.

"Breathe, and then tell me what's going on," she says.

I take a deep breath but nothing is enough to calm me down right now.

“He has his new priorities, nothing I say to him is important. Mkhuleko was here, he told me that we need to fix certain issues from the past. But Mpatho is denying everything. I know he’s not saying the truth because Beauty once said the same thing Mkhuleko touched on. Clearly I’m his fool, he will never be honest with me.”

“Okay, I don’t know what you’re talking about but I can tell that you’re angry. Try to have a conversation with him again once you’ve calmed down.”

“I don’t want to calm down, I want him to grow the fuck up,” I say.

“Remember what you said to me when I was worked up because of MaVilakazi? Use the same approach; be calm and collected and nice,” she says.

I’m glad she’s not in the mental health department, because what in the womandla spirit is this? I needed her to take my side, for my mental health reasons, and unite with me in discussing how childish Mpatho is.

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He’s leaning against the headboard with the laptop on his lap. He’s working, he doesn’t care that I walked out mad at him. It doesn’t affect him, I was hoping it would.

“Hey,” I sit next to him.

“Mmmmm,” he acknowledges me with a mili-second glance.

I hate that I’m the one who has to calm down. I’m the young one for Christ’ sake.

“I’m sorry for the tone that I used when you got in, I was a bit overwhelmed,” I say.

“I have a child now, you don’t get to speak to me like I’m a child. If I wanted impempe I would’ve gone to a store and bought a whistle. I’m your husband, there should be some level of respect regardless of what’s going on in your head.”

Someone is getting carried away with this mini apology. I used the wrong tone, that doesn’t mean I said anything wrong.

“We have come so far for you to be still using the things Beauty said to stir up drama,” he says.

“Okay, I apologize. Can I speak now?” I ask.

“Go ahead.” He closes the laptop and puts it away.

I need to reposition myself before I burst my stitches.

“I have done everything for you Mpatho. Literally everything. I even went beyond my limits. I don’t think there’s any reason for you not to trust me with your past. Mkhuleko is has a spiritual gift, I really don’t want to underestimate him. If not for me, do it for your son.”

He blows out a huge breath. “I’m tired of talking about this, honestly. What do you want me to do?”

“If you had a hand in your father’s death, just like you did in Beauty’s baby, just say it and do whatever ritual is needed to show remorse,” I say.

“Apologize to who? I’m his only child, his wife and parents are dead. Who am I apologizing to? And when is he going to apologize to me for the things he did? And to my mother for taking her child away from her. He wasn’t a saint, if I do anything to someone it’s always because they deserve it.”

Lord help me help him! Now I know that he definitely had a hand in his father’s death.

“If the ancestors cared about peace and reconciliation they would’ve punished him for making me kill my mother’s husband, my siblings’ father, not knowing. So right now I’m at the point where I don’t entertain those dead people’s little demands. I only did that peace ritual with Beauty for you. If they see it fit they can kill me and see who is going to keep their name alive.”

I’m glad I’ve given birth, I can make use of mother’s wines now.

“I need them, they need me, so I’m not going to kiss graves. They communicate with me via dreams and tell me how I’m going to get an apology from dad. Once there’s a way I’m down to give apologies.”

“I get it, you were wronged too. But chances of them punishing you directly are very slim. They will come through our son, Mkhuleko said it.” I’m begging here. I know ancestors aren’t logic, his demands won’t matter.

“They must try!” he says.

“Mpatho, we are talking about dead people here, you’re not going to do anything to them.” I remind him, it seems like he’s forgotten.

“Oh, you think so? Phume you don’t know me, I already know that I’m not going to heaven so I have no reason to be scared of sin.” He’s cruel, it’s written on his face. He believes in revenge. He killed his own father. Blood means nothing to him; there are no limits with him.

“Wow! So Beauty was right about everything?” I’m starting to feel like a clown, I defended this man.

“She was being spiteful, there’s nothing right about that,” he says.

“But you did kill your father and you don’t care, you’re not even scared for our son who might bear those sins on your behalf.”

“Phume, look at me!”

I take a deep breath and turn my eyes.

“I love hard and I hate hard. If they think they’re going to make my son suffer for the things I did after being abused for years, then they’re mistaken. You see those mlahlankosi leaves hanging over the alter, I was the one leading their spirits home from the dead hospital, with those leaves and goats. The same way I brought their spirits back home is the same way I can take them out. Out of the Mshazi alter, I can take those leaves to the wild and throw them there. Then ask my uncle to give me isphandla sakwa Vilakazi and take everything and be a Vilakazi. I was born out of wedlock, I’m easily recognized as my maternal uncle’s child.”

“Alright, let’s not use emotions too much.” I can’t believe he actually thinks that’s even possible.

“I have thought about it. It’s not like I have great memories here. They took me from my mother and did not treat me right.”

Wait a minute....

“You thought about moving to the Vilakazis?” I think I heard him wrong, because WTF.

“Yes,” he says with a straight face. “My life would be a lot easier. Right now Beauty is in Cape Town, next month she might be in India looking for an Indian boyfriend. On the other hand you want me to pay your lobola...still keeping the first one I paid by the way.”

Awu, was that necessary? That money is safe in my savings account.

“I have suffered. I put up with a lot in the name of being a Mshazi. I know Beauty is no different, she’s not going to be available to help as much as I’d need her with the surname issue. So why must I take the hard road when I can easily go to

the Vilakazis, pay lobola there and raise our kids without one-sided ancestors demanding apologies they don't deserve?"

"Oh, I think that's called running away from your problems," I say.

"Well, if that's how it's called then I'm late to do it. I should've ran away when I was 16."

16 he says...

"When you found out that you were arranged to marry me?" I'm deeply offended.

He laughs loud and quickly remembers that we are now parents and puts a pillow over his face.

It's not funny, I don't know why he's laughing.

"I didn't say that, beside you actually ran away when you found out that you were arranged to marry me," he says.

"It's not the same," I say.

"How is it different?"

"It's just different. You've hurt my feelings today more than once."

"I'm sorry, come here."

"No, I don't want to move."

"Urgh, sorry. I forget that they sew it up. They didn't sew close the honey-cave altogether, right?" He shifts to me. I hate his mouth, also he doesn't give the hospital any credit.

I roll my eyes, "Why would they do that?"

"I don't know how they do those things, you didn't allow me in the room, remember. But if I'm still going to fit in after next week then I'm all good."

"Six weeks, not three," I tell him.

“That’s like two years. But at least we have other options.”

“You’re a sadist.”

“Your sadist.”

He kisses my lips and smiles. His smile is perfect, you can easily mistake him for a kind man. I’m going to ask Miyanda for Malibongwe’s number. I know I’m probably the last person he’d ever want to help with relationship issues but I need him to talk to Mpatho because with me the more I speak, the more stubborn he gets.

CHAPTER 137

MALIBONGWE

Phume said he rushed to the office to get some documents, which is a perfect place for him because he’s coming from town, Miyanda got home yesterday and needed something from the pharmacy to boost her breastmilk. Nothing has been coming out, her breasts are dry, but he got some pills from the pharmacy, hopefully they will work because she wants to breastfeed.

He catches Mpatho just as he packs his bag.

“I thought you were on a paternity leave,” he says walking in.

“I needed a few things, sawubona nawe.” Mpatho sighs and unbuttons the collar of his shirt. “What did she send you for?”

Malibongwe frowns, “Who?”

“Phume. I know she’s the reason you are here. She never loses an argument, I knew that her silence involved thinking of another plan, now here you are.”

“Fine, you know your woman.” Malibongwe looks around the office. It’s nice and cozy, there’s a bar fridge with drinks. He can definitely use Castle Lite.

“I thought you don’t drink,” Mpatho says with his eyebrow raised.

“You need to stop thinking,” Malibongwe says opening the drawers. “Where is the opener?”

Mpatho clicks his tongue and grabs the bottle and opens it with his teeth. “Fake gangster, you don’t know how to do shit.”

Malibongwe gulps down the first one in two minutes and takes another one.

“This is not a free bottle-store wena. Don’t you have something to tell me?” Mpatho asks.

“Phume wants you to be a bigger person and reconcile with your late father for your son’s sake,” Malibongwe says.

“I’m not going to do that,” Mpatho says without hesitating.

“You have to do it for peace sake. Phume will never be happy and free with the idea that her son might suffer in future in her head. Some things you just have to do regardless of how you feel. Yesterday I was sitting in front of a white woman to ‘get counseling’ because I’m not okay- MaMthethwa’s demands,” Malibongwe says. He knows he’s struggling accepting everything that Manzi has to go through, but a counseling session with a white woman telling him to forgive himself? That was wild but he had to do it for Miyanda.

“I can die for Phume and my son, but I’m not going to apologize. I have no reason to apologize, I’m not sorry,” he says with his full chest.

“So what’s going to happen?” Malibongwe asks.

“I have been thinking about going to the Vilakazis. I talked to MaNhleko about it, I haven’t decided yet but it’s something that’s on my mind.”

“What about your father’s legacy?” -Malibongwe.

“I don’t owe the Mshazis anything. The more you guys bring this up the angrier I get because neither one of you know what they did to me,” Mpatho says, his nose flaring up.

“But the whole point of Phume’s mother arranging for you to marry her daughter was that you will carry the Mshazi name forward,” Malibongwe says.

“Fuck that witch! I’m not going to take orders from anyone. If I want to change her daughter’s surname to her enemy’s surname, my mother, that’s what I will do. Her daughter will go and serve my mother’s family and I will rebuild the Vilakazis using their money. Because they owe MaVilakazi 32 years Malibongwe, and they owe me much even more.” He grabs the drink from Malibongwe’s hand and takes a huge gulp.

“You need to calm down, this anger can be your downfall. I need you to think logically. You’re not going to lose anything by doing this, nix. But if you go down that road you might lose Phume,” Malibongwe says.

“Phume is not going to leave me.” Mpatho is too confident.

Malibongwe chuckles because with him he knows that Miyanda’s father would even hire a truck to fetch her.

“Do you love her?” Malibongwe asks.

He’s wanted to ask this question for so long but didn’t because it would’ve looked like he was taking Sphakamiso’s side.

“I do,” Mpatho says.

“If not for the arrangement, would you have gone for her?”

“She would’ve been my stepsister,” Mpatho says.

“No, if she was a girl from across the street, would you have walked up to her and asked for a date?” he asks.

“I don’t work with ifs, I work with absolutes. She is absolutely not the girl from across the street and we are together, married from arrangement, and I absolutely love her,” -Mpatho.

“Be gentle with her then. She is a new mother figuring motherhood and dealing with new body changes. The last thing she needs is an angry grown man.”

“I’m an angry man,” Mpatho argues.

“You are. Phume doesn’t even like me that much but she was able to call me and ask me to talk to you. That girl has nobody, she is also a victim of your father and her mother’s scheming. She didn’t know her real dad, just like you didn’t know your mother. But she is not prioritizing the past over Imangothando. Stop stressing her out, you wanted a baby, not the other way around, now it’s time for sacrifices.” Another cider would do! Now he’s done, Mpatho will decide, he’s old enough to know wrong from right and which battles to choose.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Phume asked for Bonga’s number, she’s having issues with Mpatho. Bonga like a true relationship expert that he is, he went there to advise. I’m happy he did that, I love Phume and Mpatho together. But him and I are also going through something. Manzi and I came out of the hospital two days ago. While I understand that he’s worried about his son, I cannot help but feel irritated and fed up. He’s been sulking everyday, I think it’s long overdue now. Manzi will be fine, he will have

surgery, just not this month. Other than that condition, he's a bouncy baby boy.

"Knockieeee!" that's Mkhuleko.

He's been in a good mood this week.

"Dinner is ready," he says.

It was his turn to cook, we are eating meat. He doesn't believe in vegetables. I didn't think he'd be a good cook but he's really getting better with experience.

He walks in and takes Manzi. Him and Sphakamiso are happy with him. They show him love regardless of his feet, something his father can't do. They have never pitied him, I know whether his surgery is successful or not they will love him and treat him like a normal baby.

We all sit around the table, only Bonga isn't here. I don't know what's keeping him wherever he is. Mkhuleko said dinner is ready but there's no food on the table.

"How are you?" Nombuso.

This one just wants us to take Manzi to a traditional healer. She says it's caused by the ancestor's wrath and only a traditional healer can help us. I have seen a lot of babies on the internet with this condition; some had surgeries and others grew with it.

Mkhuleko comes with our plates on the big tray. It's beef stew served with something I don't know.

"Hhayi! Why are we eating yellow phuthu now?" Sphakamiso asks.

It's yellow, I didn't even realize that it's phuthu.

"I put yellow food coloring on it," he says.

"On uphuthu?" Nombuso asks, appalled.

I've never seen anything like this.

Which chef is his role model?

“It tastes the same, I just wanted to give it va-va vroom,” he says.

“What’s next ke Mkhuleko? Rice with raisons?” Nombuso is pissed.

Mkhuleko smiles, “Wow, I haven’t thought about it.”

“Mkhuleko no, don’t even think about it!” I say.

Everyone laughs.

The busiest member finally arrives.

He greets everyone and goes to Manzi in Nombuso’s bedroom. He will not come out anytime soon because he’s going to sit there, stare at him until tears tickle his eyes then go to bed without eating. He hasn’t had appetite since Manzi arrived.

“Imanzi ingwenya,” Sphakamiso says.

Mkhuleko laughs, “I saw, he drinks alone now because we are broke.”

No ways, Bonga cannot test me like that. I’ve seen him drunk less than five times ever since we got together. Now is not the time, we have a newborn. I don’t care if he’s stressed, we have a baby to take care of. The person he went to advise took a leave from work to help Phume take care of the baby.

He comes out of the bedroom and leaves without eating. Nobody says anything, I’m pissed. But I finish my dinner and laugh at Mkhuleko’s jokes like everything is fine. I’m not getting the emotional support I deserve from Bonga. I don’t know if blames someone for Manzi.

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When Manzi and I went to bed he'd fallen asleep. I needed to have a conversation with him when he's sober anyway. He's already up when I wake up.

"We need to talk," I say.

"Did you dream of me?" He attempts to kiss my cheek.

I move my head. No, we are having a conversation first.

"You're angry at me?" he asks.

"Why did you drink yesterday?"

"Mpatho also drank and I wasn't even drunk."

"You slept flat throughout the night, you were definitely drunk. And I'm not talking about Mpatho because I know he kissed his son and cuddled him throughout the night, something you can't do."

"Okay. I'm not sure what's going on. Ngenzeni?"

Take a deep breath Miyanda.

"There's nothing wrong with Manzi. I will not allow you to use him as an escape to misery. You had counseling, which is a disgrace. What will he say when he grows up finding out that his father had to get counseling? I'm tired of the tears and pity, don't treat my son like a curse."

"Babe! I didn't do that. I can't be not worried about my son. If his surgery isn't successful he will grow up and be different from other kids."

"Yes, he will definitely feel different because his father will make sure he feels that way. I can cancel everything and raise him the way God gave me."

"That's not fair," his voice drops into misery.

“Snap out, I need your emotional support and he needs your love. If you fail to do that I will...”

He continues for me; “You will go home to your father.”

“I’m glad you know,” I say.

He takes his shirt and walks out. He can walk his walk, I have talked my talk.

CHAPTER 138

PHUMELELE

Someone is back. I don’t know if he’s mad at me for reporting him to Malibongwe. I check the time, it’s 17:38, I look at Imangothando’s cot and he’s still sleeping peacefully. He’s got unpredictable moods like his father.

I get out of bed and start in the bathroom before proceeding to the kitchen to see what we are eating. Even though we have our ups and downs...or is it just downs all the way with us? I’m still in love with him. I have never been one to be attracted to men with sexy bodies, physical appearance has never been really a factor to me, but his, especially the arms and chest, I get wet. He’s topless, with his back turned against me, and he looks so damn hot. But I’m still healing, I’m not going to lust over him.

“Hey love,” I say after clearing my throat.

He turns his head, “Yebo.”

He’s cold, that means he’s mad.

“What are you making?” I ask.

“Baked pasta and cheese,” he says.

“Ah, my favorite!” I pull my chair, it has a sponge placed on it for comfort.

“It’s not your favorite,” he says.

He’s kind of correct, I was saying that to set the mood right.

“Your messenger came,” he says.

“My messenger?” I mean, I’m confused, who could that be.

“Phume don’t act with me!” He turns to give me a look.

“Fine, I sent him. Do you still don’t see the need to make peace with your father?”

“I don’t,” he says.

I just sigh, at this point only God can help me.

“But I will do it,” he says.

“Really?” If my vagina wasn’t stitched I would’ve gone to give him a hug.

“You have gathered a team of defenders, strikers and midfielders. Why wouldn’t I?”

Really now? I only told Malibongwe and Miyanda and Beauty and Nombuso...and Ntombi a little bit.

“It’s not a gang-up. Your feelings are valid and I respect them. It’s just that I don’t want to worry about my son’s well-being and future,” I say.

“Fine, I will do it. Beauty is on her flight back home anyway since you told her that I’m going back to the Vilakazis and she’s going to be living here alone with angry ghosts.”

I didn’t send Beauty to say all of that but I’m glad she made it a priority and decided to come back.

“Ntombi’s mother is also coming tomorrow to confront me for making your life hard,” he says.

“I promise, I didn’t tell Ntombi the whole situation, I just said that you are....” Well, I can’t remember well.

Why is he looking at me like that?

“You know that I was diagnosed with amnesia, right?” I ask.

“Oh ya, Trevor Noah.” He takes his glass, it has alcohol inside, he drinks it.

I don’t know why he needs alcohol, it’s still early, we should be adjusting into parenthood.

“You will change Imangothando and feed him when it’s your turn, drunk or not,” I say.

“I don’t get drunk, you’re loud enough to numb my senses.” He can be quite insulting when he gets a chance.

“Divorce me,” I say.

“Okay, I will call my lawyer. Do you want a starter?”

“No, I will have desert though. What desert are you serving?”

“A slice of chocolate cake?”

That means he has nothing prepared, the cake has been in the fridge for two days. I had enough cakes when I was pregnant, he was baking twice a week, so I will pass.

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Beauty is here when we wake up. I never thought she’d ever have this kind of care for her family. She’s panicking thinking the same Mpatho she wanted gone is leaving. I can’t count how many times we forced our stay here.

“Family meeting, now!” she says.

I pray that she's going to set a date when they're going to finalize things with the Vilakazis. Mpatho has been less pissed by the situation since dinner last night. It was just the two of us, Imangothando slept peacefully and we just talked about us.

Beauty sits with her fur coat covering her down to her knees looking stressed and extravagant at the same time.

"Mpatho I heard that you want to leave. Do you understand that your father paid everything that your mother's family requested? If they left anything behind it was their fault. And who's going to look after your father's property if you leave because surely Mshazi Enterprises won't change to Vilakazi Enterprises?"

Mpatho is quiet. I don't know if he will ever regard Beauty as his step-grandmother. She's actually shouting but he's not hearing it because she had another botox injection and she's wearing the blond wig. I mean we would all pay money for her to stick to black hair only.

"I have spoken to your useless father's cousin and we are going to visit the Vilakazis again, tomorrow," she says.

"Wow, thank you." I'm very happy about this.

Mpatho might think being a Vilakazi is better than being a Mshazi. But I believe in the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know. MaNhleko has no warmth whatsoever, I know they will use him and cough him out when it suits them. If they really cared they would've fought to have a relationship with him.

"We can have your thing with the ancestors during the weekend," I say to him.

"Good, because I want to go to Knysna on Tuesday, I'm hosting a girls' trip," -Beauty.

“But I’m also a girl and I’m not invited.” I don’t really want to go with her friends, I’m 100% sure that we have nothing in common.

“My girls, not just any girl,” she says.

I’d be going 'ouch' if I didn’t know Beauty.

“Is your sister going?” I ask.

“She’s not my girl,” she says.

“Cousin?” I ask.

She sighs and looks at Mpatho. “Hopefully once everything has been sorted you will take her on a vacation and be romantic like you were in your past relationships.”

Well, it’s Beauty, I don’t care.

But I can see that she struck a nerve on someone.

“Is this meeting over?” he asks, looking pissed.

“Yes, that was all. When I come back we will plan a family reunion celebration.”

“Who is reuniting?” Mpatho.

“Us,” she says.

He frowns but does no further interrogation and just leaves. In all this I’m just glad that he’s back into his senses. No Vilakazi nonsense, we are doing what we have to do and keeping our lives as we know them. I never thought Malibongwe and Beauty can help me this much. I should call Ntombi’s mother and tell her that the misunderstanding has been cleared and she shouldn’t worry. We are heading to new beginnings, this time around I hope we really bury the past and leave all the pain behind.

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SIS' NOMBUSO

Her phone rings.

It's the number she can't recognize.

"Is this Yoli's mother?" the person asks.

"Yes, it's her," she says hesitantly.

"Thokozani asked me to tell you that he was taken into custody," the person says.

"Huh?" She's confused.

"They took him to the station for questioning then took him in. Someone sold him a gun that had murdered someone, now he has to prove that it wasn't him but he's got no receipt because he doesn't even know where the seller lives."

Gosh, this is bad.

"How did he pay for it not knowing the seller?" she asks.

"He got the offer on Facebook without asking. I think it was a trap, that person knew what he was doing because a day after the gun was sent to him the police arrived."

It was indeed a trap, someone played him and he fell right into it.

"Okay, thanks for letting me know."

They were not on talking terms but there's a lot that still needs both of them. If he gets prosecuted that means someone else will handle Yoli's rituals and ceremonies that are pending, which isn't a bad thing because she doesn't wish to get slapped again.

She has an idea of who might have done something like this. But she can't ask him anything because she's avoiding him. It's enough that she has to face Malibongwe and Miyanda everyday.

Mapholoba is here, she's been standing for almost 30 minutes. He opens the door and climbs out.

"I'm so sorry, I got caught up in traffic."

"There's no traffic in the village. You lied about your initial destination."

He smiles and kisses her cheeks. "You're right, I'm sorry."

They get inside the car, he has pizza for her to snack on. She's still mourning so she can't visit him, they meet like this or go to town together and do shopping.

"You look beautiful." He always compliments her, it doesn't mean he's being honest.

She gives him a lazy smile.

"I mean it," he cups her face and looks into her eyes smiling gently.

"Thank you." She appreciates how he always tries to lift her mood up. These little compliments really mean a lot.

She releases a deep sigh. "Yoli's father was arrested, I got a phone call from his friend."

"What did he do?" he asks.

"He bought a gun illegally and the police found out somehow, the gun has a murder case, so there's a pending investigation he might not even afford to prove his innocence from," she says.

"That's a tough one," he says.

"I think Mpatho set him up,"- Nombuso.

He laughs, "What? Mshazi is busy with his baby, he has no time."

He did it, she just knows.

"Speaking of the baby, I have to tell you something," she says.

His face brightens, he's getting the wrong idea.

"Mnelisi no, I'm not pregnant. But I did witness two pregnant women giving birth a few minutes apart," she says.

He's a bit disappointed even though he's never really tried to plant his seeds inside her. Hey, miracles do happen.

"It wasn't fun, was it?" he asks.

"Not that, but loadshedding happened in the middle of it and I had to fetch candles while both of them passed out. MaNhleko was supposed to look after the babies and maybe put Phume's next to her and Miyanda's next to her."

"What are you saying Ntofo?" Mapholoba frowns.

"We were not sure, she couldn't remember how she placed them on the blanket. I freaked out and said we should just distribute babies based on their crying pitch. I thought the one who cried the loudest was Miyanda's because she was always complaining during her pregnancy."

Mapholoba opens a bottle of water and gulps it down. What in the name of Utatakho is this?

"I don't understand why you didn't just tell them. They are not broke, even if they were DNA testing is not that expensive," he says.

"We freaked out," she says.

"No, you have to tell them before it's too late. This is not the time for you to be stressed out, it's supposed to be your

mourning and healing period. I don't like this, I don't like it at all, there are two innocent lives involved."

"I know, but how do I tell them? They will be angry at me, Miyanda has just started to trust me, we are like sisters now. Phume and Mpatho are my soft life sponsors," she says.

"Find courage Ntofo, don't let this drag until they have unbreakable bonds with the babies. I'm not saying it's your fault, it's just not fair."

She nods with a heavy sigh. There has to be a way, she also knows that it's not right.

CHAPTER 139

PHUMELELE

I think it's safe to say we have moved on from the past. I was ready to join another fake cleansing and reconciliation but emotions got better of him and we ended up sitting there for an hour, talking. I was sitting by the door, Beauty was with him close to the alter and nothing really surprised her about his confession. If there's one thing about Beauty, she knows everyone's skeletons in this family. Maybe that's why mkhulu married her, she just knows way too much.

I found myself crying when Mpatho grieved to his father's spirit. I knew that my mother and his father mistreated him, but I didn't realize the depth of the emotional damage they left him. When he said it in front of impepho that he has thought about going back to his mother's family to heal, I knew that we've won. He had poured out everything that was in his heart and all that was left was for him to comfort him later.

It's a cold morning, back in the days it would've been a cuddling morning with my husband, but now we have to change diapers and make milk bottles.

By the time we are done with our morning urgencies we have guests who have announced their visits. Nombuso is coming over, she last saw Imangothando after he was born. Mpatho's favorite sibling is between Nombuso and Mkhuleko, so he's already too excited about it.

"Can we talk?" I ask.

"Now? I want to make breakfast before Nombuso arrives. Isn't it cool that Imangothando gets to have an aunt? I never had one. And all these ugly uncles and a loving mother and a handsome father."

I'm trying to have a serious conversation here. I had questions from yesterday that I felt it was too soon to ask and the mood wasn't right.

"It's very cool. Speaking about loving mothers and stuff, can we talk more about my mother?" I ask.

His cheerful face transforms into irritation.

"What about her?" he asks.

"Your relationship with her," I say.

His Adam's apple bobbles up and down; he swallows hard and exhales sharply.

"I think you already know how I felt about her and how did she feel about me. Yesterday was the last time I talk about her unless I'm burning impepho. Can you discuss her with your aunt if you miss her?"

"I respect that. I just want to know if what was in the letter that you wrote to MaVilakazi?" I know that there's a specific letter

that was written and according to him, it should've been enough to make MaVilakazi look for him and do whatever possible to take him away from my mother. And that was before he was sent to kill Mcineka.

"What letter? There were many letters and it's all in the past now. That's what you wanted." He knows which letter I'm talking about.

"Don't you trust me?" I ask.

"I do, that's why I have included you in everything and shared my weaknesses with you," he says.

The more he denies it, the more convinced I get that my mother did something to him and he's still not comfortable to share it with me. I should've asked MaVilakazi when she was still alive.

"I don't like how easy it is for you to lie to me Mpatho." I'm not forcing him to tell me things he's not comfortable with but lying to me with a straight face has been an unhealthy pattern of his.

"What did I lie about?" he asks.

"About most things, if not everything. 95% of the things Beauty said about you have been true. And you've changed, bit by bit. The Mpatho you are now is not the Mpatho who took me to a picnic and taught me how to wash dishes."

"That's not true, I'm still the same man, just with different circumstances," he denies.

"It's how I feel. Freedom said we must not dismiss each other's feelings," I remind him. His face drops.

"Am I horrible now?" he asks.

"Yes, you are. It's obvious even to those around us. I know it got to you when Beauty said you are not romantic with me as you were with those before me. Remember our weekly date nights? How many have we had?"

He doesn't answer, because we only had three or four whereas he promised it to be every week. We are slowly turning into an old married couple. Our love language is bland to the point where people question our love.

"I'm young Mpatho, still in my early twenties. I want boyfriend vibes from you, not the hard-working husband with a horrible past who has to put bread on the table. I hope now that I have given birth you will be a little gentle with me, a little romantic and honest."

"I apologize," he says and clears his throat. When he lifts his eyes they're a little teary. Yes, I want him to be honest with his emotions too.

"I know that I've been a lot to handle. Thank you for sticking around and for not shouting while addressing this," he chuckles and grabs my hand to give it a squeeze.

"Our marriage saved my life. Beauty may have been right about 95% of the things she said about me, but saying I don't love you was a fat lie. Because the truth is, in my heart you've been sitting on the throne since day one."

"Day one?" I laugh.

"I love you," he says.

I smile and raise my eyebrow.

He takes my hand and holds it again. "I know this is not normal but my whole life I've been preparing for the day I finally become your husband. I stayed away from home so that you can have freedom throughout your teen years. I didn't want to make things awkward for us, but now please help me build this family, you are my legacy wife."

"We were in the kitchen, I was leaving with my bags, right?"

He nods, "I was holding your hand, you pulled it back and called Aunt Nomusa. Then you left me, I was hurt."

“You said you loved me and then you looked shocked by your own words.” I still don’t understand. Back then I didn’t think he meant it.

“I had never used those words to anyone,” he says.

“Don’t lie, you have ex-girlfriends and fuck-buddies.”

“I liked them,” he says.

“I don’t do like,” I say.

He chuckles, “I know, the bar was already set high for me.”

“Was it?” I mean, he’s giving someone a compliment and I’m not sure he realizes it.

“Yes, the bar was set high. He didn’t have any money, he didn’t dickmatize you, he was just boyfriending you for five years, God knows how. And you loved him, you still care, which I have accepted to be okay. I think he’s good guy and a great father to his kid.”

I just love him, now more than ever. Moving on feels great.

“You made your own mark, you didn’t climb the same ladder. I mean, I’m a sex freak now and I had a whole human being put in my tummy. How soon did you sleep with me again?”

“I went to Pretoria for work, Beauty told you that I was at a strip club...”

Now I remember.

“Were you though?” I ask.

He smiles, “No.”

“Fuck you!”

“I was just watching, I swear. Anyway, you were mad at me so I came back home earlier than planned to explain myself. But you weren’t home, you had gone to Sphakamiso. I was truly hurt but we talked about it. Then I asked you to kiss me and

touch my dick. You were scared but you did it. I asked that we take a step further, you agreed after a few minutes and let me inside your soft muffin.” His breaths are getting heavy as he narrates.

“You felt amazing, you always do. I miss our intimate moments so much.” He glances over Imangothando. “But I will let you heal, this is the greatest gift anyone has ever given me and you will take as much time as you need. Don’t mind my advances.”

“Thank you love,” I say.

“You’re welcome baby.”

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SIS’ NOMBUSO

She’s let in by Beauty who’s already wearing high heels so early in the morning. It looks like she’s changing her face.

“We were not expecting guests,” she says, rolling her eyes in front of Nombuso.

They had a fight before, now the Maps issue too.

“I told Nkosiyazi that I was coming. I haven’t seen my nephew after he was born,” Nombuso says.

“Oh, the little fuck-boy,” -Beauty.

“What? You can’t say that about a baby.”

“Oh, trust me, every Mshazi male turns out to be a fuck boy when they grow up. Imago will be no different, I already see the signs.”

“Wait Beauty!” Nombuso stops her.

She looks back with a frown.

“Does he resemble anyone from this family?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t check but Phume is devoted in that marriage, she’d never do anything behind Mpatho’s back.”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying. But grandmothers do check babies when they’re born, they are called grandmothers for that.”

“First of all, I’m not a grandmother. Glam-mother maybe. You’re also an aunt, you can check the baby if you want.” She takes a few steps and stops again.

Actually this is not a bad idea.

“It’s a tradition, isn’t?” she asks.

“Definitely. It’s very important, it’s a way of giving a baby blessings.”

“He’s your brother too, we will both do it. Let me go and end the party. I can’t believe they’re already having sex.” She offers Nombuso a seat and heads to Mpatho’s bedroom.

There’s no sex sound, they’re just giggling inside.

“Knock!” she bangs the door outside.

Mpatho opens with his erection poking the shorts he’s wearing.

“It’s baby checking day,” she says.

Mpatho frowns, “Meaning?”

“I have to check if he’s one of us.”

“You’re out of your fuckin’....”

Beauty puts her hand up, “Respect! I’m sure you’re tired of killing poor goats now. Grandmothers have been checking babies since 1935, it’s a black tradition. You were also checked, I’m just doing my job.”

Phume appears behind him tying her gown. She can hear from Mpatho's tone that something is not right.

"I'm here for Imango, he's due for his resemblance observation," Beauty says.

"What is that?" Phume frowns.

"She wants to check that Imangothando is really my son," Mpatho says, in disbelief and anger.

"Okay," Phume says and goes back in to take Imangothando.

"This is not necessary," Mpatho says.

"Let her do her thing, for once she's acting like a grandmother that she is."

"Glam-mother," Beauty rectifies her and then leaves with Imangothando.

Mpatho is not comfortable, Phume doesn't care, he follows after Beauty.

To his surprise Nombuso has arrived.

"Hey," he hugs her.

"Hi," she greets back awkwardly.

"I'm sorry, I was catching up with your sister-in-law, I didn't hear you arriving," he says.

"She has to heal, you know," Nombuso says.

He chuckles, "Relax!"

Beauty undresses Imangothando and puts him down on his blanket. What is it that she's checking again?

Nombuso is looking at her with her eyes widely open.

"I know these toes," she says.

Imangothando yawns, Mpatho rushes to squeeze his cheeks and mould his lips into a pout.

“What is that for?” Beauty asks.

“Phume said it prevents his mouth from becoming too big.”

She cracks up laughing, forgetting her ongoing duty. Phume has changed this man, he’s something else now, he’s becoming likeable.

“Anyway he yawns exactly like my husband, his great-grandfather,” she says.

“He’s light though,” Nombuso says with concern.

Miyanda’s baby’s knuckles are dark, meaning he will be getting dark as he grows. It’s a bit odd because Imangothando is just like Malibongwe.

“Well, you didn’t know my husband’s butt, it was white.”

“He definitely doesn’t look like mkhulu’s butt,” Mpatho says, a bit irritated. The last thing he wants his son matched with is someone’s butt.

“I’m just trying to say that my husband had some light body parts. Imangothando has his chin too,” Beauty says.

“Okay. Are you done? He’s cold.”

“Yeah, he’s ours.” She dresses Imangothando up again and gives him to Mpatho.

He walks away talking to Imangothando like he’s already a grown-up. Nombuso watches, they already have a bond. Surely Beauty is right, she knows the Mshazis better than anyone. Manzi must’ve taken after Sphakamiso or someone from the Vilakazis.

SPHAKAMISO

When it finally suited him he called and asked to see her. He didn't cancel the other weekend, he just kept quiet while she waited for him. She knows that he had a relationship, clearly a good one because he still hasn't healed. She didn't mind any of that, after all they have never talked about being in a relationship. However, he's started demanding exclusivity. He gets jealous when she talks about other guys. Basically he wants her to be loyal to him when he hasn't even asked her out. He's crazy, that will never happen. Yes, she's only sleeping with him, but she will make sure that he doesn't know that.

She came with her father's watch and socks. The socks are in the bathroom, displayed for anyone who walk in to see. The Tudor watch is placed on the bedside cabinet.

She's on her Whatsapp giggling on the couch when Sphakamiso arrives in her flat.

"Hey you!" she gets up and hugs him.

Oh pizza, nice one!

"Must I warm this up, ulambile?"

"Yes, please."

"Okay then, go and put your things in the bedroom and come back." She heads to her little kitchen area and warms the pizza in the microwave.

While she's there Sphakamiso is in the bedroom looking at the watch he found. It's certainly not Nokwanda's because she's into girly stuff. Someone must've been here and forgot his watch behind.

Nokwanda frustrates him. She doesn't respect herself, which is why she can't respect the next person. She was raised differently, you'd swear she belongs to another race, not black. Her father lets her get away with too much.

When he joins her for pizza he looks a bit sulky.

"What happened last Saturday? I thought you were coming," she asks.

"Family emergencies," he says almost dismissive.

"And you didn't see the need to cancel with me like a decent human being?"

"You were already posting about unreliable 'assholes' on your Whatsapp status."

At least he noticed, that was for him. She lies on her back, knees up, and eats her slice of pizza.

He doesn't talk about the watch even though it's eating him up.

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Nokwanda has already showered, she waits in the bedroom while he goes to the bathroom. She's watching videos on her phone. The watch has been shifted where it was; it explains the mood he is in.

He appears from the bathroom passage with his chest still wet. Instead of drying himself properly he's coming with a pair of socks.

"Who was here Nokwanda?" he asks, he's had enough.

Nokwanda pauses the video she was playing and looks up.

“My friend, Wise. He came over yesterday,” she says.

“You two had sex?” He’s asking personal questions now. Does it concern him who she has sex with?

He raises his eyebrow, still holding the pair of socks in his hand. She’s never had a butt-naked, dark guy glaring at her like this. He’s angry, it’s so sexy to watch.

“I’m not going to answer that. I have never asked you about your sexual relationships,” she says.

“Sexual relationship, there’s no ‘s’. Decent people only have one sexual relationship at a time,” he says.

“Didn’t you cheat on your ex?” she asks.

He takes a deep breath and returns to the bathroom. He opens the dustbin and throws the bloody socks inside.

He comes back and takes the watch.

“Sphakamiso, what are you doing?” Nokwanda sits up with her eyes widened.

He opens the window and throws the watch out. They’re on the 10th floor, there’s no way it’s not going to break. Maybe he can’t afford this watch at the moment but surely he can give this Wise a good ass-whooping.

“If he wants his things give him my address,” he says.

She smiles as he turns his back to lotion, fuming.

There’s a text from her father; *DID YOU TAKE MY TUDOR WATCH?????*

Yeer, this will see her getting another allowance decrease.

Sphakamiso puts his pants back on and gets in back. Didn’t he come here for sex?

“You’re sleeping with your pants on?” Nokwanda asks.

“Yes, I’m comfortable. Can you switch off the lamp on your side? I cannot sleep with the light on,” he asks.

“Okay,” she turns and switches it off.

He’s sleeping with his back against her, not interested in holding even a mere conversation with her. It doesn’t hurt, he’s exactly where she wanted him to be. Sphakamiso wants loyalty and respect without working for it. He thinks he can be anyhow when they’re not together and still expects her to be submissive and loyal when he spends time with her. He doesn’t give her attention but he doesn’t want her to get attention from other guys either. It doesn’t work that way.

She’s sending voice notes to her other interests, because there are some guys who beg for her attention. Now this one keeps tossing and turning. Didn’t he say he sleep well when it’s dark? It’s dark now, he should sleep.

She talks softly to the speaker of her phone making a voice note: “I’m still waiting for my flowers Sanele. Thanks for the song, I listened to it, I think Jhene Aiko is now my favorite too.”

She giggles at the end and sends the voice note.

Sphakamiso’s breaths deepen. It sounds like he’s finally asleep. Or not?

He kicks off the duvet and finds his way to the bathroom in the dark. A few minutes later there’s a smell of cigarette coming from the bathroom.

Nokwanda finally puts her phone in the charger and sleeps. Just with one eye open. Sphakamiso comes out of the bathroom after almost finishing a box of cigarettes. He turns on the light, Nokwanda’s eyes are closed, he assumes that she’s finally taken a break from whoring to rest her busy body.

He stares at her, for a very long time. She's young, just 20 years old, she's supposed to be innocent. He loves innocent, well-groomed girls. In 28 years of his life he's never slept in a bed 24 hours after another man slept on it. Nokwanda doesn't even seem remorseful, she just doesn't care at all.

She's not his type, that's why it baffles him when he starts missing her. He thinks about her a lot, even though she's too daring for his liking. Her phone vibrates in the charger, it must be the 'flowers guy'. He doesn't buy flowers and he definitely doesn't know who Jhene Aiko is.

He stops his hand halfway to her face. No, she was kissing and fucking another man 24 hours ago. He releases a deep sigh and turns the light off. He's not going to touch her, he doesn't eat another man's leftovers.

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When he wakes up his body is trapped between her legs. It must've been hot at night, the duvet is below their feet. She slept in her G-string only, without a bra. Her boobs are full and firm, the rest of her body toned perfectly and spotless.

"Hey," she whispers and smiles.

He's been drooling over her.

"Hey," he says, clearing his throat.

She places his soft hand on his waist and drops her face on his shoulder. Then it's soft kisses trailing close to his neck.

"Nokwanda," he says, just not firm enough.

She continues, her hand slides into his pants and moves under his boxers to grab his dick. Then she lifts her eyes to confirm if it's a no. But she gets no sign of refusal.

She kisses him all the way down to his waist and takes his pants down to his ankles, then works his dick with his hand until he's hard and spilling his pre-cum.

"Do you want me to lick it?" she asks, licking her bottom lip seductively.

He nods, not just once but three times.

When her lips brush against his skin he lifts his head to look down at her. She licks his tip and pushes her mouth down until his tip balances against the back of her throat. His hands tremble, his breaths pick a quicker pace.

"Aah! Mmmm!" he moans as she sucks his dick.

She spits on it and spreads her spit around his tip. When she sucks again there's a slurping sound, he starts groaning and grabbing her head. It feels good, he's never been glorified like this in the morning.

She stops while he's still enjoying. She wants him inside her; she grabs a condom from the drawer and puts it on him. Then she sits on it and starts doing magic with her waist.

He's breathing hard, sweating down a storm. He takes the condom out and wraps it with a serviette and then takes a moment to calm down. Nokwanda is lying next to him, still wet from her explosive orgasm. She knows how to satisfy herself and him at the same time.

He needed to let his steam off, that's why he couldn't resist her. But this is putting him in a place he doesn't want to be in; now he's just one of her whores.

Nokwanda looks at him and smiles. Yep, it looks like he's having mixed feelings now. Her mission was to confuse him and she succeeded.

"I will get a towel," she says, getting out of bed.

She goes to the bathroom and cleans herself up and then comes back to wipe him. He tries to take it from her and wipe himself but she insists.

Maybe he would've felt better if it was him first, then the other guy. But he's the second one, eating left-overs...delicious ones though.

He needs to take a bath.

Nokwanda makes the bed and goes to the kitchen to make coffee. Sphakamiso is scrubbing himself in the bathroom thinking she slept with another man yesterday. When he comes out he's already dressed up. Such a moody man!

"Do you want coffee?" she asks.

"No," he says.

She sips hers, nothing is important as a cup of coffee to start a day.

He opens his wallet and takes out R150 notes and drops them in front of her.

"What is this for?" she asks.

"Sex," he says.

Oh, he now thinks she's prostituting and finishing the money he doesn't have trying to spite her.

She smiles and takes the money. "Thank you very much. I should've made it two rounds, I would've been R300 rich."

His jaw tightens. He releases a deep breath and puts his wallet back in his pocket.

Nokwanda continues sipping her coffee with her legs on the couch covered with a fleece blanket.

He takes a few steps towards the door and then stops.

“What do you really want Nokwanda?” he asks.

Nokwanda looks up with a slight frown. She doesn't get asked this important question everyday. What does she want, for real?

“Jelly tots. Are you going to the shops?” she asks.

He stares at her for a good minute. It looks like he's hurt by something, so much pain in his eyes.

“Goodbye Nokwanda,” he says.

“Ciao!” Nokwanda says and sips her coffee.

He walks out of the door, rage shooting through his nerves. It's like she took his heart out and crushed it into fine pieces.

Everything she's doing is intentional.

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Mkhuleko won't stop laughing at him.

“Are you sure she's 20 years old?” he asks.

It's funny seeing a grown-ass man being played by a 20 year old.

“I don't want to keep talking about her,” Sphakamiso says.

“But you keep viewing her status messages,” Mkhuleko laughing.

“Because she doesn’t care, she just posted a packet of jelly tots. It looks like someone bought them for her. She’s fucking everybody, nx!”

Nombuso walks in, she’s been looking for Sphakamiso since last night.

“Sphakamiso, I need to talk to you. Why usulala ama-outs?”
She grabs the plastic chair and sits.

“I have a life,” Sphakamiso says.

“Well, it doesn’t look like it’s a good life. Where is the glow?”

Mkhuleko laughs out loud. Even him who hasn’t had sex for weeks glows more than Sphakamiso because happiness is a choice.

“I need to talk to Sphakamiso privately, it’s important,”
Nombuso says looking at him.

“Pretend I’m not here,” he says.

“No, get out!” -Nombuso.

He yawns and stands up. What’s so important? Everything that’s important passes by him first.

“The nurse from second floor college,” he mumbles stretching his arms and making his way out.

“What did he say?” Nombuso asks Sphakamiso.

Sphakamiso chuckles, “He’s saying you’re a nurse that went to a second floor college. Don’t mind him, you did an excellent job with Imangothando and Manzolwandle.”

“No, I didn’t, he’s right,” Nombuso says, dropping her eyes and taking a deep breath. She can talk to Sphakamiso about anything and everything. But this one has been hard, she’s been scared.

“I have to tell you something but I’m scared,” she says.

“Nombuso, I’m your brother, you know that you can tell me anything. I promise I won’t be angry, just say it.” He’s expecting something about Yoli’s father being an asshole again.

But it’s another bomb, nothing he could’ve expected. Mkhuleko was indeed right about her nursing skills. Malibongwe and Mpatho have to know before it's too late.

CHAPTER 141

MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Mpatho came here in the morning to tell us that he’s found a special orthopedist who’s willing to work on Manzi’s case and we have to meet her today. He says there’s a possibility that he might not need surgery but will go under a procedure called Ponseti method. Surgeries are mostly successful once they’re above two years of age. With this procedure they will use casts and braces weekly to correct the structure of his feet. If that fails then he will need surgery.

“We have to pray everyday,” I say to Bonga.

“Yeah,” he nods.

He’s still not doing well, emotionally.

I’m glad Mpatho is not teasing him about it. Manzi is his greatest weakness but he’s tried to keep a positive approach for my sake.

“I have to go, please be there on time, I will send you the address,” Mpatho says to him. I don’t know who’s paying the orthopedist between them, I’m just happy for my son.

Sphakamiso walks in just as Mpatho is about to leave.

“Madoda, I have to talk to you,” he says.

“Phume is waiting for me. Is this important?”

“Yes, it’s important,” he says.

I should leave them to it. I take Manzi from Bonga and walk out. I must say it’s good to see everyone getting along. Sphakamiso and Mpatho, Nombuso and Mkhuleko, and me and Phume. Some people are like dark clouds, when they leave it just becomes brighter.

I put my precious boy in bed to get ready. When I met his father I thought I had found someone I can die for. Yes, I can die for him in a way, just not the real death. But Manzi, I cannot only die but I can kill for this little man.

To me he’s the cutest baby I’ve ever seen. Everyone says he’s going to be a big baby because he has chubby cheeks and big hands. He was already weighing 5.4 kg during his 7days check-up.

Before I forget, Phume sent me Ima’s picture and I promised to send her Manzi’s after dressing him up. They’re like twins. I can’t wait for them to complete 3 months, then we can have double milk dates for them.

I tried everything to have breast milk, Nyambose says my mother breastfed me until I was 3 years old, I don’t know why mine are dry. But we’ve finally accepted that this is not the breastmilk baby, God didn’t allow it, maybe on the next one it will happen. He’s on formula now, I tried two different brands before finding the one he likes.

He's awake, staring at his hands. He’s obsessed with them to the point of wanting to eat them everytime he sees them. I can’t wait to take him home to meet his grandfather and his crazy uncle.

I kiss his tiny lips and both his feet. It's been a habit of mine; I always kiss his feet.

"You're sweet. You're worth everything good under the sun. You're smart, confident and handsome." It's the daily affirmations that I give him, even though he's still too little to understand but I know he will grow up with so much confidence that he will have no room for anyone's opinion.

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SPHAKAMISO

They're staring at him. Mpatho has to go home, his shift starts at 11am. Phume's started at 5am, it's how they operate while he's on leave. Malibongwe also needs to go and get ready for their orthopedist appointment.

"You said this is important," Mpatho says, glaring at Sphakamiso.

"Yeah, it is." He takes a deep breath.

How does he start?

"Then talk," Mpatho says.

Another deep breath.

"I was with Nombuso a while ago and she told me something that left me shocked. Remember there was loadshedding when Manzi and Imangothando arrived?"

Mpatho frowns, "Yeah, what's shocking about that?"

Malibongwe's face remains curious-stricken.

“It happened right after Sis’ Miyanda gave birth, Nombuso had to get candles from the other house while MaNhleko helped Phume.”

“Okay, get to the point, please.” Now Mpatho looks worried. It looks like there’s a bomb Sphakamiso is about to drop.

“Apparently they couldn’t remember which baby belonged to who. It’s possible that Manzi is your baby Malibongwe and it’s also possible that he’s yours Mpatho.”

Mpatho gets up on his feet and takes off his T-shirt. There’s nothing underneath, he’s pacing up and down topless.

“What the fuck? What the fuck?” He keeps saying.

Malibongwe is shocked, sitting on the same spot looking like he's recovering from a scary movie. He can't move or say anything. What kind of recklessness is this? Babies are not Samsung chargers, you don't just get them mixed up.

“Call her, now!” Mpatho demands.

“No, no, no! We are not doing that. She’s already scared, thinking you’re both going to disown her, she even packed her bags before telling me, just in case Malibongwe kicks her out. Remember she had to play nurse to Miyanda and Phume shortly after losing her daughter and suffering physical abuse from that asshole. She wasn’t supposed to be there in the first place.”

“She could’ve told us that day,” Mpatho says, his voice rising.

“She made a mistake. All I’m asking is that you don’t be hard on her, she’s still fragile. There could’ve been a baby swap and it could be that nothing is wrong. You can afford a DNA test, the good thing is that it was just two babies in the room.”

Mpatho continues with his pacing. Imangothando is his life. He only met him two weeks ago but their bond is a decade stronger.

“No!” Malibongwe finally opens his mouth.

He stands up too, shaking his head.

“No, I can’t tell Miyanda that,” he says.

“But I think you want to know the truth, don’t you?”

“I do but you’ve seen how deeply she loves Manzi. What if the results come back negative? How will I tell her to give Manzi away?”

“Not away, to Phume,” Sphakamiso says.

“Manzi is her baby, he’s our baby,” he says.

Mpatho clicks his tongue behind them. He’s just remembering Nombuso’s visit and how Beauty suddenly wanted to observe resemblances, clearly Nombuso told her to do it.

“We have to do DNA test,” he says.

“Didn’t you hear what I just said? I cannot tell Miyanda this, we are seeing the orthopedist today, she’s come too far with Manzi,” Malibongwe says.

“No, you and I and the boys, we have to go and test, they don’t have to know until we are sure of something. If there was no swap there will be no need to tell them that something of this nature ever came up,” Mpatho says.

“Okay, but I know that Manzi is my son,” he says in a shattering voice.

Manzi is his son, he can’t not be.

Mkhuleko walks in the middle of high-emotion situation. Both Malibongwe and Mpatho are on their feet.

“I just saw Sis’ Miyanda, she says you’re seeing a special for Manzi today. If it’s possible can you start at the Vilakazis and

ask malume to burn impepho and ask ancestors to go with you guys?" he asks.

Malibongwe looks at him, his eyes are already red-rimmed.

"Why there and not here?" he asks suspiciously.

"Because we had a funeral not so long ago," Mkhuleko says.

"But it's not like we have to slaughter something, it's just impepho."

"Malibongwe take Manzi to the Vilakazis and ask malume to burn impepho to ask ancestors to go with him, that is that." He's getting pissed because Malibongwe has this tendency of questioning and ignoring everything he says.

He looks at Mpatho, smiling again. "Big brother, I need a favor."

"I will do Cashsend," Mpatho says.

"But I didn't say I need money, I said a favor."

"What favor do you need then?"

"It is money, just R250."

"I will do Cashsend."

"Thank you." He smiles and walks his childish ass out.

Malibongwe is stressed more than before because now there are many signs that Manzi might not be his. Mkhuleko stopping him from burning impepho for Manzi here is just another sign. And Miyanda's inability to produce milk after trying every method and medication under the sun.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

Her name is Maria, she's hands-down the sweetest doctor I've ever met. She even gifted Manzi with a toy before observing him. She says even though it's both feet, his tendons and ligaments are still flexible and will be easily stretched.

"Give me six weeks, boy will be okay," she says, rubbing Manzi's feet.

Six weeks is nothing. The good thing is that his feet will have casts and braces before he has the need to use them. It's the right time for this procedure to be done. God is with us. Not to forget the Vilakazi ancestors, we started there to ask for indlela enhle.

She successfully stretches Manzi's feet to put casts around them and then sets up our second appointment for next week. I feel positive about this, my baby is going to be okay.

Bonga has been quiet, I think he's still scared. As soon as we get inside the car I break into tears. I have never cried about Manzi's condition and I'm not crying about it now. I'm crying because we've finally reached the light after wandering through the tunnel for so long. I'm crying because things are finally going to be okay. Bonga hasn't been well despite how many times I've pushed him to be. I've been harsh on him too, our relationships completely changed.

"Baby!" he gets out and comes to my door.

He opens and covers my shoulder with his arm.

"He's going to be okay," he says.

"I know," I wipe away the tears.

But they keep pouring out.

"Then stop crying, you're ruining your make-up."

I wonder where on TV he heard this line.

“I’m not wearing make-up,” I say, laughing with tears on my face.

He lifts my chin and kisses my lips.

I can’t wait for six weeks to end. I’m not saying this is not normal motherhood but for once I will also experience motherhood without worry.

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Mpatho and Malibongwe meet outside the laboratory after submitting DNA samples for testing. It’s such an awkward place to be in.

“I can’t believe I stole my son’s hair. I know it’s necessary but I feel like a bad father,” Mpatho says.

“Phume doesn’t suspect anything?” Malibongwe asks.

He shakes his head, “No. What about Miyanda?”

“No, she’s just happy about Manzi’s ongoing procedure,” he says.

“What about you?” Mpatho asks.

“Me? I don’t know, I’m not concerned about my feelings in all of this. I’m worried about Miyanda. There’s nothing she’s looking forward to more than having Manzi as a normal baby from head to toe. It’s what she’s been talking about since yesterday. In three weeks time we will have DNA results back. If they come back showing that I’m not Manzi’s father my whole world will change.”

“I know,” Mpatho nods with a heavy sigh.

“She’s taken care of Manzi. Unlike me, she accepted him the moment she held him in her arms. She’s loved him unconditionally since that minute. It’s not fair that she loved and nurtured Manzi in this condition and then as soon as he’s okay we might have to give him to you and Phume.”

“You know that this is not our fault, right?” Mpatho asks.

“Yeah, I know,” he says.

CHAPTER 142

Nombuso walks in and finds Malibongwe in the lounge, lost in his thoughts. No confrontation has happened between them. She hasn’t been updated about anything either even though she knows that they know and agreed to do DNA tests with the boys.

“Hey,” she says, clearing her throat.

Malibongwe looks at her. His face is emotionless.

“Hey,” he says and drops his eyes again.

She pulls the chair and sits. “How are you holding up?”

Malibongwe doesn’t answer. It’s clear how he’s holding up.

“Miyanda is very happy with Manzi’s procedure. I’ve never seen her so happy. Have you told her?” she asks.

“Have you told me?” Malibongwe’s eyebrow narrows. Nombuso hasn’t said anything to him, not even a little apology.

“Sphakamiso did,” she says.

There’s a moment of silence.

“I hate what you did,” he says.

“It wasn’t on purpose and MaNhleko is half to blame,” she says.

“No, I hate that you had to wait for so long until telling us the truth. There wouldn’t have been any emotional damage back then, but now, it’s going to be hard.”

“Do you think he’s not yours?” Nombuso asks.

“Everything shows that he’s not. I have to inform my in-laws as soon as the results come back because I don’t know how I’m going to break this to Miyanda. She will just lose it,” he says.

“Ah, but Imangothando is also a sweet boy, and he’s so cute.” She smiles and shakes her head as she recollects memories. “Phume is very protective of him. Mpatho took a three week leave to bond with him.”

“Did Mkhuleko say anything to you?” Malibongwe asks.

“Just that his dreams have become clearer. When do you plan to do Ma’s isidwaba ceremony?” Nombuso asks.

“I have to give it a year then do it,” he says.

“Then I will also have to wait until then before doing a ceremony for Yoli.”

“Not necessarily, she doesn’t have to wait because her ceremonies will be held at her father’s house, not here. Once they take you off inzilo you can do izibani and then get a job.”

Nombuso’s eye widen. A job? She’s never had to work a day in her life. She got married very young and had Yoli’s father taking care of her. After divorce she came back home and they took care of her and Yoli.

“Sphakamiso will give you a job,” he says.

Is this guy crazy? What on earth is a job?

“Why must I work?” she asks.

“Because you have to do something with your life,” he says.

“I am doing something with my life.”

“By fucking the bodyguard?”

Wow, just wow!

“So you’re tired of me now because my mother is dead?” She’s standing up crying.

None of this would’ve happened if her mother was still around. Clearly Malibongwe is punishing her because she no longer contribute anything since Yoli’s grant ended.

“You don’t have to support anyone with your money. All I want is for you to work and earn something for yourself. You cannot be u ‘aunt ogad’ ikhaya’ at such a young age,” Malibongwe says.

“I will not work in your stupid shop,” she says, wiping the tears. She will never work for him. He’s never going to be her boss.

She clicks her tongue walking away. “Like you worked for anything in your life, hijacking cars every night, thief.”

He keeps quiet. She says more as she walks out. She must’ve forgotten about him working at a hardware throughout his twenties to put bread on the table.

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PHUMELELE

Tomorrow there’s a girl coming over for the nanny post. Imango has been behaving this week, I hope he will not go back to his old ways because I know that nannies nowadays are impatient. Once she’s here I will have time to focus on the boutique. It’s been on hold for too long now. I told Mpatho to back off, now I

need to bounce back before he thinks I'm a bad businesswoman who can't do anything without him.

He walks in after taking a shower. He went for a haircut, he looks finer than ever.

"Can I charge my phone?" he asks.

I lost my charger somewhere in the house, now I depend on his. I remove my phone, he connects his. I don't know why he's avoiding eye contact so much lately.

"Are you okay?" I ask.

He looks at me briefly, "Yeah, why?"

He's looking away again.

Look, I know that I haven't lost the pregnancy weight yet, but I still look good. I bath in the morning and dress up the way I used to. My eyebrows are trimmed, my hair is well-kept, and my lips are never dry.

"You're acting so weird. I need a foot massage later," I say.

"I can take you to a spa," he says.

"Not a bad idea. But who will look after Imango?"

"We will go with him," he says.

"Bad idea. I will go tomorrow, if the girl coming is a perfect candidate."

"She is, I know her, she worked for Msizi."

Oh, he knows her.

I watch him lotion his body, massaging every spot carefully. I miss us, this is the longest we've gone without being intimate. We are headed to a third week now.

My phone rings, taking me off my drooling.

It's Zama, Aunt Nomusa's niece.

They hardly call me.

"Hey sisi," I answer.

"Hey Phume, I'm sorry to bother you at this time. My uncle died in a prison cell, they say he committed suicide. Tomorrow I have to go there, I don't have a penny in my pocket, you said we can call you anytime we need something."

Yes, I did say that, they were grieving.

"I didn't know that your uncle was arrested," I'm surprised.

"It happened two weeks ago, for possession of unlicensed gun." She sounds stronger than she should.

It's too soon for them to lose another parent figure. But what can we say? He ended his own life, nobody is to blame.

"I will send you something, my deepest condolences sisi. If I wasn't a new mom I would've come to see you tomorrow," I say.

"It's okay, I understand, thank you very much." She drops the call.

I release a deep sigh; what a world we live in.

"That was Zama, their uncle died," I tell Mpatho.

"That's sad, depression is real," he says.

I wonder if he was with those who killed Yoli. It's still sad because Aunt Nomusa's family is now hurting again. I just pray that his depression didn't have two legs and big muscles.

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I make Imango's bottles and check on Beauty before going to bed. She's going to Knysna and coming back to host a family reunion thing.

"Glad you're here," she says giving me a piece of paper.

Contribution? Why am I contributing R10k for something she came up with?

"I don't have money," I say.

"Come on Phume, you earn money for being Mrs Phumelele Mshazi every month. This reunion is special, we have to prove to people that we are still rich. That R10k won't even cover drinks for the day," she says.

Mpatho has to contribute too, R16k. We were not made aware of these contributions on time. We have a baby for crying out loud.

"Are you still going to pay anything at all?" I ask.

She swipes the screen of her phone and shows me the invoice from a catering and decorating company. "Your mother spent double for family functions. I'm not dropping standards. Also make sure that you design your outfits on time."

"I'm inviting Ntombi's family," I tell her.

"No seshoeshoe dress will be allowed, everyone will have to respect the dress code. I don't want any embarrassment," she says.

I take Imango's bottles and leave. She's right about my mother, she went out and above, to the point where none of the family functions were enjoyable. We all had to be perfect and focus on painting a wealthy picture instead of enjoying the day.

Mpatho is talking to someone on the phone. It sounds like he's standing against the door. I don't know why but it just sounds suspicious, so I stand and listen.

He goes on; "I don't know Zamani, only DNA results will tell if he's my son or not. I feel like I'm losing my mind waiting..."

I take two steps back. What the fuck did I just hear?

Is this the reason why he's been acting weird?

I'm dehydrated, I need water.

I throw Imango's bottles on the counter and exercise a few breaths. So Mpatho doubts that my son is his? Mpatho thinks I'm not faithful after taking so much shit for him. He went behind my back and did a DNA test.

All his friends probably know about it. I'm nothing but a loose wife in their eyes. How dare he tarnishes my name like this?

I wasn't a virgin but he knows very well that I've never been the one to sleep around. I had one boyfriend, whom I only had sex with twice.

"Here you are," he says, pushing his phone in the pocket and coming in.

I'm a no fake zone. I cannot look at him and pretend like I don't know that he doubts my son's paternity.

"You did a DNA test with Imangothando?" I ask, standing up.

"What?" His brows creases.

He takes a step back, faking confusion.

"Did you or did you not Mpatho Mshazi?" This is the last straw, the last.

I know that Imangothando is his, those results will come back positive and I will pack my bags and leave as soon as they do.

“I can explain,” he says.

“You’re damn right, you can and you will, now!”

He shakes his head, “Please Phume, not now. Can we go and see Freedom tomorrow?”

“I don’t need therapy, I need the fuckin’ truth.”

“Yes, I did a DNA test.”

Oh dear Lord, lead me through this one!

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 143

SIS’ NOMBUSO

She needed to be away from home. Mapholoba respects culture, he’s going to use a separate blanket. This week has been a lot, with the truth coming out and Malibongwe telling her that he’s tired of supporting her, she's exhausted. She needed a breather, and no place is perfect than Mapholoba’s arms.

She’s looking forward to a good cuddle and productive conversation. Mapholoba always keep it 100 with her and give good advices. One thing she’s not looking forward to is cooking.

They pass yet another restaurant and he doesn’t buy food. She needs to tell him.

“Mnelisi,” she says, clearing her throat.

He glances at her, “Yebo MaMcinaka.”

“I’m not going to cook,” she says.

He smiles and keeps his eyes on the road.

“Don’t worry, there’s food in the house,” he says.

Now she can relax and look forward to a peaceful night. As usual, she only told Sphakamiso that she was coming here. Others will work it out on their own.

When they reach the house she sends Sphakamiso a text letting him know that she arrived safely because he pulls crazy stunts if not informed.

The lights are on, if not mistaken there are people talking inside the house.

“Who is here?” She’s getting cold feet.

She made it clear that she wants private time, why would he bring other people over?

He shifts her bag to his left hand and holds her. He’s not explaining anything, just leading her inside.

“Fuzee,” he calls as they enter the door.

She pulls her hand and stops. What the fuckin’ fuck?!

“Is your sister here?” she’s whispering.

Before getting any response the woman appears.

Whoever her father is, she looks like him.

“I almost went to bed,” she says, coming to meet them.

Mapholoba looks at her, smiling. He doesn’t see how awkward and uncomfortable this is. He also looks like his father by the way, there’s just no way they look like their mother.

“Meet MaFuze, your older sister,” he says.

MaFuze is standing with a practiced smile plastered on her face.

“Hi, I’m Nombuso.” She extends her hand for a shake.

“I know you by Ntofontofo, intombi emhlophe. I’m happy to finally meet you,” MaFuze says and shoots a look at her staring brother. “Go before I tell her your nickname.”

He goes away, laughing.

Now it’s just the two of them. This is Mapholoba’s sister, she looks older than her. Wrapped in a doek, wearing a blue apron and umhezo around her neck. But there’s no ring on her finger, she must be engaged or something.

“Let’s get in and sit,” she says.

Nombuso follows her to the lounge. This was not the plan, she wasn’t ready to meet his people yet. She wanted a private night with Mapholoba but now she’s having this nerve-wrecking encounter.

“How are you?” MaFuze asks.

“I’m fine,” she says.

That’s what you tell people you don’t know very well.

“We wanted to come to the funerals but we couldn’t since you two haven’t made anything official. But you’ve been in our prayers everyday.”

She nods, holding back tears. Condolences are just a trigger. In fact any kind of sympathy.

“Is there any progress with the case?” MaFuze asks.

“Not yet, but one suspect who was arrested is said to have committed suicide inside,” she says.

“God will answer, Ntofo. It might be not the way you want him to answer but all those who had a hand in it will face justice, if

not in this world, in front of God.” She sounds religious, a complete opposite of Mapholoba.

“Thank you,” Nombuso says.

She’s getting a bit relaxed and comfortable.

“Your other pikinis are here,” MaFuze says.

She frowns, “Huh?”

“His kids, we are leaving tomorrow morning. But it’s just the youngest two, they go everywhere with me. Do you want to see them?”

Nombuso nods with a nervous smile. Mapholoba surely knows how to throw a bomb. This is so unexpected.

MaFuze comes back with one boy who’s wearing eyeglasses and a girl with pink ribbons, wearing a big smile on her face. The boy hides behind his aunt as soon as their eyes meet.

She has to smile and not scare them.

“Hello,” she says, waving at them.

The girl giggles behind her hands and looks at MaFuze.

“Greet Ma back,” she says.

“Hello,” -the girl.

She’s so cute with her two missing teeth.

MaFuze drags the boy to the front. This one must be Mnelisi’s biological son. It looks like he has an eye condition and he’s hell shy.

“What are your names guys?” Nombuso asks.

“I’m Thando and this is Phuphu,” the cute girl says.

“I’m happy to see you.” She really is.

Thando is a bit older than Yoli but a little girl figure represents so much to her. She wants to grab Thando and squeeze her in a tight hug. But that would be weird, so she just stares at them until it's awkward enough to get their aunt talking about food.

They follow her to the kitchen, Nombuso heads to the bedroom.

He's been anxiously waiting. It could've gone two ways; bad or good.

"Hey," he turns from the window and looks at her.

Nombuso stands with a blank face, staring at him.

"Are you okay?" He's nervous.

Meeting the kids, especially the youngest two could be triggering for her. It wasn't planned, she asked to come over while his sister was here.

"Thando, is she your late brother's?" she asks.

"Yes," he nods.

"And Phuphu, what's wrong with his eyes?"

"Myopia, he's nearsighted," he says.

She nods, takes a deep breath and sits on the bed.

"Your sister is religious," she says.

He chuckles, still nervous. "I know, she's a die-hard Christian. Did she give you any verse?"

"No, just words of comfort," she says.

"I'm sorry if I overwhelmed you. I will wait a bit before introducing you to the rest of them," he says.

"Overwhelming me? I was nervous but I'm happy I've met them. Thando reminds me so much of Yoli, I'm sure they would've made best friends."

“I know, Thando would’ve loved her. But I believe she’s now an angel looking over you.” He caresses his lips against her cheek.

Soft as usual, he loves her skin.

“I have missed you so much, just being next to you like this,” he says.

She drags in a deep breath and smiles. The feeling is mutual, soon things will be back to normal and they will enjoy each other’s company to the fullest again.

“How are you and your brother?” he asks.

“We are not talking to each other,” she says.

Nothing unusual, they fight at least twice a week.

He holds her hand, “What happened this time?”

“He told me that I need to get a job,” she says, still offended. She turns her eyes to Mapholoba, “This has never happened while Ma was still alive. I contributed with Yoli’s grant and her allowance from her father. But now I have to find a job because I no longer have any source of income.”

“Are you comfortable with having no source of income?” he asks.

Is he taking Malibongwe’s side? This is witchcraft.

“I help with every chore at home,” she says.

“But you’re a woman, you need more than food to look this gorgeous. And now your brother is about to get married. The girl is already living with you, right? That means you no longer have the right to ask money directly from your brother, even if it’s for a deodorant. You have to ask your sister-in-law. Is that how you want to live?”

She frowns, “Why would I ask Miyanda for my brother’s money?”

“As soon as I marry you, Fuze will have no right to ask money from me, she will have to ask it from you. That’s how it is, unless you don’t want peace. So are you going to ask your sister-in-law for deodorant and toothpaste?”

“Hell no!” she says.

Miyanda is younger than her, what will happen to her pride?

“Then you should try looking at his suggestion positively. The good thing is that you have two brothers who run businesses, you have the privilege of not drafting CVs and just show up to work,” Mapholoba says.

“Privilege? Malibongwe is not an easy brother, surely he’s not an easy boss,” she says.

“I trust you to remind him that you’re older than him if he dares throw his weight around,” he says.

She laughs because she’s very much capable of that, employer or not. She places her other hand on Mapholoba’s. He always give her different perspectives, without putting her down or being harsh on her.

“I love you,” she says.

He kisses her forehead. Love doesn’t describe how he feels about her, no word does.

What’s that little hand at the door?

“Thando, I see you,” he says.

“It’s not me baba, it’s Phuphu,” Thando denies in her own voice.

Nombuso laughs.

Someone is going to have grey hair soon.

CHAPTER 144

PHUMELELE

“How are you feeling?”

I stare at this man, wondering if he’s ever experienced the kind of pain I’m feeling. If not, what makes him think he can help me.

Mpatho pushes a bottle of water to me. I open it and drink. I didn’t have any breakfast, I had a sleepless night, water is the only thing keeping me going.

“Phume,” Freedom calls for my attention again.

What does he want me to say? Is it not obvious?

“Obviously I’m not okay, Freedom. My son might be taken away from me.” No mother would be fine in this situation.

“Your pain is valid,” he says.

“Thank you.” I reach for the tissue and wipe the tears.

I hate loadshedding, because none of this would’ve happened if we had a useful government who put people’s needs first. I also blame myself for trusting MaNhleko so much.

“What are you hoping for? What do you think can make you feel better when those results come back?” he asks.

“Nothing, absolutely nothing. It’s possible that I haven’t met my son, the one I carried for nine months. And I’ve already bonded with Imangothando, I love him more than anything in this world. How am I going to love another baby and forget about him?” I’m hopeless. I don’t see myself loving any baby the way I love Imangothando. He’s taken all my love.

“No matter the outcome, you don’t have to forget about Imangothando. It’s okay to keep him in your heart as long as

you want. What your husband want is for you to be emotionally okay and prepared for the results, whether they're positive or negative," he says.

I don't think I will be ready. I shake my head, tears roll down. Mpatho gives me more tissue. I know that, whether I'm ready or not, I have to make the most out of the three weeks that I have left.

"Manzolwandle is a clubfoot baby, right?"

I nod, fuck the tears.

"Do you know anything about the condition?"

I shake my head.

Mpatho has been involved in Manzi's treatment search. He knows Manzi better than me, in fact it's safe to say I don't know Manzi at all.

"Would you like me to link you up with an orthopedist who can tell you more about it in preparation?" He's talking as if he knows that the results will come back negative.

"I'd appreciate that," I say.

I don't want to do any of this, but Mpatho is worried and I know he wants us to be emotionally prepared for whatever comes in three weeks. I'm not sure I will bond with Manzi, Imangothando is the baby in my heart. But he's a special baby, if he happens to be ours, I have to make him comfortable and understand his needs.

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He's going back to work soon. I appreciate how helpful he's been, he is without any doubt the best dad. I watch him hovering over Imangothando and wonder how he feels about all of this. It's been all about me since he confessed about the DNA test.

"Hey," I say, lifting my head.

He looks at me, I can see that he's also going through a lot.

"Come with him," I say shifting to make space for them.

They come and join me.

Imangothando can stare. When his eyes land on me he stares for a good minute. His vision is now good, colors spark his interest, he's a smart baby.

"I think he knows me," I say.

Mpatho chuckles, "He's not even 1 month old."

"I'm his mom, he knew me from day one," I say and realize how in denial I still am.

He doesn't say anything. I think he's given up hope already.

"How is Miyanda doing?" I ask.

I haven't been on Whatsapp, I'm avoiding people asking for more pictures of Imangothando.

"She doesn't know," he says.

"What?" They're unbelievable.

If I didn't hear that phone call he would've kept me in the dark as well.

"Their relationships is different from ours, he's not going to do things the way I do. If the results come back negative, he will talk to his father-in-law and they will find a way to talk to her. Then...."

I raise my eyebrow...then what?

He drags in a long breath. "Phume, we will have to take our biological son and give them theirs."

"We are talking about our Imango," I remind him.

"I know, our Imango-mango, the pipe-burster," he's trolling Imango's farting skills.

We both laugh.

"Aunt Brandi sent me instructions of giving him enema," I say.

"Wena uchathe ingane? Oh please, I'd rather find something from the pharmacy."

I roll my eyes, "You have so much faith in my mothering skills!"

He laughs.

"I'm so proud of you," he says.

I frown, "Why?"

"You're matured for your age."

Well, one of us has to be.

"Mkhuleko told me so little, yet so much."

My English is not sharp as I thought.

"Little and so much?" I ask.

"He's been telling me things since the day I first met him, as a brother. I think he knew about the babies getting mixed up or so, I just didn't pay attention."

"Mmmm." I'm giving it a thought, remembering his last visit. He insisted on the reconciliation, saying that the ancestors will punish us through our children. And I can't help but wonder if that has already happened.

“But let’s focus on getting therapy and taking care of Imangothando. I will take more days off, just to be with you,” he says.

I couldn’t have asked for a better partner.

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SPHAKAMISO

Nokwanda has messed him up. He’s turned into a Whatsapp stalker; watching everything she posts and checking her last-seen every now and then. She’s wild, she’s untamed, he shouldn’t be interested in her.

Yet, he’s typing a text as soon as she comes online, asking if they can meet and talk. Obviously it will depend on which day Wise is not seeing her. He’s ashamed to even think how he’s slowly settling for the second best, if not the tenth best. Who knows how long her list is!

She replies saying she’s going home during the weekend. Can’t she squeeze him in?

He needs to see her, there’s a lot he wants to grieve about. But she’s logged out of Whatsapp. Now she’s giving him a chase. How the hell is he going to find her home? Surely her father doesn’t stay in town, it’s not easy to just get access to his neighborhood.

There’s a car outside but none of the guys come to notify him. It’s definitely not a customer, today is a bit quiet. But the store is running smoothly, they’ve recovered from the shooting

trauma. Most of their customers are from the taxi ranks, a dangerous but money-generating industry.

Oh, it's the boss.

"I thought you were in Durban," Sphakamiso says.

"Postponed." He grabs Sphakamiso's half-drunk Coke can and gulps it down.

It's been stressful two months for him and there's still no light.

"I saw Maphumulo, he's coming later to get rims for his car," he says.

"No problem, I will close late today," -Sphakamiso.

"As long as you remember that you're cooking today," he says.

"I will buy take-aways from the taxi rank."

He's giving Sphakamiso a judging look. "Have you sent Aphelele anything?" he asks.

"I did, even though Nondu had already bought him everything. I feel like I still can't afford my son, what I send him monthly is only worth a pair of sneakers Nondu buy him," Sphakamiso says with a heavy sigh.

"What does she do?" Malibongwe asks curiously.

"She's a laboratory assistant working for some Dr Manzini," he says.

"Your girlfriend's father?"

No ways, it can't be.

"I think a different one," he says hesitantly.

That would be too fucked up; a crazy circle.

Malibongwe shoots him an inquiring look.

“Are you in love?” he asks.

“In love? No, not at all. I’m just having fun.”

“You look like it,” he says.

Whatever that shady remark means, he’s having fun with Nokwanda.

Is she back online again?

He checks. Nope.

Sigh.

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They’re both inside the shop, Sphakamiso has opened his lunch. Boom, Nombuso is entering. This is the first time they’re seeing her in high-heels since her wedding.

She’s wearing formal black and white. Their sister looks elegant, but for what?

She makes her way in and looks at her surroundings with interest.

“Where’s my office?” she asks.

They look at each other. She has an office?

Wait, this is Nombuso, right? She doesn’t have a twin somewhere.

“What are you doing here?” Sphakamiso asks.

“I’m here for the job. You guys have to introduce me to the staff, I can’t be managing people I don’t know,” she says.

Sphakamiso frowns and looks at Malibongwe. Did he do this? Yes, Malibongwe owns the shop but he's in charge, no decision must be made without his approval.

"Nombuso, I didn't say come and be a manager. I said you have to come and work, you refused so I haven't told Sphakamiso anything," Malibongwe says.

"That's fine. Where am I going to work from?" She's still looking for an office, if not a big desk somewhere with a laptop, she will learn how to use it as time goes by.

"We sell car parts and fix cars. It's not a restaurant or clothing shop. If you're here for a job I will have to find a suitable one for you and interview you," Sphakamiso says.

She raises her eyebrows. UThoko yini? Interview for what? Malibongwe owns this place and he told her to come and work here.

"You will clean," Sphakamiso says.

Maybe he didn't see her well. She had to borrow these high-heels from Miyanda and sit two hours in the salon braiding her hair. And then she applied the nail polish she bought from the taxi rank with a whooping R12. All that for cleaning?

"No!" she refuses.

Sphakamiso looks at Malibongwe icily. He got them in this mess.

Malibongwe takes a deep breath and looks at Nombuso. "Look Nombuso, this is a car repair shop, everyone gets dirty. If you're serious about taking a job you will have to clean while Sphakamiso deals with the customers."

They're doing this to torture her. Maybe it's a revenge.

"Fine, but I'm not doing an interview," she says taking off her shoes.

“But I have to know that you understand your job,” -
Sphakamiso.

“Who cleans after you at home? Now all of a sudden you’re not sure if I know how to squeeze a mop and wash the floors.”

“I know that, but can you work under pressure? Can you work overtime? And respect your co-workers?” Sphakamiso asks.

“I can. Can you work with me under pressure?”

Sphakamiso sighs.

Malibongwe could’ve just let her stay at home.

“I will get a sjambok, if anyone steps on the floor while I’m mopping they will feel the sjambok licking their legs,” she says.

Sphakamiso shoots an icy look at Malibongwe once again. Nombuso is the Batista of the family, why bring her here to scare workers with a sjambok?

But as usual, Malibongwe can’t say anything.

CHAPTER 145

PHUMELELE

I wake up with a stinging pain in my heart. Today Mpatho and Malibongwe are fetching the DNA test results. We are going to kwaVilakazi, where it all began. Attending therapy has helped me a lot, I have forgiven MaNhleko. I’m not going to fight anyone, I will wait for Mpatho to come and tell me what the future holds. I haven’t spoken to Miyanda but as far as Mpatho says, she’s still in the dark. That’s between Malibongwe and her. I’m glad I found out and had enough time to process everything.

Deep down in my heart I feel like this is the last time I hold Imangothando in my arms, but I’m still praying for the best. His

nanny is a 45 year old MaNgema, she's what Mpatho said she was, the best nanny ever. I'm taking her with me, she's bonded so well with Imango within a few weeks.

Beauty came home shortly and embarked on another trip, there was no time to tell her. Mpatho is headed to the lab, I'm going to the Vilakazis with Imangothando and MaNgema.

We are the first to arrive, the Mcinekas are not here except Mkhuleko. I think he got here yesterday and suggested that the results are read here, with everyone present. No questions were asked. They have doubted and questioned him for so long that they blame themselves for not reading too much into his riddles. A lot of things could've been avoided.

He looks different. I don't know if it's the fear or respect that I have for him now, I don't look at him in the eyes when he comes to greet and take Imangothando from MaNgema.

Mkhuleko is two shades lighter than Sphakamiso, but dark when compared to Nombuso and Malibongwe. But today he's the darkest of them all, he even tops Mpatho. There's no 'Imango-mango, manga-manga business', he looks rather intense. He checks Imango's beads and then walks away with him.

"That's his uncle," I say to the curious MaNgema.

She seems to relax.

I told her everything; she might come back as a nanny of a different baby.

We get inside the house and find MaNhleko and her husband. She stands up nervously and asks if she must help with the bag. It's just Imango's bag and our purses, we are good.

“Makoti, you have arrived,” says Malum’ Mcineka.

I can’t believe he also didn’t see the need to say anything sooner, surely his wife told him.

“Yebo malume. This is MaNgema, our nanny,” I say.

He looks at her, there’s a twinkle I don’t understand as he sizes up MaNgema, his eyes stripping her naked from the waist down.

“Dlokovu!” he says, coming to shake MaNgema’s hand.

The handshake has some secret fondling. MaNhleko is seeing this and she’s quiet.

I’m about to say something when I notice that MaNgema is actually blushing. Let me put the boss title aside and let elders be elders.

I grab a seat, MaNgema sits next to me.

“I will go and make tea,” MaNhleko finds an escape.

She can’t even make eye contact.

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MIYANDA MTHETHWA

I didn’t know we were going to the Vilakazis until yesterday afternoon. I don’t know why we are going there but it’s compulsory, everyone is going. Manzi and I are ready, his father was picked up by Mpatho, we will meet them there. I don’t know if Phume is also going, she’s been scarce on socials lately.

Nombuso comes in to tell me that Sphakamiso has arrived. We were waiting for him, he's using Malibongwe's car since it's bigger. Mkhuleko left yesterday morning. I think whatever is taking place today is his idea. God, not another dog party.

Nombuso helps with the bags, I pick Manzi, he's no longer wrapped like a sandwich now, he's a month and two weeks old. He's bigger than his peers.

He's still addicted to his hand, he likes licking and sucking his fists. But I put gloves on his hands because he also uses them to scratch his face. He hates gloves more than he hates sleeping in a dark room.

I'm not sure if I'm seeing clearly, there's a man sitting at the front and he looks just like my father. One, he's never set his foot here; two, he's not a big fan of the Mcinekas. I'm confused.

But as I get closer my confusion clears, the door opens and he steps out. I was still planning to go home and show him Manzi.

"Nyambose, what are you doing here?" I ask.

"Is that how you greet your father after making him a grandfather?"

I laugh, he takes Manzi and looks at his cast-covered feet.

"Why didn't you cover him with a blanket?" he asks.

"Hhayi baba, I'm showing off, he's grown now," I say.

"Showing off and putting him at risk to catch cold?"

Sigh. I give him the blanket, he wraps Manzi.

"I have to pay a fine for standing like this outside Mcineka's home," he says.

I doubt anyone will charge him, they brought him here.

"Why are you here?" I want to know, because he wouldn't just come here for no reason and without telling me.

“Your husband invited me for lunch with his uncle,” he says.

This is very strange. And why is he calling Bonga my husband?

“He didn’t say anything to me,” I say.

“Don’t worry mntanami, everything will be fine.” He gives back Manzi and gets inside the car. I’m left confused.

If this is a surprise, it’s an uncomfortable one. I wish Mam’ Zonke had come along too, just to keep an eye on her boyfriend because he can be unpredictable.

Traveling with my in-laws and Nyambose is awkward for all of us. I get a relief when I see Phume’s car parked outside, at least I will have someone to talk to when things go south.

Nyambose remains outside the yard, Sphakamiso fetches his uncle to come out and welcome him inside the yard.

I bump into Mkhuleko making his way out. He’s not wearing any shoes, there’s a fresh animal skin around his wrist.

I stop him, “What lunch is this?”

“Family lunch, gogo.”

Did he just call me gogo?

“Thank you so much, for everything,” he says, not smiling. His eyes are dead dark, it’s like I’m standing in front of a total different person.

“For what?” I ask.

“For everything, I said.” He’s staring at my chest.

Is there something wrong?

Damn, my nipple areas are wet.

I’m wearing a bra and I haven’t had any milk coming out. What is this?

“Hold Manzi for me, I need to pad this up,” I say.

“Give him to Phume, I have to go,” he says and walks away without giving me a chance to beg. So much disrespect from this child, he’s walking away while I need his help this much.

I rush inside the house, Phume is with everyone, I don’t even pay attention.

The woman next to her is holding Imango, I put Manzi on her lap.

“My breasts are leaking, hold him for me,” I say and rush out.

I will fold pieces of tissue and put them on my nipples. If I knew this was going to happen I would’ve brought an extra T-shirt.

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Fatherhood hasn’t been smooth at all, especially for Malibongwe. Today feels like the end of his world, yet it could be the beginning. Manzi is halfway through his procedure, and oh Miyanda, she’s the proudest mother on earth. But this envelope he’s holding can end all of that.

Mpatho has the same envelope, he’s praying for the best but prepared for the worst too. After this he’s sending lobola and having a wedding ceremony. Phume deserves the best of everything that the world has to give after this. How she handled this whole situation proves to him that she’s a rock, a mother and a wife for keeps.

“Are you ready?” he asks.

Malibongwe takes a few deep breaths. His nerves are wrecking him, his eyes are evident of the intense crying he did in the

toilets when they passed town. Nyambose's presence might make a difference, he called him before reading the results because Mkhuleko has been more clearer about the situation. Chances of Manzi not being his are 85%.

Mpatho leads the way in, he follows. For the first time when his eyes lock with Nyambose's, he sees sympathy and comfort. Now it hits him that Miyanda might be the only clueless person here. Phume has been seeing mental doctors, Mpatho came clean and prepared her.

He looks around the room, he can't see Miyanda.

"She's changing the baby," MaNhleko says.

They exchange greetings with everyone. He looks at Phume's direction, she's feeding Imangothando, there's a woman next to her holding the blanket. How can she be so calm knowing that Imangothando might not be leaving with her after this?

It's last minute but he's got to find Miyanda and tell her why everyone is here.

He excuses himself and walks out.

He bumps into her just outside the door.

"Hey daddy," she says.

"Babe, I have to tell you something."

"Yes, like why is my father here?" She's laughing.

"Because...can you give me the baby?"

Now she frowns, why is he panicking?

She lets him take the baby, then he leads her back to the rondavel where she changed Manzi.

“You’re scaring me, what is going on?” she asks.

“First of all, I’m so sorry sthandwa sami. I should’ve told you sooner but I was scared, you were already stressed by the hospital visits.”

She’s getting anxious. Why can’t he get straight to the point?

“Remember there was loadshedding after you gave birth, in fact a few minutes after?” he asks.

She nods, but why is that so important, loadshedding happens every other day.

“The babies could’ve been swapped, MaNhleko and Nombuso couldn’t remember. So Mpatho and I did DNA tests.” He’s holding the big envelope.

Bonga jokes around but he wouldn’t use something like this as a joke.

“No,” she says.

“No?” He’s confused.

“They were not swapped,” she says.

“We will open the results and know for sure.”

“I’m telling you they were not swapped, are you crazy?”

“My love,” his voice starts shaking.

She glares at him, not sparing him a blink.

“Just for closure, please,” he begs.

“No Bonga, I’m leaving.” She grabs Manzi and walks out.

All these people are gathered here for this bullshit. If the babies were swapped why didn’t anyone say anything? Manzolwandle is her baby, she can feel it in heart.

“I know he’s ours,” Malibongwe says behind her.

She takes a deep breath and looks at him.

“I just want to prove it to everyone,” he says.

“We don’t need to prove shit. Does Manzi look like he’s not my son?”

He shakes his head, “No.”

“Then let’s go,” she says.

“We will go, let’s show everyone the results first, then they can leave us alone,” he says.

She thinks about it for a minute and then nods.

They return to the house everyone is gathered in.

She doesn’t sit, she remains on her feet with Manzi on her chest.

There’s tension, everyone can feel it. She’s shooting daggers at everyone.

“Shall we?” Mpatho asks Malibongwe.

He nods.

They tear the envelopes and pull out the documents inside.

A minute pass, another one follows. Neither one of them has a reading problem.

Why are they taking so long?

“What does it say?” Phume asks Mpatho.

The deep breath he takes and the defeated look he gives her is an enough answer. He’s not the father. Phume shuts her eyes and tightens her arms around Imangothando.

“I’m not his father,” Mpatho says and looks at Malibongwe whose hands are shaking.

He lifts his teary eyes and shakes his head.

Miyanda grabs Manzi's bag and walks out. Nyambose gets up and follows her.

Mpatho goes to Phume and kisses her forehead, muttering apologies.

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Miyanda is sitting in the car, angrily waiting for Sphakamiso to come and drive her home. Nyambose approaches her, seeing his daughter hurting like this breaks him.

"Mimi, you have to calm down mntanami," he begs.

"I'm calm baba, I just want to go home," she says.

"Find a way forward and then leave," Nyambose.

"There's no need for a way forward, Manzolwandle is my son."

"Yes, he is. But you have a biological son that you gave birth to, and you just left him behind," he says.

Malibongwe comes and stands next to Nyambose. It doesn't look like Nyambose is winning here.

"Babe," he steps closer to the door.

Miyanda looks at him, "Where is Imangothando?"

"He's with Phume," he says.

"Fetch him," she instructs.

"You can't leave with both babies, it's not possible my love."

"But Imangothando is my baby, you and Mpatho just said that's what those DNA results show." She's losing her temper now.

This is not difficult, Bonga just needs to go and take Imangothando.

Malibongwe walks back in, everyone look at him with curiosity. He doesn't have Manzolwandle. He kneels in front of Mpatho and Phume.

"She wants Imangothando," he says.

"Where is Manzolwandle?" Mpatho asks.

He releases a deep sigh, "She's not letting him go."

"Malibongwe, we are just behind the hill. This is not the end, we are going to be mom and dad to Imangothando, we love him, this doesn't change anything. But if we are not his blood parents we cannot deprive you from raising him. Do us the same honors," Mpatho says.

"I know but she doesn't understand that. This is all a shock for her."

"Do you think she will take good care of my baby?" Phume asks. She has to know before handing Imangothando over, this boy is too special to her.

"She's his mother Phume, she will take good care of him," Malibongwe says.

"Fetch Manzi first, then come back to take him. We will meet later to talk about his routines and talk further," she says.

Malibongwe returns to Miyanda empty-handed. Her father is talking to her, she's crying. This time he doesn't ask, he just takes Manzi from her, she cries harder. His heart breaks into a million pieces.

“I’m so sorry sthandwa sami, they want to see him and hold him. We cannot deprive them their rights. I will come back with Imangothando. Later, once we get back in the village, we will meet with them to exchange everything and plan when we are going to Home Affairs.”

She wails louder and louder. Her painful screams follow him as he head back to the house. Mpatho stands up to receive Manzolwandle.

Phume has to let go of Imangothando. At first it looks like she’s not willing to, then she presses her lips on his forehead for a long time. She’s shedding tears as she gives him to Malibongwe.

They still have a long day ahead.

Mpatho and Phume know nothing about Manzi, just like him and Miyanda know nothing about Imangothando. Malibongwe removes his beanie and stares at him outside the door. He’s not eating his hands, there are beads around his wrists, must be Mkhuleko. He’s different from Manzi, his tiny eyes shine like glasses, his pink lips are pouted. He stares back at Malibongwe without blinking. Mpatho has taught him how to be stubborn.

“Hey Mcineka,” he whispers.

Imangothando just stares blankly.

He smiles, this is his son too.

Miyanda will fall in love with him, she just needs to give him a chance.

But when he gets to the car she folds her arms and looks at a different direction.

CHAPTER 146

PHUMELELE

It hurts so bad.

I thought I was prepared but I'm falling apart. I cried all the way home. They have taken Imangothando, my baby. I'm scared of failing to bond with Manzi. Even now I'm crying for another baby while he's here. Imangothando left with a huge part of me. Whether he's mine or not, he taught me how to be a mother, my first experience of everything motherhood has been through him.

We get home, Mpatho tells MaNgema that she can go and relax. There are a lot of emotions that we need to process. He leaves Manzi on our bed and fetches drinks from the kitchen.

He's awake, staring at his hands and trying to fit them inside his little mouth. I'm scared of touching his feet, he's wearing casts on both of them. I don't know where Miyanda got 1 month old baby pants but I get it, he can't wear rompas. He's twice Imango's size, his eyes are bulbous.

I feel Mpatho standing behind me and lift my eyes to him.

"He hasn't cried since we left the Vilakazis," I say.

"I'm sure Imangothando is on his 5th round of tantrums." He breaks a laugh, but there's pain behind his eyes.

Manzi is heavy and it doesn't look like he gives a fuck that much about people. He's paying attention to his hands, before we know it he scratches and almost pull out his eye. I go on a panic mode. Is this a baby or what?

I hold his hands intending to take a look at his nails. But oh boy, doesn't he fold his hands and give me a fight before opening them!

"It's the Mcinekas, that's where he learnt this violent behavior," Mpatho says.

I laugh because this is exactly how I imagine him as a baby.

I pick him and put him on my lap. I have chills on my spine as his feet touch me. What if I hurt him? Is he not feeling any pain?

I look at Mpatho.

“Relax, you’re doing a good job,” he says.

I take a deep breath and shakily touch his leg. This is my son, I better get used to him. I cannot be scared, I have to embrace him as he is.

“Are you okay?” Mpatho asks.

I take a few deep breaths and nod.

Yeah, I’m okay.

We have to schedule a meeting with his orthopedist before his next appointment.

He sits next to us. So this is my blood family. I thank God that it was me and Miyanda, maybe if it happened in a hospital I wouldn’t have met Manzi, nobody would have ever known.

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SIS’ NOMBUSO

Miyanda locked herself in the rondavel. It’s been hours, as an aunt and part of the reason why there’s this mess, she’s helping Malibongwe with Imangothando. Imangothando is a spoilt-brat that cries out of nowhere. He doesn’t do well alone,

he likes attention, more especially if there's someone who just sits next to him and stare at his cute face.

"This baby is self-centered," she says when she hears him crying again just a minute after she went to the kitchen to get something to eat.

"Yeah, like Mpatho. It's his way or high way," Malibongwe says.

"Did you see his milk? S26 gold, you need to go and hijack more cars." She's always blunt and maybe a little disrespectful.

"Miyanda wanted to breastfeed and now she has the milk, her top was wet when we got here. But I don't know how long it's going to take her to embrace him," Malibongwe says, ignoring her shady comments.

"Miyanda is a weird girl," she says.

"Meaning?" He raises his eyebrow.

"Weird in a special way, that's why Mkhuleko gravitated towards her, another weirdo," she says and fetches Imangothando before he breaks his vocal cords.

Maybe Mkhuleko can get through Miyanda, Malibongwe thinks.

He wastes no time and heads to his and Sphakamiso's outbuilt two-room. Sphakamiso drove Nyambose home, Mkhuleko should be home, he left the Vilakazis early.

Ruby is sitting in front of the door. She's a bit moody, even when Malibongwe tries to play with her she doesn't stand. By now she probably knows that she's his least favorite niece, there's tension between them.

Malibongwe walks inside Mkhuleko's room. Everything is packed. The mattress is turned and leaning up against the wall. Even the little alter that he had with colored candles is gone. This is strange, Mkhuleko makes his bed at 5pm and he definitely doesn't wash all his clothes and pack them like this.

None of his clothes are missing, all his bags are here.

It's been hours since he left the Vilakazis, maybe five hours now.

No, something is not right.

Malibongwe calls his phone.

It rings somewhere in the room, in the jacket hanging on a hanger.

No, no, no!

Sphakamiso says he doesn't know anything, they last talked when he left the Vilakazi homestead. According to Sphakamiso, the last person he had a conversation with was Miyanda.

"Babe!" he knocks outside the rondavel.

No answer, just low sobs.

"It's about Mkhuleko, we don't know where he is."

The door opens after a few minutes. His babe is in so much pain.

He just wants to give her a hug but she doesn't want anything that has to do with him, not even his 1 month old son.

"Mkhuleko is not home. Did he say anything to you?" he asks.

"No, he just said he had to go, he was in a hurry, not wearing any shoes," she says.

"And you didn't ask him anything?" He's sweating.

How can she let him go, just like that?

"It's two hours away and you didn't even ask him how he was getting home?" He's angry.

"I didn't think," she says, now panicking too.

“Yes, you didn’t think Miyanda!”

She follows him as he exits the yard, intending to search around the village. But right at the end of the yard there are two umbilical cords; one is old, one is new.

“This is one is his,” Malibongwe points out.

Miyanda’s breaths deepen, “That’s not Manzi’s, his is in my bag, remember you said you will put it where others are when you get time. I think it’s Imangothando’s, ask Mpatho.”

He takes out his phone and calls Mpatho. They talk for a minute, then Mpatho tells him to hold while he checks, he doesn’t find Imangothando’s umbilical cord.

“It must be Mkhuleko who brought it home, you have to bury them together,” Miyanda says.

“Why?” Malibongwe frowns.

“Just do it. I think the day has finally come.”

“Which day?” Malibongwe asks.

“He’s gone, Bonga. Can’t you see?”

“Yeah, he’s gone and I’m going to find him.”

“You won’t find him. Weren’t you listening when he talked? Once he leaves he’s not coming back here, at least not as the Mkhuleko that we know.”

“But I don’t even know where he is,” -Malibongwe.

“We will know if he needs something from us,” she says.

Malibongwe sighs, “How Miyanda? He left his phone.”

“And his umbilical cord with Imangothando’s. Imangothando is the link, we will know through him,” she says.

Now it makes sense.

Malibongwe smiles thinly.

“You call his name so well. Do you want to see him?” he asks.

“Yes, please,” she says.

Nombuso is singing to Imangothando, he’s quiet and staring at her.

When she sees Malibongwe walking in she sighs with relief.

“Please take your son,” she says.

“I’m here to take him, Miyanda is ready to meet him,” he says.

Nombuso’s eyes widen. “What changed?”

“Mkhuleko is gone, he’s left for his initiation.”

“Whaaaat?” She’s shocked.

“Yeah, he packed his room and left his umbilical cord esangweni with Imangothando’s. Miyanda says he was walking with no shoes on when he left the Vilakazis. I wish he had said goodbye and took some money. What if he gets hungry on the way or they don’t feed him where he’s going? We don’t even know where to find him?”

Nombuso grabs a chair and sits. Tears roll down her cheeks. She’s always said she wants less siblings, but she didn’t really wish for that to happen. She wants her mother’s last-born back. It can’t be Yoli and now him.

“Nombuso don’t cry, you will make his journey difficult,” Malibongwe begs, rubbing her back with one hand.

“What if we never see him again?” she asks in tears.

“We will, he just won’t be the same Mkhuleko that we know,” he says.

She wipes the tears. It was even Mkhuleko’s turn to cook, this is not how he was supposed to leave, he was supposed to cook his turn and say proper goodbyes.

“Please be careful with Miyanda, she’s still bleeding for Manzolwandle,” she says.

“Don’t worry, she’s back in her senses. You’re taking Mkhuleko’s turn,” Malibongwe says and walks out.

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PHUMELELE

We were supposed to meet yesterday to officially exchange everything and plan our trip to go and change the babies’ identities. They’re keeping the first names, now more than ever I respect the name Mkhuleko gave my son. Manzolwandle, I think he was intentional about it. And Imangothando really suits Imangothando because his biological parents really stood by their love through all the ups and downs, ups and downs named MaVilakazi. But their second names will be swapped because Malibongwe intentionally wanted his son to be Nkosiyazi, so Imangothando will be Imangothando Nkosiyazi Mcineka.

It’s been a day since I last saw him. I’m worried about a lot of things. I’m not doubting Miyanda’s mothering skills, she’s an excellent mom, but I know what’s best for Imangothando more.

They are here, they took long.

Mpatho prepared a brunch. I just want to see if Imangothando is okay. I know he doesn’t enjoy lying down and he loves company.

They walk in, Malibongwe is holding him. Miyanda is calm, not crazy as she was when she left yesterday. I'm really not happy with the way Malibongwe has wrapped my Imango with a blanket. Imangothando likes having his arms free, he's wrapped like a sausage in there.

I pass Manzi to Mpatho and go to Malibongwe as soon as he sits. Miyanda bumps into me with her arm, I don't know where she's going. I fix Imangothando's blanket and kiss his forehead.

"Did he cry?" I ask.

"That's his hobby nje," he says.

I'm so proud of him.

And Miyanda, what is she doing with my son?

I look at her, she looks at me.

"Put gloves on his hands, he scratches his face." She takes out a piece of paper from her purse and puts it Mpatho's lap.

"These are his daily affirmations, recite them to him everyday."

"Don't leave Imango by himself, he loves company. Take turns watching him. And please sing to him, any song as long as there is no cursing word in the lyrics. Take him to the garden in the morning for a fresh smell of flowers."

"Our garden has cabbages and tomatoes," she says.

"Then plant flowers," I say.

She stares at me with her arms folded; I hold her stare. It is what I'm telling her.

And then these men? Why are they looking at us like we are not well upstairs?

THE FINALE I

PHUMELELE

God's timing is truly the best. I feel like we were not ready all along, nothing was right for my lobola to be sent. But now that everything is the way it should be, Nombuso is here making umqombothi and pretty much giving Sis'Theh a hard time. She came here straight from work. I didn't think she'd last a week but hey, it's been two weeks already. I think keeping busy will help her.

If we had a serious grandmother she would've been here doing what Nombuso is doing. But no, Beauty had something planned in Bali after her cosmetic surgery, the fourth one if I'm not mistaken. Soon we will be seeing her on Blotched, I tell you.

"So, how is Maps?" I ask Nombuso.

"Who is that?" she asks.

"Mapholoba, Beauty calls him that."

She rolls her eyes, "He's fine, just working nonstop."

"And Yoli's father?" I ask, last time I heard he was in prison.

"That one is a 29 now," she says.

I doubt there's a gang number called 29.

"I think your husband set him up," she says.

I'm shocked. My husband? He wouldn't do anything like that.

"He is innocent," I say.

She laughs, "Bedroom verdict!"

"No, it's the truth."

"All his enemies end up having problems with the police. Wasn't his grandfather friends with the minister?" She's fishing from an empty pod.

“I can’t believe you’re feeling sorry for him,” I say.

“Who? Are you not seeing the extra kilos I have gained. I want him there for at least a year,” she says.

I’m glad we are on the same page. It would’ve been a pity if she suddenly felt sorry for him.

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Mpatho arrives later, his sister is done and packing to go.

“Antiza,” he says.

This is what he calls her lately and she loves it.

“Your wife refused to help me make umqombothi,” she lies with a straight face.

Wasn’t I giving her support while she was making it? Emotional support, to be specific.

“Be gentle with her,” he says, pulling me to his chest.

Nombuso rolls her eyes, “I have to go, I will come back tomorrow ng’zovubela.”

“Thank you very much. How was work?” Mpatho asks.

“It’s okay, I just hate Sphakamiso as a boss. Can you believe that I asked him for an advance and he refused?” She’s pissed by it like what she was asking was normal.

“You haven’t worked a month,” I chime in.

“Sorry, where do you work wena?”

Well, I better go and check on Manzi.

I leave before she takes it from 0 to 100.

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Manzi is fine, he's bouncier than I expected. We went to his 5th week appointment to have his cast changed. Guess what, Miyanda was already outside the door waiting when we arrived. I knew she was going to be there, we are sharing our babies. At first I was mad about it but Mpatho advised me to look at it positively; our son gets to have two mothers who'd cut their boobs off for him. Same for Imangothando, his future wife better prepare to have me as a mother-in-law, I will be taking no prisoners.

Mpatho comes in, his sister has left.

"We have to talk," he says.

Anyone gets a pounding chest from this question.

I look up from Manzi, "What did I do?"

"Rephrase; I'd like us to talk about something."

Now I can relax.

He takes Manzi and sits next to me. By the way I don't read Manzi Miyanda's affirmations, only Mpatho does when he remembers.

"Beauty is hosting family reunion next week. I invited my friends, just like you invited yours," he says.

"What is your point?" I ask.

"You don't like my friends," he says with a chuckle.

This is news to me. I don't even know who his friends are.

He raises his eyebrow, "Zamani?"

“The porn star?” I ask.

“See!” He laughs.

“They even know that you don’t like them. Please be welcoming, I want everyone to have fun and be happy,” he says.

“Fine, I will smile and be welcoming. Is that all?”

“The Vilakazi issue,” he says.

Sigh.

I thought we were pass that discussion.

“I want Manzi to have a strong relationship with the Vilakazis,” he says.

“Why must he have a relationship with them?” I don’t understand what makes them so special. Mpatho makes everything about him and his relatives.

“I feel like he has a connection with them, from how he was born and from what Mkhuleko kept saying about a boy child being needed at the Vilakazis.”

“A boy child is also needed at the Shandus.” Nobody stays in my grandmother’s house.

“I’m not going to the Vilakazis and I’m not saying Manzi should go there. He is our son and he is a Mshazi. But I want him to be accessible for the Vilakazis. I want you to be also accessible. I want us to be involved in everything that they do.”

I wonder what kind of portion MaNhleko gave him. I had to fight him against changing his surname and moving us there, now this!

“Okay Mpatho,” I want no arguments today.

I don’t see his point of view but for once, I will be a ‘yebo baba’ wife.

“Thank you,” he kisses my cheek and stands up to stretch himself.

Manzi is a quiet baby, he only cries when there’s a need. I put him down, he doesn’t care, he just sucks his fists.

“Weeks have gone so fast. I can’t believe it’s been over 8 weeks since he was born,” Mpatho says.

“Yep, but I can’t remember how life was without him and Imangothando,” I say.

“Life with sex for me, I can’t remember it,” he says.

Ok, that’s his point. From serious family matters to discussing his penis life.

“I’m saving myself for marriage, real paid marriage. I cannot be opening legs for a man who hasn’t paid a chicken,” I say.

“But I’m paying it on Saturday, full price for a girl with a baby.”

Listen to this idiot!

“Is it not your baby?” I throw a pillow his way.

He dodges it and laughs.

He’s really not getting any sex.

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Beauty had to come home the day before lobola. I’m leaving today, I should have left at the beginning of the week but nobody stays there, I had to wait until Aunt Brandi gets there.

Beauty is coming home with a new nose. Believe me, this family is not normal. I’m not saying she was beautiful, but she’s doing too many changes now. I’m not informed about cosmetic

surgeries, her nostrils look narrower and smaller. I don't understand why anyone would pay to struggle to breathe.

"How are you?" I ask.

"Recovering is a journey but I'm fabulous as I look," she says.

"That's nice." I'm actually worried about her, she's getting addicted.

She doesn't even give her body enough rest before going for another one.

She's a gift-giver, even though she requests compensation sometimes. I'm always getting jewelry and bags when she comes back from her trips.

Today I have Belecoo stroller for a change. I guess now that I'm a mom gifts change.

But I like it, she's such a good glam-mother.

"Thank you very much." I feel so bad because I have never bought her any gift.

"You're welcome," she says, taking out new pairs of shoes she bought for herself.

Even though I like her lifestyle, minus surgeries, I still don't wish to be a widow, rich or not.

Mpatho comes out of the bedroom with Manzi.

Beauty looks at him and frowns. I didn't update her, I mean she was miles away and hardly reachable on her phone.

"And now?" she asks.

I look at Mpatho. Can he explain?

"This is not the same baby. Or is it him you guys put him out in the sun and overfed him? And his legs? The big eyes?"

She's going to offend me.

"The babies were switched. Imangothando is biologically Miyanda's, DNA tests were done, this is the baby I was carrying and he was born with Clubfoot deformity, that's why he's wearing casts," I explain.

Her mouth drops open. She's shocked, as expected.

"I don't understand, you didn't know your own baby?" she asks.

"I passed out after pushing him out. I think it was fate," I say.

"No, you're a bad mother. Iya, caramba!" she exclaims, stepping closer to look at Manzi in Mpatho's arms.

She sips from her wine glass and takes another careful look.

"He kinda looks like my husband; the ears and..."

"Please don't even start Beauty," I stop her.

"Hhayi-bo, I'm observing as his glam-mother."

"It's not your thing Beauty, from now on let laboratories do their job."

She can take her African visionary DNA test skills and shove them where the sun doesn't shine. Ha! I'm tired of Beauty and her fake observing skills.

"Suit yourselves ke! I will see him properly once I'm done unpacking," she says and looks at Mpatho's Chambray shirt.

"You look broke."

I have made peace with her. But Mpatho not so much.

"How far with the preparations?" she asks.

"Everything is good. Nombuso lent a hand. Congratulations on your new nose!" Mpatho says.

I give him a reprimanding look; he just shrugs.

FINALE II

I always knew that I was going to be a wife one day. I had a perfect picture of how my family was going to look like. I gave myself until 27 years, then I was going to have my first baby and get married.

But I'm 25 years old, sitting in Aunt Brandi's old bedroom. In the lounge sits men I knew as 'my uncles', 'my father's cousins'. And guess what, they're my in-laws now. With them is Malibongwe, the man I grew up thinking he was going to be my brother-in-law, my children's uncle. Oh wait, he is!

The life I planned for myself isn't anything close to what my mother actually planned for me. It has been anything but normal.

These are not negotiations, they're here to pay lobola and take the letter of izibizo. In two months time we will start planning our wedding. But Aunt Brandi had to go and dig out some drunkard Shandu uncle that I don't know from the man in the moon. Now he's in there disagreeing with everything that's happening.

My phone beeps.

Mpatho, you'd swear this is the first he's sending his uncles over. He wants to know why there's an uncle demanding things that were not initially requested. I'm a bride to-be, I shouldn't be stressed by what's going on in the lounge.

I'M COMING- that's his last text.

I don't say anything to stop him.

Aunt Brandi finally comes out and tells Ntombi to serve refreshments. It's done and dusted. I'm officially sold to the Mshazis.

"What was delaying things?" I ask.

"Shandu fined them for changing your surname before coming here," she says.

"But that was for legal reasons and the inheritance," I'm in disbelief. What a whack scamming strategy!

"It was against culture. Can you relax? It's over, they paid," she says.

That's Mpatho's money, which means Manzi's money being wasted. But I will let it slide, I hope this Shandu uncle can go back to whatever cave he crawled out from.

"We will deposit the money tomorrow," I tell her.

"I think we should keep some to assist us with preparations for umbondo," she says.

"I'm not doing all of that." I don't understand the concept behind it.

It's just another waste of money.

"No Phume, you're going to do everything properly. Umbondo is important, the Mshazi ancestors have to know that their cows arrived. We are doing it after izibizo have been brought and you will wear isdwaba on the day and carry Mpatho's basket on your head," she says.

Why did I make her a decision maker again? This woman is holding me back, this is not 1995.

"I just want to have my wedding," I say with a heavy sigh.

"You just love being the main character. Give Manzi to me and go help Ntombi."

I roll my eyes. I really don't care about the mini steps, I just want my big day.

Another text message? Mpatho is now a keyboard warrior.

Well, it's not him.

CONGRATULATIONS

It's Phaka, he just sent one word without any punctuation.

I don't know what would be a perfect response, so I just read and close my Whatsapp.

I get inside the kitchen, Ntombi is almost done.

"Can you believe I actually have to do umbondo before my wedding?" I ask.

"Yes, I can believe it," she says.

Am I the only normal person around here?

My phone again, I'm very popular today.

It's a text: HEY MY LEGACY, I HAVE PAID MORE THAN A CHICKEN.

Yoh this man! It hasn't been 30 minutes since he paid but he already wants me against the leather seats of his car. I'm going to him, I want to tell him to wait until the wedding. I think he will understand better if I personally go there. I will carry a towel to wipe my face because I might sweat on the way.

"Babe, can I help with anything?" I ask Ntombi.

"Yes."

Gaaaaaaa!

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I fix myself and take a kiss before heading back. I thought it would feel different and maybe he might not enjoy me the way he used to. It was a quickie but damn, I could tell he wanted to get inside me with his balls and heart.

I told Ntombi that I'm coming to him to talk about something important. As I make my way inside the yard I see abakhongi leaving. I think the scarf Aunt Brandi wrapped around my head fell over the seats. But these people know me since I was a kid, they know me playing in my underwear, it's no trainsmash.

I get inside the house, Manzi is such a mother's keeper, he's not crying.

But Aunt Brandi looks angry like an overworked nanny anyway.

"Where did you disappear to?" she asks.

"I went to talk with Mpatho," I say.

Ntombi is laughing silently.

"You're wearing your top inside out. I'm sure you had a long fashion talk. Go wash your hands with soap and come back and make the baby's bottle," she says.

Ntombi laughs out loud.

I'm such a clumsy person, hey. Maybe even abakhongi saw that I just got fucked.

After making Manzi's bottle I feed and change his diaper. I need to talk to Miyanda about this umbondo thing. Her and I are two strong-opiniated women, we don't agree with each other on most things, especially now that we are trying to co-mother our sons. But I know she will come through for me.

She answers; "Hello."

I can hear my Imango crying in the background.

"Did you put him down?" I ask.

"Yoh Phume! I don't think I will need gym to lose the pregnancy weight while I have Imango," she says.

I laugh, "I'm so sorry."

There's a movement, after a minute Imango's cry stops.

"Now he's quiet, we can talk," she says.

"I actually want to know more about umbondo. My aunt insists on it."

"Urgh, we have to go market shopping," she says.

"Can't we do it online?" I have no intentions of going up and down in the markets.

"Yes, that's a brilliant idea. Let's order reedmats, amadumbe nobhatata online. It will all be delivered to our doorsteps."

Sigh.

"Fine, I get it. Is it a lot of things?" I ask.

"You have the means, make it beautiful," she says.

"Alright, izibizo will be brought in two weeks time, we will plan market shopping afterwards," I say.

"No problem, I will ask Sphakamiso to give Nombuso a day off so that she can look after Ima for me," she says.

MaNgema will look after Manzi.

"Thank you sis, your man is on his way," I say.

She laughs, "I'm sure he's not coming straight home. Beauty hosted a party after abakhongi left, Nombuso is drunk."

"You're joking!"

“Try calling her, she’s drunk.”

Beauty! Just when I thought she was becoming a real grandmother, now she’s getting Nombuso drunk. Nombuso doesn’t drink, God of Mapholoba!

I hope Mpatho will get there and end that party before Beauty start with her ways on Nombuso. Nombuso took her crush, I know she’s still holding that.

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Mpatho gets home, there’s loud music and ladies singing. There was only one calabash of traditional beer, it wasn’t for partying but informing the ancestors about the lobola going to the Shandus.

It must be Beauty and her friends. Yes, it’s not his house but this is not the right day to do this. He’s angry as he makes his way in.

“Beauty come and see this!” Nombuso screams, laughing in between.

Malibongwe appears behind Mpatho and immediately frowns.

He pushes Mpatho out of the way. “Nombuso?”

Beauty appears and puts her arm around Nombuso.

Nombuso explains; “This one had this one’s baby. Now my thing is, what if Malibongwe is Nkosiyazi and Nkosiyazi is Malibongwe, they were also switched?”

Beauty laughs, she’s just as drunk.

“That makes sense, I need to see if he is really a Mshazi,” Beauty says and looks at Mpatho. “I need to see your toes, I don’t trust you ngathi uyi-switch.”

Mpatho clicks his tongue and turns to Malibongwe.

“Take Nombuso home,” he instructs.

“No, Nombuso and I are sisterwives, we are going to party with the big boys from here,” Beauty says, staggering towards Malibongwe to stop him.

“Sisterwives? Malibongwe you better get this girl away,” Nombuso suddenly has a change of heart towards her drinking partner.

“Bitch, I just blessed you with my Vergelegen,” Beauty.

Mpatho drags her to the bedroom, he’s annoyed to the core.

“Evn after having a baby you’re still heartless. Or is it PTSD now? Post Traumatic Down Syndrome?”

Mpatho pushes her to her bed and walks out, closing the door behind.

Malibongwe drags Nombuso to the car outside. Now she’s calling Mapholoba wanting to know why Beauty is calling herself her sisterwife.

“Mnelisi don’t lie to me, uyezwa?” She’s yelling.

Malibongwe’s patience is running thin.

“She said it. Do you want my brother to confirm? He was there.” Before Mapholoba responds, the phone is given to Malibongwe regardless of how annoyed he looks.

“Ntofo, I don’t understand what you’re talking about,” - Mapholoba.

“She’s drunk,” Malibongwe says with a hint of irritation.

“Ummm, sbali, I didn’t know that you’re on the line.”

“Mapholoba you haven’t counted any cows for me, ungang’bizi ngosbali ungangibalele lutho,” Malibongwe says.

Nombuso taps his arm and whispers; “Tell him that I’m crying.”

“Nombuso, I’m not playing games,” Malibongwe says, more annoyed.

Why is he caught up in their fights? Mapholoba hasn’t even introduced himself.

“Okay, say I have committed suicide,” Nombuso says, now loud instead of whispering.

“He can hear you,” Malibongwe says and drops the call before she tells him to say she’s in a coffin.

She takes her phone back, leans against the seat and falls asleep before they get home.

He calls Miyanda and ask her to prepare Nombuso’s bed. They now have a drunkard in the family. Yes, they all drink but nobody has ever reached this level. All thanks to Beauty, her new nose is sticking everywhere, the old one was better.

They take her out of the car to her room. She gives a fight before getting in bed. Miyanda is amused by all of this. This is the side of Nombuso they’ve never seen.

She looks at Malibongwe, silently laughing.

“She will wake up not remembering any of this,” she says.

“Oh, I will remind her, she will know how much she embarrassed herself. You look so beautiful by the way.” He pulls her for a quick kiss.

“Where is Sphakamiso?” he asks.

“In his room, he’s actually fine with everything. I think someone else is giving him stress now,” Miyanda says.

“I’m sure it’s the doctor’s daughter.”

“Shame, new love is always stressful. At least nobody is harassing anyone in their workplace,” she says, giving him an eye.

“I can do it over and over again and have ten more Imangothandos.”

Okay, now she has to go back and finish cooking Ruby’s bones.

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PHUMELELE

Mpatho fetches me from the Shandus. Spending a day away from him felt like a year. I know I’m exaggerating but I did miss him a lot, especially when Manzi woke up in the middle of the night. This baby is like an owl; he spends most time at night awake. The only good thing is that he doesn’t cry a lot.

He starts telling me about Beauty’s escapades yesterday. I don’t really get why he’s pissed, I mean they were drinking indoors and celebrating. Nombuso needs to let loose once in a while.

“So where did she sleep?” I ask.

“I don’t know, a man picked her outside the gate,” he says.

“Let her party man, her new nose hasn’t been to a club.”

He laughs. “I feel like her old nose was better, this one will be in everyone’s business.”

“No, she’s really trying to be a better woman.” I believe in giving people second chances. I can’t say the same about him, he holds grudges.

He suggests that we grab breakfast on the way.

“MaNhleko wants us to visit with Manzi,” he says.

I’m so tired of MaNhleko shame.

“When?” I ask.

“Anytime we are free,” he says.

I slurp my coffee. I know he’s longed to have a mother figure in his life but I’m just not going to be buddies with MaNhleko.

I take over the wheel as we head home. He sits at the back with his son. I’m wearing my engagement ring today, it’s a good day. It feels like my world just opened to new possibilities. I will do umbondo, and as Miyanda said, I can make it beautiful. I will not cheat anything for this man.

As we get closer to home I notice the smoke shooting up. It’s burning somewhere but I don’t pay any attention until I see every house on our side of the road except ours.

“Mpatho, the house is burning!” I park the car, panicking.

“Oh, no!” He opens his door and gets out.

There’s nothing we can do except calling for help. We can’t even see the gate, the smoke is everywhere.

He calls the firefighters.

All I’m thinking about is our belongings going up in flames. Everything, even Manzi’s medical files are in there.

What kind of bad luck is this?

A car pulls up behind us, we are now standing with the community.

It's Beauty being dropped by a grey-haired man. She asks questions and starts crying.

"My shoes! My wigs! Oh my god, my facial creams."

I return back to the car to check if Manzi is still okay. All windows are closed. He's not asleep, just staring at his hands. Oh, my poor homeless baby!

I notice some keys on the seat where Mpatho was sitting. They must've dropped from his pants. It's house keys, they look new.

I know Mpatho does things his own way but he wouldn't burn down his father's house. I told him this is where I want to live.

"I have to get your 5 year old father," I tell Manzolwandle.

Here we go again!

THE END!!!